

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**Cock rings, masturbation sleeves, and pulsating vibrators: Contesting
and reproducing heteronormativity via sex toy parties in Aotearoa
New Zealand**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of

Master of Arts

In

Sociology

At Massey University, Manawatū, New Zealand

Janelle Smith

2024

Abstract

Pure Romance is a US-based sex product retailer that operates commercial sex toy parties in four countries, including my hometown and research site, Palmerston North, Aotearoa New Zealand. This thesis critically examines and analyses Pure Romance's female-only parties, product catalogue and website-based promotions, and female party attendees' narrative responses to these. This was done to address the question of whether female-only sex toy parties reproduce or contest heteronormative and androcentric sexual scripts and discourses. My thesis analyses the company's promotion of lotions, potions, and sex toys using a theoretical framework comprising critical discourse analysis, sexual script theory, and vital materialism. Based on the promotional framing and agentic capacities of these products, a spectrum of conflicting and sometimes complementary sexual scripts and discourses is discovered. These overtly, and most prominently, reproduce the hegemony of heteronormative and androcentric sexual discourses through the equally conservative sexual scripts of the company promotions, facilitator narratives, and the narrative responses of party participants. However, this conservative reproduction was also significantly ameliorated by other, albeit less prominent, sexual scripts, which overtly promoted female masturbatory self-pleasure. Indeed, some female-centric scripts directly contested the phallogentric and/or penetrative ideals of heteronormative and androcentric sex by promoting clitoral-focused sexual activities. Furthermore, other scripts latently promoted homosexuality, both female and male, through the omission of any articulated rejection or contestation of such sexual practices. Overt contestation of hetero- and androcentric discursive values would involve the promotion of female solo masturbation/same-sex relationships as the preferred or idealised alternative, or indeed the primary and most celebrated goal of heterosexual encounters. However, evidence of this was lacking.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, my deepest thanks and gratitude go to Dr Peter Howland and Dr Carolyn Morris, my thesis supervisors. I enjoyed your under-graduate courses so much that when considering who my ideal thesis supervisors would be my mind needed not search further than you both. I feel incredibly blessed and fortunate that you agreed to take me on as a post-graduate student. This entire process has been a very long and challenging road (on which, admittedly, I spent a lot of time dragging my heels, stressing, despairing, and partially losing my mind) yet neither of you stopped believing in me and supporting me. Words really can't express the depth of my gratitude to you and how much I admire you as hard working, inspiring academics and wonderful people.

I would also like to thank my family. Especially my mum who tirelessly supported in me, hosted me, believed in me, and continued to let me be a drain on her finances. I'm grateful to all of my loved ones who showed me support and aroha during my journey. I definitely couldn't have gotten through it without all the laughs and good times with my friends along the way (especially those shared over ritual morning break iced lattes).

Lastly, I'd like to thank the women who participated in this research, without whom it wouldn't be possible.

Ngā mihi nui.

List of figures

<i>Figure 1.</i> Variety of contemporary sex toys (Source: Wilner & Huff, 2017, p. 259) ...	46
<i>Figure 2.</i> My lounge room during the demonstration (own photo)	77
<i>Figure 3.</i> Catalogue page featuring 'Revive' and 'Body Boost' (prices in USD. Source: Pure Romance, 2017a)	79
<i>Figure 4.</i> Catalogue image of 'Great Head' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a)	83
<i>Figure 5.</i> Catalogue image of 'Whipped' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a)	85
<i>Figure 6.</i> Catalogue description of 'O' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017b)	86
<i>Figure 7.</i> Catalogue displaying the 'Blush Collection' (prices in USD. Source: Pure Romance, 2017a)	88
<i>Figure 8.</i> From left: 'Blind Date', 'Tease Me, Please Me', 'Friend With Benefits' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017)	88
<i>Figure 9.</i> 'The Flirt' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017)	89
<i>Figure 10.</i> Catalogue displaying the 'Amplify Collection' (prices in USD. Source: Pure Romance, 2017a)	91
<i>Figure 11.</i> 'Home Alone' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a)	92
<i>Figure 12.</i> Catalogue displaying the 'Seductive Spotlight Collection' (prices in USD. Source: Pure Romance, 2017a)	94
<i>Figure 13.</i> 'Encore' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a)	95
<i>Figure 14.</i> 'Premiere' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017)	138
<i>Figure 15.</i> 'Take A Bow' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017)	139
<i>Figure 16.</i> 'Kaia' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a)	140
<i>Figure 17.</i> 'Fan Favorite' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017)	140
<i>Figure 18 (left).</i> 'Give it to her' vibrator advertisement (Source: Montone, 2010)	142

<i>Figure 19 (right). 'inflatable love maid' advertisement (Source: Tom, 2010)</i>	142
<i>Figure 20 (left). Satisfyer Pro Plus G-Spot (Source: Adulttoymegastore, n.d1.)</i>	143
<i>Figure 21 (right). Satisfyer Hot Lover (Source: Adulttoymegastore, n.d2)</i>	143
<i>Figure 22. Satisfyer Endless Fun packaging (Source: Cherrycolors, 2022)</i>	144
<i>Figure 23. Satisfyer Triple Oh (Source: Adulttoymegastore, n.d3.)</i>	145
<i>Figure 24. 'Mira' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a)</i>	146
<i>Figure 25. 'In The Groove' (Source: Pure Romance, 2016)</i>	146
<i>Figure 26. 'Rock Star' (Source: Pure Romance, 2016)</i>	147
<i>Figure 27. 'Main Attraction' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017)</i>	149
<i>Figure 28. 'Aqua' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a)</i>	150
<i>Figure 29. 'Blind Date' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017)</i>	150
<i>Figure 30. 'Do Not Disturb' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017)</i>	151
<i>Figure 31. 'Free Style' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017)</i>	153
<i>Figure 32. 'Double Feature' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a)</i>	154
<i>Figure 33. 'Rendezvous' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a)</i>	155

Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	2
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	3
<i>List of figures</i>	4
<i>Chapter 1: Introduction</i>	9
How I came to the question.....	9
Situating the answer.....	11
Research site.....	13
Methods and analysis used.....	13
What I omitted.....	15
Roadmap.....	17
<i>Chapter 2: Literature review</i>	20
Introduction.....	20
Critical Discourse Analysis.....	21
Sexual Script Theory.....	27
CDA and SST in collusion.....	37
Thing-power.....	39
Sex Toy Literature.....	41
Historical.....	41
2 nd wave feminism.....	42
Waves of sex toy development.....	44
Marketing: contemporary.....	47
Aotearoa New Zealand.....	52
Conclusion.....	57
<i>Chapter 3: Methodology</i>	59
Introduction.....	59
Research Philosophy and Approach.....	59
Method.....	61
Data generation.....	63
Participant observation: the parties.....	63
Strengths and limitations of the PO method.....	65
Gathering materials.....	66
Interviews.....	67
Data analysis.....	68
Conclusion.....	70

Chapter 4: Ethnography	72
Introduction	72
Pre-party set up	75
Party part I: bath and shower	78
Party part II: beauty and cosmetics	79
Party part III: lubes	82
Party part IIII: toys.....	87
Ordering room.....	99
Conclusion	100
Chapter 5: Lotions and Potions	102
Introduction	102
Beauty and Body.....	103
Overview.....	104
Thing-power.....	105
Identified scripts.....	106
Discourses informing the scripts	109
Bath and Shower	115
Overview.....	115
Thing-power.....	115
Identified scripts.....	117
Discourses informing the scripts	122
Enhancement Creams	123
Overview.....	123
Thing-power.....	123
Identified scripts.....	125
Contrasting scripts.....	129
Discourses informing the scripts	131
Conclusion	132
Chapter 6: Sex toys	134
Introduction	134
Primary thing-power.....	135
Clitoral vibrators	137
Penetrative vibrators.....	141
Dual-action vibrators	148
Male masturbatory sleeves.....	152
Cock rings	153
Script and discourse reproduction.....	155
Conclusion	169

<i>Chapter 7: Conclusion</i>	171
Summary of findings	171
The Literature	176
Methods	179
Concluding thoughts	180
References	183

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this thesis I address the question of 'Do female-only sex toy parties reproduce or contest heteronormative and androcentric sexual discourses and scripts?' I did this by critically exploring and analysing the ethnography of female-only, commercially orientated sex toy parties in which various sex toys (e.g. vibrators) and associated lotions and potions (e.g. flavoured, warming lubricants) were promoted and sold to women resident in Palmerston North. Through the content analysis of the associated sex product promotional website and catalogue, and via semi-structured interviews with several party participants, I found that sexual discourses (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) and scripts (Simon & Gagnon, 1986) generated in these different forums did overtly, and most prominently, reproduce the hegemony of heteronormative and androcentric sexual discourses through the equally conservative sexual scripts of company promotions, facilitator narratives, and the narrative responses of sex toy party participants. However, this conservative reproduction was also significantly ameliorated by other, albeit less prominent, sexual scripts that overtly promoted female masturbatory self-pleasure. Indeed, some such female-centric scripts directly contested the phallogentric and/or penetrative ideals of heteronormative and androcentric sex by promoting clitoral focused sexual activities. Furthermore, other scripts latently promoted homosexuality, both female-female and male-male. This was done via the omission of any articulated rejection or contestation of such sexual practices.

How I Came to The Question

Even before starting my undergraduate degree, I have always had an interest in the social and cultural power dynamics that shape what forms of female sexuality

are deemed socially acceptable. I think simply living in the world as a woman (or someone who is female presenting) is enough to sensitise us to the various societal constraints and encouragements we bear. This interest was piqued in 2015 during a D.Vice¹ sex toy party thrown for one of my close friends in celebration of her 'hens night'². Before conducting this research, I had already attended six sex toy parties. Four of those were D.Vice parties and two were thrown by companies similar to Pure Romance³ who facilitated the two parties that inform this research which reflects both my existing interest in (and comfortability with) sex toys and female sexuality.

However, I had not yet started a sociology degree when I attended these parties, so I was not primed (and actively looking to) to see beyond the first layer of meaning I interpreted. During this 2015 D.Vice sex toy party I was in my second year of an undergraduate sociology degree and already thinking about potential master's thesis topics. I thought to myself *it feels like there is something worth exploring at D.Vice sex toy parties*. I already felt like I knew a lot about the company, informed by previously having interviewed for the position of D.Vice party facilitator and living with a friend who did get the job – which, comically, included coming home to a lounge room full of charging sex toys from her demonstration kit. I also felt my values aligned with those that underpinned their operations: they manufacture many of their own products to ensure quality, focus on inclusive sex positivity, commit to providing fact based and non-biased sexual information, and always offer non-judgemental advice for customers who need help ("*Customer Care*," n.d.). As such, I had an opinion of D.Vice parties as the 'gold standard' of sex toy parties.

¹ D.Vice is an Aotearoa New Zealand based sex toy company owned and operated by two lesbian women, Wendy Lee and Ema Lyon, since 1997. Their impetus for starting the business stemmed from a lack of access to quality sex toys in a comfortable environment (<https://www.dvice.co.nz/pages/customer-care>)

² A 'hen's night' is kiwi vernacular for what is more commonly called a 'bachelorette party'.

³ Pure Romance is a US-based multi-national and multi-level-marketing sex toy company (<https://bottlesoup.com/2018/06/10/pure-romance-financial-opportunity/>).

What I sensed happening in this space, with my 200-level sociological knowledge, was open discussions on sexuality and the encouragement of sex-positive, autonomous female pleasure.

Unfortunately when it came time to generate data for my thesis D.Vice had stopped running sex toy parties⁴. Instead, I found a company – Pure Romance – that threw parties in my hometown and research site. Because of my experience and knowledge of sex toy parties I had formed certain opinions and biases about companies like Pure Romance who use the multi-level-marketing business model. Moreover, because they do not require their party facilitators to undergo any sexuality training, I suspected most of their products and promotional rhetoric would reflect the dominant, hegemonic discourses of androcentrism and heteronormativity. Still, I wanted to discover if this was the case and was keen to use my sharpened sociological imagination in doing so. Overall, these experiences led to the formation of my thesis question: ‘Do female-only sex toy parties reproduce or contest heteronormative and androcentric sexual discourses and scripts?’

Situating The Answer

In the search of the answer to this question I address the topic of sex toy parties and print/digital promotion of sex lotions, potions, and toys in Palmerston North, Aotearoa New Zealand. I explore and explain what kinds of underlying socio-sexual discourses they draw on, and consequentially what range of sexual scripts, narratives, values, and ideals of sexual practice are reproduced. I focus on what wider existing socio-cultural sexual discourses are deployed in the promotion

⁴ The ‘Sex Toy Parties’ link remains on their website but it redirects to the ‘D.Vice Blog’ page or to a ‘404 not found’ link (<https://www.dvice.co.nz>).

of Pure Romance sex products and, in turn, what sexual scripts women are motivated to articulate, accommodate and/or embody. Additionally, I deploy Bennett's (2010) concept of 'thing-power' in my analysis, whereby inanimate objects or 'things' have a material vitalism or agentic causal capacities of their own, allowing me to understand how the thing-power of sex lotions, potions, and toys interact with, and either support, contest, or modify, various sexual discourses and scripts. These ideas enable both micro and macro level analytical approaches which draw connections between broader systems of sex-based knowledge, values, and power and every day practical or instrumental enactments of such.

I approach this topic from a different angle than that which currently exists in the scholarly literature. Several articles examine sex toy parties and educational opportunities (see Herbenick & Reece, 2009; Herbenick et al., 2009; Herbenick et al., 2010; Herbenick et al., 2013) and individual women's feelings about their own sex toy use (see Fahs, 2011; Fahs, 2014; Fahs & Frank, 2014; Fahs & Swank, 2013). McCaughey and French (2001), Storr (2003), and Curtis (2004) provide ethnographic accounts of sex toy parties. The work of these authors constitutes the entirety of academic literature that uses the method of ethnography and critically examines said ethnography of sex toys. McCaughey and French (2001) and Curtis (2004) consider the promotion of sex toys in the context of consumer capitalism, and subsequently what impact it has on the communication of disruptive or reinforcing normative sexual discourses. Storr (2003) conducts ethnographic research with a focus on sex toy parties as examples of 'female homosociality' or female homosocial bonding in which certain forms of femininity are constructed and reinforced. Much of the existing literature about sex toy promotions/marketing focuses on the relationship between consumer capitalism, reported sexual practices, and the reproduction or disruption of socio-sexual ideals. I choose, however, not to take a capitalist critique approach. Of course, the context and consequential effects of consumer capitalism are significant and must be acknowledged, and I discuss this below. Overall,

however, considering the existing substantial literature on this topic that uses a capitalist critique lens, the increasing homogeneity of consumer culture in Western societies (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007), and the absence of any ethnographic-based⁵ research conducted in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, I choose to discover how broad, global socio-cultural sexual discourses manifest (in the form of prescriptive, but not determinate, sexual scripts) in my local and uniquely situated research site.

Research Site

My desire to compare the international literature on sex toy promotions and associated narratives and scripts with the way this is articulated in provincial New Zealand stems from the location of my hometown and research site – Palmerston North, Aotearoa New Zealand. Palmerston North is a small, regional city in the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand and is roughly a one hour and forty-five-minute drive from the capital city Wellington. It has a population of almost 84,500 and the median age is 34 years (Stats NZ, 2018). The sex toy party I hosted (in my home) and follow-up interviews I conducted (either at my own or my interlocuters' home) all took place in Palmerston North. The sex toy party I attended was hosted in Fielding which is a twenty-minute drive from Palmerston North.

Methods and Analysis Used

⁵Not only is there a lack of ethnographic-based research about sex toys in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, almost no scholarly research exists regarding rates of sex toy use or subjective narratives about methods of and meaning behind solo masturbatory or partnered use. I expand on this in the literature review Chapter.

In line with an overall qualitative approach, I deployed the methods of participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and content analysis to generate data for this thesis. I chose participant-observation as it allows for an in-depth, nuanced, and embodied understanding of the dynamics and interactions (including body language, facial expressions, and other non-verbal cues) that occurred during the sex toy parties which is impossible to capture via quantitative approaches. The product demonstration narratives of the party facilitators were largely derived from the content in the companies print (product catalogues distributed at parties) and digital (website) materials. As such, content analysis based on these materials enabled me to supplement ethnographic data with more fully articulated promotional discourses. Follow-up in-depth interviews with party attendees was chosen as a means of understanding the ways they responded to the range of scripts, values, and ideals of sexual practice presented to us during the party. I had planned to include these in an analysis concerning the possible influence of socio-economic, education, age-life experiences, and sexual biographies on engagement with Pure Romance's toys, lotions, and sexual scripts. However, interview analysis is not present in this thesis which I explain below.

My overarching analytical framework is comprised of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) and sexual script theory (SST) (Simon and Gagnon, 1973). SST views sexual practices as framed and guided (but not necessarily determined) by historically contingent, culturally shared expectations, norms, and ideals in the form of (metaphorical) scripts. SST suits my research well as my aim is to discover what kinds of normative sexual practices and forms of idealised femininity women are encouraged to articulate, accommodate, and/or embody in the context of sex toy promotions. Additionally, I used Bennett's (2010) concept of 'thing-power' or material vitalism to interpret how the promoted products materiality interact with and contribute to support, contestation, or modification of various sexual scripts. And in order to discover what broader socio-

sexual discourses are manifest in the sexual scripts I interpreted in my research data I combined SST with CDA. This enabled me, from a social constructionist standpoint, to interpret and explain how existing discourses interpolate individuals into certain designated subject positions. These subject positions, such as 'sexually desirable woman' (as defined by the male gaze), have associated sexual scripts which involve specific (practical and instrumental) modes of enactment, such as body hair removal and the use of anti-aging lotions. As such, to address my thesis question I used the dialogic relationship between discourses and scripts to guide me in identifying and interpreting what socio-cultural norms and ideals are apparent in the kinds of sexual practices endorsed (either overtly or implicitly) in my research context and how these link to overarching, often hegemonically dominant, existing socio-sexual discourses.

What I Omitted

As mentioned above, I conducted follow-up interviews with six sex toy party attendees to generate data on their reported responses to and modes of engagement with the range of sex toy party based sexual scripts and discourses. I did this with the intent of considering how differing and diverse sets of socioeconomic and experiential circumstances may influence their responses. For example, one forty-year-old interlocutor, Amelia, critiqued androcentric, heteronormative, and feminine beauty ideals she saw as evident during the party. This was reflective of her education (bachelor's degree in the Social Sciences and Humanities), life-age experience (researching and writing a female sexuality-based blog), and sexual biography (personal interest in sex toys and former party facilitator).

Ultimately, these interviews do not feature in the thesis for two primary reasons. Firstly, my small sample size of interviewees means any analysis would

only be indicative of the possible influence of social, economic, and experiential variables on how women engage with the sexual discourses of a sex toy party. A larger sample size is required to assess how this manifests in practice and how generalisable responses are. Secondly, this thesis is analytically dense because it is crucial in order to illustrate and analyse the nuance and contradictory and conflicting elements of evident scripts and discourses. As such, I decided to dedicate space to this and forego analysis of interview data.

Similarly, I have not included a critical capitalist analysis as I briefly mentioned above, however, it is important to include a brief discussion of its significance. While this omission reflects limitations in scope and available space, it does not negate the recognition of potential implications stemming from socio-economic exclusions, inclusions, and stratifications. Those unable to afford the cost of a sex toy are immediately excluded from promised technologically enhanced, on-demand sexual experiences. Others may be required to grapple with various levels of affordability based on the quality of the materials used and the efficacy of form and function which ultimately determines the quality of their sexual experiences with that product. For example, the least expensive Pure Romance sex toy, which costs \$67 NZD, is a penetrative vibrator that provides internal vaginal stimulation only. It requires non-rechargeable (and thus the need for consistent replacement of) batteries, offers only three speeds, and may be made from silicone however this is not specified (and is therefore unlikely – silicone is an expensive material that is typically promoted as a feature). In contrast, if a woman desires (or requires) simultaneous clitoral and internal stimulation and additional features such a rotating beaded shaft, ten vibration speeds, and a rechargeable battery she will need to spend \$298 NZD on the dual-action 'Encore' vibrator. Similarly, to experience more intense orgasms via the assistance of "Boost", a clitoral stimulation enhancement gel, this will cost the user \$42 NZD (for a 30-millilitre bottle). As such, this effectively stratifies sexual experiences that is inclusive of certain socioeconomic statuses and

exclusive of others. These aspects of lotions, potions, and sex toys are undoubtedly important but do not constitute my primary thesis focus and are thus not included.

Roadmap

In Chapter Two, “Literature Review”, I combine a review of the theoretical and topic literature. I begin by describing the social constructivist underpinning of CDA and the emphasis placed on the role of language and discourse in shaping individuals’ perceptions and experiences of lived reality. This illustrates the suitability and utility of its use in research seeking to understand how discursive practices contribute to the construction/reinforcement/contestation of socio-cultural norms and expectations embedded in sexual scripts. I also explain how SST relates to broad socio-sexual discourses by way of manifesting norms and ideals in the form of guidance for practical enactment. To situate my research within the existing literature I then review the history of sex toys, their historical and contemporary political discourse, and provide the chronology of promotional strategies. I conclude by summarising the small amount of existing literature about sex toys in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. I have placed the literature review chapter first as the philosophical and ontological underpinnings of SST and CDA heavily (and inherently) inform my methodological approach.

In Chapter Three, “Methodology”, I outline the specific research strategies employed and provide a detailed account of the data generation process including ethical considerations and challenges I encountered data generation and analysis. By choosing to undertake qualitative research I aim to make sense of the meaning or meanings underlying the sex toy party phenomena.

In Chapter Four, “Ethnography”, I provide a descriptive ethnographic account of a sex toy party that I organised, attended, observed, recorded, and transcribed. The purpose of this chapter is to put forth illustrative instances of identified sexual scripts which supports further analysis in the proceeding chapters. It also enables me to provide a vivid and detailed depiction of social interactions, practices, and behaviours within the context of the party and is an apt way to ‘give life’ to the coming analytically dense discussions. Furthermore, the ethnographic account serves to contextualise theoretical discussions and helps the reader understand how abstract concepts like sexual scripts are enacted and negotiated in practice.

In Chapter Five, “Lotions and Potions”, I expand on the sexual scripts identified in the previous chapter concerning products in the ‘Beauty and Body’, ‘Bath and Shower’, and ‘Enhancement Creams’ categories in the promotional catalogue. Before doing so I give an overview of each product category, including associated primary and specific thing-power, to provide context for the analytical discussion. I then expand on the socio-sexual discourses underlying each script to illustrate how various (often dominant conversative, androcentric and heteronormative) narratives, values, and ideals of sexual practice manifest in overt or latent guidelines for practical enactment. Throughout the analytical discussion I also illustrate how a product’s agentic capacity interacts with and either supports, contests, or modifies various sexual scripts.

In Chapter Six, “Sex Toys”, I analyse the promotional context and material vitalism of sex toys sold by Pure Romance to illustrate how the sexual scripts identified in previous chapters are similarly promoted or contested. As with chapter five I provide a description and overview of each product for context. Again, I expand on the wider existing discourses from which these sexual scripts are derived to demonstrate how sexual scripts can be viewed as a crystallisation of idealised

sexual practices. Contestation of the conservative, male-centred sexual status quo is more evident in the sexual scripts related to sex toys than those relating to the previous product categories. For example, penetrative, dual-action, and clitoral vibrators overtly promote female masturbatory self-pleasure, and clitoral vibrators specifically promote clitoral focused sexual practices which directly contest phallogentric and/or penetrative ideals of heteronormative and androcentric sex. However, and in illustration of nuanced findings, vibrators designed for vaginal penetration (thus emulating the erect penis) simultaneously reproduce sexual scripts that normalises the role of male penetration in female sexual pleasure. Overall, overt contestation via promotion of an idealised alternative is lacking. As such, androcentric and heterosexual discourses and practices effectively remain as dominant pathways to female sexual pleasure.

In Chapter Seven “Conclusion” I argue that fine-grained categorical analysis is essential to discover the full spectrum of different and often competing or conflicting sexual scripts. Some scripts, particularly those embedded with heteronormative sexual values and ideals, were more dominant in being overt, foregrounded and extensively articulated. There is evidence of progressive, female-focused sexual scripts that challenge sexual hegemony; however, this does not constitute an overt contestation of androcentric ideals. Ultimately, there is evident reproduction of sexually androcentric discourses at female only sex toy parties. But importantly, these were not the only discourses apparent. Other scripts and discourses exist that (partially) challenge the reproduction of conservative, male-centred socio-sexual norms.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Introduction

A substantial amount of international research has been done on the topic of women and sex toys, however, much of it focuses on the relationship between consumer capitalism, reported sexual practices, and the reproduction or disruption of conservative socio-sexual ideals. Additionally, several ethnographic accounts of sex toy parties have been published which also take a capitalist critique approach. I differ in approach by analysing how sex toy promotions draw from established socio-sexual discourses and crystallise their constitutive norms and values in guides for practical enactment and/or embodiment. I also use vital materialism to illustrate how lotions, potions, and sex toys interact with and either support, contest, or modify various sexual scripts. As such, my research is uniquely situated to address a gap in the literature by asking a question that addresses the ways women are motivated to articulate, accommodate, and/or embody practical enactments of dominant socio-sexual discourses in the form of sexual scripts. It is also uniquely situated geographically as I am unable to find any ethnographic accounts of sex toy parties in the Aotearoa New Zealand context.

This literature review identifies a gap in the existing research, particularly regarding the examination of female-only sex toy parties and their role in perpetuating or challenging dominant sexual discourses which is not bound by the parameters of capitalist critique. To address this gap, my study employs a theoretical framework that combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Sexual Script Theory (SST) to analyse how sex toy promotions reflect and shape socio-sexual norms and values. The first half of this chapter reviews the relevant theoretical literature and explains the overall theoretical framework used in my thesis. Drawing

from diverse social constructionist approaches and combining (CDA) and (SST), the review provides a comprehensive understanding of how cultural scripts influence sexual behaviour and attitudes, and how these scripts are constructed and reinforced through language and discourse. The second half of this chapter traces the history of sex toys from their inception as medical devices, their entanglement with second wave feminism, through to the three major 'waves' of development – taboo/restricted, androcentric disruption, and overtly female oriented - they have undergone. I then explore the chronology of promotional strategies and the emergence of sex toy parties as platforms for learning and discussing sexual health information. By analysing the discursive strategies and ideologies underlying the promotion of sex toys, this literature review explores the sweep of discourses, values and ideals that exist under an overarching umbrella of two meta and essentializing discourses. Those are that sex should naturally be pleasurable (ideally for all participants) and that enhanced sexual pleasure is probable through the use of technological embellishments and enhancements (i.e. enhancement creams, lubricants, lotions and sex toys). More specifically, and foregrounded in my analysis, is that existing under this umbrella of meta-discourses includes intersections of heteronormativity (of which gendered socio-sexual norms and sexual androcentrism are also emphasised) and sexual positivity in which masturbatory self-pleasure is explicitly emphasised and lesbian sexuality is latently promoted.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Burr (1995), building on Gergen, writes about diverse social constructionist approaches and provides four premises shared by all which constitute a general definition of social constructionism. Firstly, taken-for-granted knowledge should be examined critically and not held as representative of objective truth. This is because reality is only known to us via linguistic devices – for example, categorisation – and

are therefore products of discourse. Secondly, all knowledge is historically and culturally specific and contingent. As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p. 6) state “this view that all knowledge is contingent is an anti-foundationalist position that stands in opposition to the foundationalist-view that knowledge can be grounded on a solid, metatheoretical base that transcends contingent human actions”. Third is the link between knowledge and social processes whereby knowledge is produced through social interaction. Lastly, diverse interpretations of the world and society can result in various types of social action and as a result the way knowledge and truth are established socially can have significant social effects.

Among the various approaches to discourse analysis, one thing they all share is a social constructionist underpinning – both in their view of language and of the individual (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Discourse analysis views language as “stemming from structuralist and poststructuralist linguistics, and ... understanding of the individual [is] based on a version of structural Marxism” (p. 3). This means that individual identity, including beliefs, values, and socio-cultural habitus, is understood as constituted by discursive structure. Laclau and Mouffe borrow the concept of interpellation in explaining the individual, saying “people are ... interpellated by discourses: subjects are to be understood as ‘subject positions’ within a discursive structure ... [d]iscourses always designate positions for people to occupy as subjects” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, as cited in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 18). This was part of the ‘linguistic turn’, a critique of positivism whereby linguistics were used to examine the social construction of meaning, value, narratives, practices, relationships, and other associated social phenomena (Gill, 2000). Jørgensen and Phillips state that “discourse analysis is just one among several social constructionist approaches but it is one of the most widely used approaches within social constructionism” (p. 5). Within the broad category of social constructionism, discourse analysis also draws on poststructuralist language theory. As Jørgensen and Phillips state “the poststructuralist idea [maintains] that discourse

constructs the social world in meaning, and that, owing to the fundamental instability of language, meaning can never be permanently fixed” (p. 7). Therefore social reality is reproduced or contested through struggles at the discursive level.

I now provide a brief overview of the history and development of discourse analysis via major contributing theorists. Discourse theory emerged in the 1970s as a reaction to the limitations of traditional linguistic analysis in understanding the complexities of language and communication in society – hence subscription to the concepts outlined above. Strauss and Feiz (2013) write that the early development of discourse theory is associated with Michel Foucault who argued that power relations are embedded in language and discourse, and are discursively (re)produced. Furthermore, historically contingent regimes of power and associated knowledge paradigms determine what is considered true and false, yet “it is not possible to gain access to universal truth since it is impossible to talk from a position outside discourse” (p. 14). Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) detail how Foucault also provided the basis for understanding contingent socio-psychological constructions of the subject. In his theory power and knowledge are interdependent, with knowledge being used to reinforce and justify power relations, while power shapes what is considered legitimate knowledge. In addition, the power/knowledge that underpins all socio-cultural constructs is seen as both oppressive and generative, and furthermore is *both* embedded in society and simultaneously something held by individuals and groups. It follows therefore that all power/knowledge is also embedded, and thus is made available to critical analysis, within discourse (and in associated practices) in which the subject and society are continuously (re)constituted. As Foucault (1972, p. 55) states:

[D]iscourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his dis-continuity with himself may be

determined. It is a space of exteriority in which a network of distinct sites is deployed ... it must now be recognized that it is neither by recourse to a transcendental subject nor by recourse to a psychological subjectivity that the regulation of its enunciations should be defined.

Here, Foucault claims that the subject does not speak, act, or indeed even exist with absolute agency, but rather that they are generated and situated in various discursive fields which impress on and continuously (re)constitutes them in relation to various social contexts and the types of knowledge/power embedded within it.

The field of discourse analysis was further developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), who argued that meaning, value and identity are constructed through language and that social and political structures are the result of discursive practices. Theirs is the 'purest' poststructuralist approach in that discourse constructs the entirety of the social world: there is no separation between discursive discourses and non-discursive practices. Furthermore, they place a predominant emphasis on 'discursive struggle' whereby "different discourses - each of them representing particular ways of talking about and understanding the social world - are engaged in a constant struggle with one other to achieve hegemony" (as cited in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 7). In 1989 Norman Fairclough published the book "Language and Power", establishing (in tandem with van Dijk's "Discourse and Power", 1993) critical discourse analysis (CDA) theory. Fairclough and CDA is now the focus of the remainder of discussion.

I now discuss the key concepts of CDA and explain why CDA is the approach best suited to the topic and research aims of this thesis. The field of CDA encompasses a variety of approaches, however, Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p. 2) consider Fairclough's approach to represent "the most developed theory and method for research in communication, culture and society" and it is one of the most

widely used and influential approaches to CDA. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) provide an overview of the five central features of this approach. Firstly, the production and consumption (this being comprised of both recipient and interpretation) of texts (called 'discursive practices') are regarded as significant practices that contribute to the formation of the social world, including identities, relations, roles and status. Furthermore, it is partly through the discursive practices of everyday life that socio-cultural reproduction and change occur. Secondly, discourse and the social world are mutually constitutive. Discourse both shapes and reshapes social structures and is shaped by social structures; discourse is both constitutive and constituted. Therefore, some social practices are seen as non-discursive or as enduring and recursive. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p. 3 - 4) provide an example of this from Fairclough's 1992 book 'Discourse and Social Change':

The family [are given] as an example of how the social structure influences discursive practices. The relationship between parents and children is partly discursively constituted, he says, but, at the same time, the family is an institution with concrete practices, pre-existing relationships and identities. These practices, relationships and identities were originally discursively constituted, but have become sedimented in institutions and non-discursive practices. The constitutive effects of discourse work together with other practices such as the distribution of household tasks. Furthermore, social structures play an independent role in forming and circumscribing discursive practices in the family.

Thirdly, social context specifics should be considered in empirical analysis of language. Fourthly, unequal power relations between social roles, positions, cohorts and groups (for example, between men and women) are seen to be created and reproduced by discursive practices. In this way, the effects are ideological. And

lastly, CDA produces critical research and therefore is not politically neutral. This is especially illuminated by the emphasis CDA places on the discursive reproduction of unequal power relations.

Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) describe some other pertinent aspects of Fairclough's approach, especially with regard to the topic and scope of this thesis. Firstly, interdiscursivity refers to the mix of different discourses articulated in a communicative event. If new articulations of discourses are done creatively it can both reflect and drive discursive and therefore socio-cultural change. However, if this is done conventionally this (re)produces, and reflects, reinforcement of the dominant discursive discourses and therefore social order. Lastly, Jørgensen and Phillips explain the relationship between discourse, ideology, and hegemony in Fairclough's CDA approach. They state that "ideologies are created in societies in which relations of domination are based on social structures such as ... gender" (p. 16). Discourses can be understood as having varying degrees of ideology, with the discourses that seek to perpetuate or change power relationships being the ones that are considered ideological. The ideological discourses that achieve the highest degree of cultural saliency are thus considered hegemonic.

Jørgensen and Phillips explain aspects of Fairclough's approach to CDA which make it particularly relevant for the study of the relationship between sex toy promotions and the reproduction or contestation of various – some complementary, others (in part) oppositional; some overt, others latent – sexual discourses (as elicited in the ethnographic discourses and associated practices in sex toy parties and in the follow-up, semi-structured interviews). These include heteronormativity and sex idealism, associated gender norms, androcentrism, masturbatory reflexivity and homosexualities (particularly lesbianism). Practically, it is more suitable than other similar discourse analysis approaches which lack systemic and empirical studies of contextual language use or which instead focus primarily on rhetoric. Fairclough's

approach is theoretically oriented to the critical examination of power relations in discourse of which sexually heteronormative and androcentric discourses are clearly constituted. CDA also aims to uncover underlying ideologies and discursive strategies that may reinforce dominant power structures, making it an ideal framework for examining the construction of differentiated and unequal gendered socio-sexual norms generatively embedded in heteronormative and sexually androcentric/phallic/orgasmic discourses. Additionally, this approach allows for the non-discursive and particularly of materiality and physicality – such as the material constitution of sex toys themselves and their associated physical sexual practices respectively – which are both constituted by and constitutive of associated sexual discourses. And finally, CDA is a flexible and adaptable approach that can be applied to various types of discourse, from media representations to everyday conversations, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which discourse shapes and reflects social phenomena.

Sexual Script Theory

CDA forms one part of the theoretical framework for this thesis. I now discuss sexual script theory (SST) which, when combined with CDA, constitutes the overall framework. This section explores what SST is, its key concepts, and provide a brief overview of the history and development of SST. Human sexual behaviour is shaped by a range of varied biological factors – some of which, such as distinct heteronormative male (penetrative) and female (receptive) roles, the ‘ever erect’ phallus, and the ‘always achievable’ orgasm (male and female), are idealised and foregrounded (and thus effectively essentialised) by the sex toy product industry. However, human sexual actions and interactions are also just as, if not more, significantly influenced by various social and cultural factors and associated discourses of sex knowledge and power. One prominent approach to studying the

social and cultural aspects of sexuality is sexual script theory (SST). The theory suggests that sexual behaviour is guided by cultural scripts or norms that are learned through socialisation processes and that these scripts influence individuals' sexual attitudes, desires, and behaviours. Indeed these scripts can also be regarded as contingent discourses about normative and ideal sexual behaviour that generate and are generated by associated sexual practices, interactions and relationships.

A brief overview of the history and development of SST reveal that it is an extension of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionist theory was created by the sociologist Herbert Blumer during the 1930s, which was inspired by the research of his mentor, George Herbert Mead, also a sociologist. It refers to the role shared use of language plays in the construction of meaning, and meaning is understood as an outcome of everyday interactions (Hall, 2007). Following this, the use of the script metaphor precedes Simon and Gagnon. The sociological perspective of dramaturgy was famously coined by Goffman (1959), a leading proponent of symbolic interactionism. Goffman compares human social interaction to a play whereby individuals, following a script, perform expected roles. SST, therefore, applies and extends social constructionism, dramaturgy, and symbolic interactionism to sexual discourses and associated practices. This perspective emerged in the late 1970s as a response to the limitations of previous approaches to sexuality, such as Freudian psychoanalysis and behaviourism, and biological essentialism (Wiederman, 2015). As Wiederman states:

Unlike the psychoanalytic and biological perspectives, Gagnon and Simon believed that nothing could be assumed about sexuality, apart from the notion that anything considered “sexual” arose because those meanings were attached to the stimuli, or situation, or behavior (sic) by the individuals so involved (p. 11).

John Gagnon and William Simon (1986) explain that SST approaches human sexuality from a social constructionist standpoint whereby sexual behaviour is understood as shaped by social and cultural factors rather than solely by biology or individual psychology. Both SST and social constructionism emphasise that our understanding of sex and sexuality is constructed through social processes such as language, media, cultural norms and associated practices and experiences. SST focuses specifically on how individuals learn and internalise culturally shared ideas and expectations about sex, including how to initiate, engage in, and conclude sexual encounters. The theory argues that individuals do so via metaphorical scripts which are constituted by and derived from broader discourses about sex and sexuality. These discourses draw on social and cultural forces such as gender norms, cultural values, and power relations, and consequent sexual scripts are “learned and incorporated as a function of their involvement in the social group” (Simon 1996; Simon & Gagnon 1986, 1987, 2003, as cited in Wiederman, 2015, p. 7).

Simon and Gagnon (1984) argue that “for behaviour to occur, something resembling scripting must occur on three distinct levels: cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts” (p. 53). These authors define each level of scripting and the relationship between them. Cultural scenarios, the most abstract scripting level, “are the instructional guides that exist at the level of collective life” (p. 53). It is through cultural scenarios that the performance and execution of particular roles are prescribed. And importantly for my thesis, cultural scripts guide how sexuality is supposed to be enacted according to heteronormative gender roles (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Essentially, the “enactment of virtually all roles then, must reflect either directly or indirectly the contents of appropriate cultural scenarios” (Simon & Gagnon, p. 98). Wiederman (2015) elaborates on cultural scenarios in the context of sexual behaviour and norms, stating that “cultural scenarios lay out the playing field of sexuality; what is deemed desirable

and undesirable, and where the broad boundaries lie between appropriate and inappropriate sexual conduct” (p. 8).

However, sexual cultural scripts are too abstract to be applied in all situations and therefore “are rarely entirely predictive of actual behavior (sic)” (Simon & Gagnon, 1984, p. 53). This then necessitates analytical consideration of interpersonal scripts. Interpersonal scripts involve the adaptation of cultural scenarios to meet the requirements of specific social encounters, yet still significantly rely on the roles and instructional guides provided by cultural scenarios. Tailoring to specific situations differentiates this level of scripting from cultural scripts, and it is achieved through mutually shared conventions that enable two or more actors to collaborate in a complex act requiring mutual dependence. Intrapsychic scripts entail the specific strategies and plans for enacting interpersonal scripts, a kind of “internal rehearsal” which “influence[s] how gender roles are produced at the individual level including sexual fantasies and desires” (Beres, 2014, p. 77). Simon and Gagnon see all three scripting levels as dynamically related and in flux, stating that “all behavior (sic), or perhaps one should say all conduct or all action, involves all three levels of scripting, though not all three are of equivalent relevance in all situations or at all levels of concern” and that “it is difficult to conceive of any behavior (sic) ... that is not scripted” (1986, p. 104). Furthermore, the interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts that individuals create during their teenage and early adult years are often conservative, as they are motivated to maintain what has worked in the past once they have been successful. The authors state that:

Once [the individual has] found a formula that works—in other words, the realization of sexual pleasure, as well as the realization of sociosexual competence—there is an obvious tendency on some level to para-ritualize that formula. Variations can occur, but variations generally occur within the limits

of a larger, stabilizing body of scripts both interpersonal and intrapsychic (p. 57).

In sum, the three levels of scripting work in tandem to produce sexual scripts that hegemonically generate sexual behaviour and practices which reflect wider cultural and social norms concerning sex and sexuality. Of course, all sexual scripts remain open to contestation and change at both social and individual levels.

Also of particular relevance to this thesis is the concept of gendered sexual scripts, the establishment and development of which I now examine. The cultural prescription of how sexuality is supposed to be enacted is gendered, with different scripts prescribing distinct sexual desires and practices for men and women. Sexual script theory argues that these gendered scripts are learned through socialisation processes and that they shape, but do not over determine, individuals' sexual attitudes, desires, and behaviours. Gendered sexual scripts for women, imbued with socially constructed sexual and gender norms, often reinforce sexually androcentric discourses. These discourses may manifest in ways that, while aiming to facilitate male sexual pleasure, could inadvertently hinder or limit the full realisation of female pleasure. For instance, while some contexts might view prioritising male pleasure (especially phallus penetrative and ejaculatory) as a necessary component of female pleasure, it is crucial to recognise that such prioritisation might impede the exploration and fulfilment of female desires, distinct from the benchmark established by predominant discourses focused on self-pleasure.

Simon and Gagnon largely focus their theoretical attention on sexual scripts overall, without providing a thorough account of gendered differences. In their article 'Sexual Scripts' (1984), however, they state "women rarely have been selected for sexual roles on the basis of their own interest in sexual pleasure. The idea of female interest in, or commitment to, sexual pleasure was, and possibly still is,

threatening to many men and women". This statement indicates that sexual androcentricity (the centrality of male pleasure) is inherent in sexual scripts. Additionally, in their book 'Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality' (2017) gendered sexual scripts are discussed in the context of a heterosexual marriage. Based on social norms and power relations learned through various social institutions such as the family, school, and media the authors describe gendered scripts which largely prescribe male dominance and female submission. They give the example of a women performing fellatio on a male partner to illustrate that even when a sexual act seemingly places women in a more active and thus dominant position, it is nevertheless interpreted and constructed to assert male sexual dominance and thereby avoid violation of hegemonic gendered sexual scripts. They state:

Even though the woman is more physically active and dominating and the man more passive, the act of fellatio is symbolically constructed in terms of men's dominance and women's submission. This is part of the common practice found in sexual activity of relabeling physical acts to fit social definitions (p. 65).

Another quote from Gagnon and Simon (2017, p. 62) is further illustrative of male dominance and female submission as prescribed in gendered sexual scripts:

The experience of sexual activity as achievement on the part of young men or as a form of social service on the part of young women does not derive from immanent meanings derived from biology, but from the invented and created role categories that are available to members of a society.

Several scholars have deployed Simon and Gagnon's theory in research to further establish what constitutes male and female gendered sexual scripts, and how

they have changed since the time of Simon and Gagnon's publications. Traditionally, it is believed that men hold a strong physical outlook on sexuality that emphasises sexual performance and 'drive' (Wiederman, 2005; Me'nard & Cabrera, 2011; Oliver & Hyde, 1993; Sakaluk et al., 2014). Additionally, men frequently endorse "status enhancement and physical reasons (e.g., physical pleasure) more frequently [than women]" (McCabe et al., 2010, p. 253). Complementing this, women are prescribed the sexual "gatekeeper" role which men must overcome (Wiederman, 2005). They also "commonly endorse emotional reasons (e.g., love)" for participating in sex (McCabe et al., 2010, p. 253) and their objectified physical sexual appeal is prioritised (Me'nard & Cabrera, 2011; Eaton & Rose, 2011; McCabe et al., 2010). Additionally, male sexual centrality is underscored by the emphasis on being pleased or serviced by women (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2012) and further illuminated by the finding that women are typically expected to restrain their sexual desires and refrain from discussing their sexual pleasure (McCabe et al., 2010). These assertions are echoed by Kiefer and Sanchez (2007) who state that women are socialised into "a sexually disempowered, responsive rather than active role" while men are encouraged to adopt an assertive, dominant, and directive role (p. 271). Recent research suggests that gendered sexual scripts continue to persist, which prioritize men's sexual pleasure over women's. Evidence shows that heterosexual people are more likely to choose to ensure orgasm for a man instead of a woman if they had to choose between the two (Klein & Conley, 2022). Furthermore, recent evidence suggests that sexual encounters enacting phallogentric scripts, which prioritise agentic male behaviour such as penetrative intercourse and male orgasm and deprioritise clitoral stimulation, hinder female orgasm (Willis et al., 2018; Dienberg et al., 2022).

While such historical gendered sexual scripts persist, there is evidence of change. Culture-level sexual scripts often remain stable and inform stereotypical beliefs about men and women, however at the interpersonal and intrapsychic level

evidence has been found of exception-finding. Exceptions to gender rules are often crafted for individuals and their partners (Masters et al., 2013), sexual experimentation (a large number of partners) has been evaluated negatively for both men *and* women (Sakaluk et al., 2014), and there are contradictions between peoples personal sexual experiences and traditional gender roles (McCabe et al., 2010). McCabe et al., (2010) found that “when people talk about sexuality in the abstract, it is generally in ways that correspond to transitional gender arrangements and stereotypes; however, personal experiences elicit more contradictions” (p. 255). Traditional, conservative gender norms were not wholly apparent in participants discussions about their own personal sexual experience (which constitutes interpersonal and intra-psychic sexual scripts). One participant (male, 47) described the impact his mood and emotions has on his sexual desire: “if I’m mad at my partner, the last thing I want to do is to have sex or be intimate at all ... she’ll try to initiate something and I’ll just roll over and go to sleep” (p. 256). This contradicts his earlier statements about sex as physical for men and women’s lack of desire.

Masters et al. (2013) also describe the persistent stability of traditional sexual scripts at the cultural level, but incongruency in “how or whether these scripts were incorporated into individual relationships” (p. 409). Their participants readily described traditional, hegemonic masculine and feminine culture-level gender scripts, however, at the individual level they “saw many participants desiring or enacting very different gender scripts than those they cited as cultural norms” (p. 413). Upon examining participants intra- and interpersonal scripts they found three methods of interactions with traditional gender scripts: “conforming, exception finding, an transforming” (p. 413). With participants that conformed, the researchers found that their intra- and interpersonal scripts largely matched hegemonic cultural scripts, and an unquestioned acceptance of these scripts as normal and natural. Exception-finders also accepted culture level gender scripts as a given, but “focused on creating exceptions to gender rules for themselves or on finding partners who

were exceptions to these rules” (p. 415). For example, one female participant described herself in opposition to the way women are expected to behave sexually. She said she “tends to be more sexually open [than other women] ... [and] not quite the way other people [were] – the way girls and boys are supposed to be” (p. 415). In the narration of her sexual history she emphasised her bisexuality, polyamory, and not wanting to “play by the rules”. The transforming cohort are described as the following (p. 416):

Overall, participants were either conscious, explicit transformers, who wished that gendered relationship norms at the cultural level were more congruent with their own scripts, and sometimes were involved in deliberate attempts to make them so, or they were unconscious, implicit transformers, who had a worldview in which their nontraditional intra- or interpersonal scripts’ legitimacy was taken for granted.

Masters et al. (2013) article suggests that while traditional cultural sexual scripts may remain somewhat stable, individuals may be reluctant to abide by the norms that guide behaviour.

Dienberg et al. (2022) also explored the permanence and change of cultural sexual scripts. Similarly, these authors found persistence of cultural sexual scripts and describe gendered sexual scripts as a barrier to female sexual pleasure. However, they also found that “more clitoral knowledge was associated with endorsing less gendered sexual scripts, which in turn showed a positive association with higher pleasure and orgasms experienter” (p. 9). Fröander et al. (2019) research reinforces the persistence of traditional cultural scripts via critical discourse analysis of academic articles about women’s sexuality and consent. The results of their study found that “the existence of the “gatekeeper” concept and the traditional scripts was something that the articles did not criticise, but stated as facts” (p. 36). They attribute

this to Foucault's power/knowledge construction and in the context of their research means that "the people with the power and knowledge are sustaining the concepts of the "gatekeeper" and the traditional scripts instead of working towards innovation" (p. 36). Seabrook et al., (2017) offer an intriguing possible explanation for the stability of cultural sexual scripts over time, which also relates to how Fröander et al. attribute said stability to the power/knowledge construction and how those with power and knowledge sustain conservative norms. The authors state (p. 247):

[O]ur results suggest that college women who frequently consume TV, or who believe that its content is real, tend to endorse the gendered sexual scripts that are portrayed frequently on TV. Endorsement of these gendered sexual scripts is, in turn, associated with less confidence using condoms and more negative and shameful feelings about one's level of sexual experience ... [also, other] researchers have found relations between women's TV consumption and endorsement of gendered sexual scripts (Guo & Nathanson, 2011; Ward, 2002, as cited in Seabrook et al., 2017), and between endorsement of gendered sexual scripts and components of sexual agency (Curtin et al., 2011; Levin et al., 2012, as cited in Seabrook et al., 2017).

Similarly, Ward et al. (2022) examine mainstream media and its role in reinforcing conservative sexual scripts. They found that "significant evidence indicates that heavier media exposure is associated with greater acceptance of these expectations among U.S. youths ... [s]tronger endorsement is linked to greater psychological distress, diminished sexual agency, and more dysfunctional beliefs about relationships" (p. 369).

In contrast, evidence of change to culture-level sexual scripts does exist however this evidence is more scant than that which confirms its persistence.

McCormick (2010) cites several other studies which have found evidence of changing cultural and interpersonal gendered sexual scripts. As McCormick states (Byers & Heinlein, 1989; O'Sullivan & Byers, 1992; Simms & Byers, 2009, as cited in McCormick 2010, p. 92):

[W]omen and men are statistically similar in their readiness to comply with or reject a partner's sexual invitation, no longer differ in the frequency with which they had considered initiating sexual activity and underestimate how similar their ideal sexual behavior (sic) frequencies are to those of their partner.

It seems significant that such a dearth of academic literature exists regarding changing cultural sexual scripts and a lack of incorporation of anecdotally culturally significant ideas like gender and sexual fluidity, a non-categorical and non-judgemental attitude, and the shame-free importance of female sexual pleasure (as portrayed in the promotion of many contemporary sex toys).

CDA and SST in collusion

In the remainder of this theoretical literature review I discuss why both CDA and SST have been selected to create the theoretical and analytical framework for my thesis. This is done by explaining how the two theories complement each other, how they can be integrated in the analysis of the thesis topic, and how the combination can help to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the promotion of sex toys and the range of discourses (from conservative to contesting or innovative, explicit to latent, convergent and divergent, etc) they generate. I also discuss the concept of Bennett's 'thing-power', which provides another strata of analytical

framework, to explain how the material objects in question possess agency and exert influence, therefore interfacing with sexual scripts.

Beres (2014) outlines how SST and discourse approaches complement one another. The author argues that it is the differences between the approaches that makes them more fertile theoretical and analytical grounds when combined. Sexual discourses and associated practices are generally the focus of SST (i.e. what sexual practices are socio-culturally prescribed) while discourse theory focuses on how language use discursively constructs understandings of sexuality, and what subject positions these constructions open up. It is by “putting these two approaches together, we can start to see scripts as the manifestation of discourses” (Beres, 2014, p. 82).

Combining a macro and micro perspective by integrating both theories in analysis provides a richer and more comprehensive understanding. CDA helps unveil the range of underlying power structures and ideologies present in the discourses (e.g. gender, class, aged, etc), while SST shed lights on the specific sexual norms, expectations, and behaviours perpetuated in response to these discourses. By employing both critical discourse theory and sexual script theory, my thesis offers a multifaceted analysis. It allows for a nuanced examination of how language and discourse employed in sex product marketing not only reflect but also constructs gendered sexual scripts. This combined approach can uncover the power dynamics, societal influences, and entrenched norms present in promotional materials, providing a more holistic understanding of how these scripts are shaped, maintained, or potentially changed.

The combination of SST and CDA can help to provide a more comprehensive understanding of my thesis question because SST provides a framework for understanding how cultural scripts influence sexual behaviour and attitudes, while

CDA provides a method for analysing how these scripts are constructed and reinforced through language and discourse. By applying CDA to analyse the language and discourse surrounding sexual behaviour and attitudes, my thesis can identify the ways in which cultural scripts are reinforced and perpetuated, as well as the power dynamics and ideologies that underlie them. This can provide a deeper understanding of how gendered sexual scripts are constructed, maintained, or disrupted, and how they contribute to gender inequities in sexual behaviour and attitudes.

Thing-power

To explain how material items produce effects, and in this sense have agency, I employ Bennett's concept of 'thing-power' which is central to her theory of vital materialism. As Bennett (2010) outlines this idea suggests that objects, or "things," have a causal vibrancy or agency of their own. That is, they are not just passive entities acted upon by humans, but rather they can have effects, create impacts, or set up conditions that affect human and non-human interactions. To convey this Bennett replaces the 'actor' in Actor-Network Theory with the 'actant', which "is defined not by a capacity for action but rather by its ability to produce effects and alter situations" (Bennett, 2004, as cited in Lemke, 2018, p. 35). Thing-power, then, is the recognition of the inherent dynamism of objects, their ability to act as quasi-agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own. For example, a power outage might reveal the "thing-power" of the electrical grid. As such, applying the concept of thing-power to my analyses of Pure Romance's products illustrates their specific forms of agency. Consequentially, the kinds of capacities these products have effect what is reproduced as normative sexual practice and on what basis such practices are promoted. In this way, the thing-power of the products in my thesis is not just about their physical properties or their ability

to provide pleasure. It is also about their capacity to reaffirm, challenge, and/or reshape our understandings of sexuality and normative sexual practices. This literature review concludes with a brief overview of the history of the vibrator followed by a history of the marketing and promotion of sex toys through to contemporary methods. Literature concerning sex toy parties in particular will be explored thereafter, including the lack of research in the New Zealand context.

Sex Toy Literature

Historical

The entirety of the history of sex toys is well beyond the scope of this literature review because, as Rossolatos (2016) states, “sex toys ... have been around ever since antiquity” (p. 1476). However one of the most well-known and widely cited accounts of the history of sex toys in modern Western societies was published by Maine in 1996 and titled “The Technology of Orgasm: ‘Hysteria’, the Vibrator, and Women’s Sexual Satisfaction” in which she argues that the vibrator was invented in the late 19th century as a medical device to treat “hysteria” in women. ‘Hysteria’ was used as a catch all term used to diagnose women exhibiting signs of anything from anxiety to promiscuity and the vibrator was used to induce “hysterical paroxysm” (orgasm) as treatment. Therefore it was seen by the male dominated medical establishment as a labour saving device avoiding the need to manually bring female patients to orgasm. Additionally, this treatment was not seen as sexual due to medical androcentric bias which saw female sexual pleasure as derived only from penile vaginal penetration.

Lieberman and Schatzbarg (2018) contest Maine’s theory. After careful assessment of the sources cited in her book they found no evidence to support the practice of physicians using vibrators to treat hysteria ever occurring. Lieberman (2016) further critiques Maine’s theory, pointing out that by the 1930s a leading gynaecologist noted patients use of vibrators during masturbation, the practice of which was not unusual enough to warrant comment. She states that “no such evidence exists for doctor-assisted masturbation by vibrator. Unlike Maines’ argument, a marketing-driven account of the vibrator’s sexualization requires no willing suspension of disbelief” (p. 397).

Using advertising and marketing materials Lieberman establishes a sex toy history grounded in content analysis. Lieberman argues that vibrators had dual-use capabilities: in addition to sexual uses they also had non-sexual uses such as massage and treatment of ailments like backache and constipation. As such during the early 1900s manufacturers and retailers bypassed advertising obscenity laws (the Comstock Act 1873) and sociocultural sanctioning by advertising the overt medical use of the product while “sexual messages were encoded in ads, and consumers were expected to decode them” (p. 397). Additionally, user manuals were included with products which informed consumers of their sexual usage and almost all companies made phallic attachments. In sum, Lieberman shows that vibrators have been widely commercially available since the early 20th century but were sold under the guise of their non-sexual usages. As such, there was widespread evidenced use of vibrators, by both men and women, in masturbatory practices.

Second Wave Feminism

After the early 20th century, there is a scarcity of literature on the history of sex toys. Lieberman (2017) attempts to address this gap by analysing the impact of second-wave feminism on attitudes towards dildos and vibrators. Lieberman examines customer correspondence to Eve's Garden, a feminist sex-toy mail order company founded by Dell Williams in 1974, to understand how women during the second-wave feminist movement dealt with changing sexual norms. Initially, Eve's Garden only sold three products: the Hitachi Magic Wand, the Prelude 3, and Betty Dodson's book, *Liberating Masturbation*. In 1979, the company expanded its stock to include more vibrators and feminist literature on sexuality.

Lieberman argues that despite the sexual revolution's normalisation of premarital and oral sex, female masturbation remained taboo. As it gained acceptance among some feminists, it challenged deeply ingrained gender and sexuality norms centred on heteronormativity and male-centric sexual activity. For instance, women may experience better orgasms through masturbation than with male partners, enhancing their agency and potentially leading to dissatisfaction with current relationships, resulting in ending or starting new ones. Indeed, Betty Dodson's pro-masturbation philosophy maintained that (p. 102 – 103):

[W]omen who couldn't bring themselves to orgasm would always be dependent on a partner. If a woman did not know how to bring herself pleasure, she could not take control of her own sexuality. Women would be unable to have successful sexual relationships if they could not give themselves orgasms because they would not be able to instruct their partners about their sexual preferences.

Betty Dodson's philosophy and bodysex workshops, which involved the use of vibrators, inspired women to purchase their own sex toys. However, purchasing sex toys in the late 1960s America was a challenging task as these were only available in adult bookstores located in dangerous areas and offered limited options. To address this issue, Nancy Williams started Eve's Garden mail order business and provided an alternative model informed by second-wave feminism. She aimed to encourage emotional and sexual liberation by changing the meanings attached to sex toys and reducing the stigma associated with female masturbation. Williams helped to transform the perception of sex toys as devices of feminist empowerment, rather than unseemly devices or marital aids. As an example of Williams' feminist justifications, Lieberman (p. 105) quotes Williams' from a 1975 catalogue where she contrasts unreliable men with the reliable, uncomplicated vibrator:

The vibrator is the best thing to come along since the wheel,' said a woman sex counselor (sic) psychologist...and, by Goddess, she may be right! It never has a cold, snores, talks back, sulks, rejects, is too tired or out of town! It's always there when you need to massage away an ache, turn yourself on, or come.

Here, Williams demonstrates how the vibrator can be a tool that enables woman to stop relying on men for sexual pleasure. At the time this was generally a radical idea, but in line with feminist ideals. Lieberman also describes the early ads as revolutionary because "Williams rebranded vibrators as tools of the women's movement ... [b]y modifying *vibrators* with the adjective *liberating*" (emphasis in original, p. 105).

Overall, Lieberman demonstrates how during the 1970s and 1980s feminist philosophies and sex toys had a profound, positive influence on many women's lives. This authors research (p. 97) illuminates that "[c]ustomer correspondence tells a story that has been rarely discussed: the transformative effect that masturbation and sex toys had on the lives of ordinary women" and demonstrates the emergence of sex positive feminism, radical liberation of women's masturbatory practices, and widespread dissemination of vibrators and dildos via mail order.

Waves of Sex Toy Development

Wilner and Huff's (2017) research provides context for upcoming discussion on the development of sex toy promotion and the socio-sexual norms drawn on for marketing purposes. Wilner and Huff outline three waves of sex toys from 1989 to 2014 which are differentiated by design, framing by advertisers, and media representation. The first wave, from 1989 to 1997, was an era when sex toys were

taboo and availability was restricted to mail order catalogues and 'sleezy', dark retail stores located in red-light districts. In this period sex toys "exhibit two sharply divergent forms" (p. 252): flesh coloured overt phallic designs or disguised as personal massagers. The authors argue that the former reflected embedded sexually androcentric ideals whereby female sexual pleasure is equated with penile penetration (actual or simulated). Where female pleasure is equated with actual penile penetration it is also expected that this should lead to male orgasm and ejaculation. In the subsequent period, from 1998 to 2007, European and US based designers attempted to disrupt the established paradigm of shame and secrecy by producing vibrators that, while still phallic, included an external clitoral vibrator in playful colours. Because these vibrators provided dual stimulation (technological enhancement of the ideal enduring, erect penis) they were viewed as "noteworthy for ... acknowledgement of female body form" (p. 255). 2008 to 2014 marks the third period in which aesthetics and function were foregrounded. Vibrator designs of this period moved away from "cheap materials, kitschy colours and infantilising forms" (p. 258), instead favouring minimalist aesthetics in line with other consumer electronic devices (like Apple products). Also favoured was the use of safe and soft water-proof, medical grade silicone. Functionally, ergonomics were emphasised. As a result a "multitude of non-phallic forms" of sex toys entered the market (Orrell & Scuderi, 2016, as cited in Wilner and Huff, p. 258). Wilner and Huff provide a selection of images that demonstrate the proliferation of non-phallic sex toys, choice of new materials, and sleek/minimalistic design and aesthetics.



JimmyJane Form 2 ®



LELO Tiani 24k ®



JimmyJane Form 3 ®



Crave Vesper ®



JimmyJane Form 4 ®



Crave Duet ®



Figure 1. Variety of contemporary sex toys (Source: Wilner & Huff, 2017, p. 259)

Figure 4. Period 3 (2008–2014) product design. Sources: JimmyJane images: JimmyJane; Crave images: Crave; LELO images: LELO.

As this image also conveys, another notable features of third wave sex toys was “the emergence of enough product differentiation and brand recognition to provide the grounds for positioning” and that ‘the most recent period is marked by the introduction of ‘luxury’ devices” (p. 260).

The promotion and marketing of sex toys are influenced by cultural discussions about female sexuality, just like their design and function. Although there are feminist sex toy retailers like Eve’s Garden, they are not widespread. Historically, sex toy shops were considered seedy and targeted male consumers. For instance, product packaging often featured sexualized images of women, reinforcing the idea that women existed for men's pleasure (Crewe & Martin, 2017). Hyper-realistic dildos and vibrators were marketed as marital aids for men to use on women, and as tools for male satisfaction – particularly in terms of ‘readying’ (physically and in respect of cultivating desire) female partners for actual male penile penetration. This effectively prioritised the centrality of penetration and subordinated the needs and desires of women (Tiefer, 1994).

Contemporary Marketing

However, from the early twenty first century women were addressed as consumers of sex products in their own right, rather than figured as objects of sexual talk and male sexuality, which fundamentally altered the marketing landscape (Smith, 2007). As the 2000s progressed discussion turned to female sexual agency and women were encouraged to “reject [sexual] passive receptivity and shame for more ‘active’ and pleasure-seeking sex” (p. 171) and to explore their sexual interests “separately from earlier models of heterosexual monogamy” (p. 172).

Evans et al. (2010) argue that encouragement of the right to pleasure, agency, and assertive sexuality is rooted in post-feminist values. This seems to “fulfil much of the ambition of second-wave feminism for a celebration of active female sexuality” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 212). However, these authors argue that post-feminism denotes a departure from the tenets of second-wave feminism, which primarily focused on issues of gender inequality, institutionalised sexism, and collective action for social change. Post-feminism diverges by adopting a more individualistic stance, emphasising personal empowerment, agency, and the celebration of diverse expressions of femininity. This paradigm often contends that the goals of feminism—such as gender equality—have largely been achieved, thus advocating for a shift towards individual choice, autonomy, and a rejection of victimhood narratives. A key element of post-feminism is the commodification of feminist ideals, wherein empowerment becomes conflated with market-driven narratives, leading to the commercialisation of feminist values in media, advertising, and popular culture. As such, Evans et al., (p. 212) argue that post-feminist sentiment (as expressed in marketing) incorporates:

[N]eoliberal constructions of subjectivity and the centrality of consumerism within its sense making. Postfeminism can be understood as a sentiment that associates femininity with bodily property, incorporating a shift from sexual objectification to sexual subjectification that is characterized by issues of self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline ... within this cultural context, the consumer oriented pursuit of pleasure has become paramount to the contemporary woman.

As such, Smith (2007, p. 177) explains that sex toy shopping is now framed as something sophisticated and adventurous which strategically positions customers as having a ‘new attitude to sex’. Smith’s article was written when brick-and-mortar retail was the dominant mode of consumption. However, as of 2021 online sales

accounted for nearly two third of sex devices sold globally (Beyrouthy, 2023).

Attwood (2005) explores online sex toy retailing which I expand on this later in this Chapter.

While some argue that the emphasis on women's sexual pleasure and agency is the defining feature of feminist politics in late modernity, it is crucial to consider the context in which this emphasis arises. Although the encouragement of female sexual desire and practices appears to be progressive, it remains rooted in heteronormative and androcentric frameworks. This expansion of sexual discourse does not challenge the traditional male-centric view of sexual pleasure and satisfaction but instead offers a limited form of female sexual agency, such as mutual orgasms and masturbation, within the confines of heteronormativity. In this way, heteronormative and androcentric ideals, such as male orgasm/ejaculation as the primary goal and evaluative modality of hetosex, are not rejected but rather the normative scope has expanded whereby other forms of sexuality are equally valued and the focus is on individual choice and desire.

Recently the most influential, well-cited research on how sex toys are contemporaneously promoted, and therefore which kinds of sociosexual norms they generate, reproduce and/or are influenced by, fall under the umbrella of post-feminist analysis. For example, Smith (2007) and Attwood (2005), writing about sex toy promotion in the United Kingdom and online, argue that marketing of contemporary sex toys use discourses of style, luxury, and fashion in order to appeal to the 'new' female consumer; "stylish, sophisticated and adventurous" (Smith, 2007, p. 177). This links to post-feminist individualism in that sex toys are constructed as educative tools crucial to the project of "reflexive selfhood" (Giddens, 1991, as cited in Smith, 2007, p. 175) with accordant personal (yet still socially mediated) sexual desires and pleasures. Importantly, the distinction between high and low end retailers allows consumers to differentiate themselves based on taste, reinforcing

notions of class-based sexualities. This is further proposed by Crewe and Martin (2017) who argue that up-scale sexual consumption continues to be a matter of taste, distinction, formation of sexual self, and a post-feminist “blurring [of] sexual objectivity and subjectivity” (p. 594). Attwood also critiques this ‘de-sexualising of sex’ in order to address female consumers and argues that such developments indicate that “we [women] still can’t participate for the same reason men do – just because we like it [sex]” (Moore, 2003, as cited in Attwood, 2005, p. 404).

The post-feminist context also generates the potential for contesting and/or expanding norms. Literature on in-home sex toy parties and their relationship to sociocultural and sexual discourse/norms is scarce, yet there exist several prominent articles that have analysed sex toy parties as a platform for adult female sexual education (Herbenick et al., 2009; Herbenick & Reece, 2009; Herbenick et al., 2013; Jozkowski et al., 2012). By comparison McCaughey and French (2001) and Curtis (2004) have specifically studied the promotion of sex toys at in-home parties and its relation to sexual norms. Both articles provide ethnographic accounts of sex toy party attendance; McCaughey and French attend five parties between them and one together, and Curtis documents attendance of two. McCaughey and French sought to discover whether promotion of sex toys in this context can “disrupt or reinforce normative discourses of the gendered body [and] whether the context of consumer capitalism fuels or thwarts the potential of feminist critique of male-centered (sic) sexuality (which is one reason women need vibrators in the first place)” (p. 91). Ultimately, these authors argue that the ‘self-help’ narratives offered at the sex toy parties they observed only serve as a ‘band-aid’ for male centred sexuality/androcentrism. Discourses communicated to women that, essentially, men will not change and that liberation consists in the use of self-satisfying technology and simply expecting less of men.

Curtis (2004) also examines the relationship between capitalism and the construction of sexual subjectivities. More specifically the article considers “the relationship among commodities, consuming desires, and sexual practices” (p. 95), and whether the plurality of the market results in multiple sexualities. The author puts the research question into sharper focus when stating “how do commodities produce desires that shape and/or change the available scripts for sexual practice?” (p. 100). Sexual script theory is used in the production and answer of this question whereby consumption habits are analysed to assess whether dominant sexual scripts are reproduced and/or contested.

After analysis of interview data obtained from party participants Curtis comes to the conclusion that participants sexual practices have changed, from moderately to radically, via “a forum that was palatable to their “moral” sensibilities” (p. 109). Palatability was generated by “informative” and “tasteful” demonstrations performed by distributors who appeared “wholesome” and “trustworthy”. The author contends that her participants came to identify with the distributors (regardless of ethnicity, class, or age) and this is what facilitated consumption: “the guests purchased goods they had previously regarded as taboo [and] the demonstration shows generated novel sexual scripts promoting diverse sexual activities”. (p. 109). Curtis claims that “the scripts generated by the commodities become resources for self-imagining and self-production” (p. 109), in line with post-feminist values and the project of self. It is important to note that “another issue for a number of [Curtis’] informants [was] the accessibility of sex toys, which is not unrelated to access and exposure to sexual knowledge” (p. 110). At the time of writing, sex toys were still primarily only available at adult book stores. As one of her informants claimed, “I would never go into a porn store or a XXX video place ... Those places are sleazy with sleazy men inside” (p. 110). Access to sex products and sexual information has hugely changed since 2004 meaning that sex

toy parties since around the mid-2000s would likely generate far fewer novel sexual scripts and radically altered sexual practices.

The most recent scholarship about sex toys investigates how contemporary/newer forms relate to androcentrism. Hua et al., (2022) survey 126 contemporary vibrators for women, concluding that the majority are insertable and phallic shaped. The authors state that “using phallus symbolism in vibrators stresses the androcentric myth of male’s essential role in women’s sexual pleasure” (p. 410) and that while “the proliferation of new forms in the last twenty years is promising in this regard, our analysis has nonetheless shown that penis replacement remains a primary design concept” (p. 411). Similarly, teledildonics – which allows individuals to engage in sexual activity remotely through digital technology – reinforces the ‘coital imperative’ whereby sex is equated to vaginal-penile penetration (Faustino, 2017). In de Kloe’s (2022) exploration of the Lioness vibrator (a ‘smart vibrator’) they conclude that the vibrator centres penetration and in the process of ‘improving your orgasm’ transforms sexual pleasure into a phallogocentric, achievement-driven experience.

Aotearoa New Zealand

There is very little research about sex toys in the New Zealand context, and none about sex toy parties. Two articles discuss sex toy purchasing behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic, stating that sex toy sales tripled in New Zealand as a response to social isolation (Arafat & Kar, 2021; Qalati et al., 2022). Several popular media outlets reported on sex toy trends and purchasing patterns by region. For example, Stuff (2021a) reported the top ten toys purchased in New Zealand during 2021 and the top ten purchasing regions, of which Palmerston North ranked sixth. The popularity of sex toys in Palmerston North is reiterated in another article by

Waiwiri-Smith (2022) that cites data from the popular New Zealand sex toy e-commerce website Adulttoymegastore (ATMS). Palmerston North was the region that bought the most sex toys per capita in 2022⁶. In 2021, Palmerston North placed sixth and thus jumped up five places in one year. The article also features a representative of 'Barbarellas' adult store which has been operating as a retail outlet in Palmerston North for over 28 years (Barbarellas, ND). Chantelle is quoted as saying (para. 7 – 8):

“We get a mixture of everyone, from just turned 18-year-olds coming in to be nosy to a few 80-year-olds ... it's not what you normally think of, like a dirty old man or anything like that they're just normal mums and dads” [and that] in her 25 years working in an adult store, Chantelle says one of her many standout experiences is serving the same elderly couple every Christmas. “They come in, and they're just so cute and so in love – they hold hands and buy each other presents every single Christmas”.

Waiwiri-Smith also quotes Violet from adult entertainment talent agency Thumper who claims to be glad about Palmerston North residents' heightened curiosity for sex toys. They state that “in general, it's known that a lot of women don't receive as much enjoyment from sex as much as men ... it should be something we're openly talking about ... women should know that if they're unsatisfied, they can masturbate too” (para. 9). Violet also states that “some have vaginal orgasms and some clitoral, so it's all about figuring out what feels better for yourself before buying”. However, the idea that vaginal and clitoral orgasms are distinctly different phenomena has been disproven and it is (increasingly) commonly known that the internal portion of the clitoris wraps around the vaginal canal and all genital

⁶ Wellington was second, and Whangārei third.

orgasms are clitoral orgasms (Pauls, 2015). This includes female orgasms that involve no physical stimulation of genitalia or no physical stimulation at all.

Wellington and sex toys have also been discussed in the media. Stuff (2021b) reported ATMS's establishment of a sex toy recycling scheme whereby the product is stripped and reusable materials are collected. 'Girls Get Off', the Mount Maunganui-based company, has also received notable media attention. Quill (2022) reported on the company's marketing strategy for the launch of their first product. A mass email sent nation-wide invited women to purchase a "mystery product" and over 1000 women committed to the \$169 purchase. This product was a dual-action vibrator. The company founders claimed there was a gap in the market for "sex toys that are beautifully presented, and something you want to shout about not just in the bedroom but to all your friends, just like you would about a new shoe haul or something" (para. 11) and that the company philosophy "is about sexual empowerment and normalising female pleasure ... it's something me and my girlfriends talk about – we compare notes on purchases" (para. 14). This company was also featured in another prominent New Zealand media outlet, thespinoff.co.nz, and the American based platform refinery29.com.

While the topic of sex toys in the New Zealand context has featured many times in the media/news articles, very little academic research exists. In the remainder of this literature review I will discuss every article I could find that mentions sex toy use in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Ellis and Atiken (2020) consider the sexual behaviours and sexual health practices of young people aged 16 to 19 years old living in Aotearoa New Zealand. The authors contend that this cohort are at considerable risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections and sought to address the lack of local research regarding sexual behaviours and health practices among New Zealand teenagers. Among the 52 people between the ages of 16 to 19 surveyed, 71.2% were sexually active. The most common reported sexual practice is

penile-vaginal penetration (86.5%) followed by fellatio (81.1%). This is followed by “sex using sex toys, objects or fingers” at 64.9% (p. 66)⁷. The use of sex toys is expanded on briefly in regards to sexual health practices. The authors state that despite “[a]pproximately two-thirds of respondents (64.9%) reported using sex toys” only 56% reported washing them before and after use and never sharing them which “suggests that a sizable minority were not engaging in this most basic sexual health practice” (p. 67).

A 2022 landmark research into female sexuality and masturbatory practices was conducted by Csako et al. whereby they “examined frequencies of, reasons for, and activities during masturbation as well as the relationship between masturbation and other factors” which is the “first of its kind within the Aotearoa/New Zealand context” (p. 522). From investigations into the masturbatory sexual practices of 698 New Zealand women at least 18 years of age via online surveys Csako et al. (2022) found that clitoral stimulation was the most commonly used practice (76%). Additionally, 35.4% of women reported penetrative vaginal stimulation and 33% reported using penetrative dildos or vibrators. The authors argue that this “is consistent with research indicating that many women do not rely on or even include vaginal penetration when they are masturbating ... providing another piece of evidence against the traditional phallogocentric view of female sexuality” (Fahs & Frank, 2014; Herbenick et al., 2018; Rowland, Hevesi, et al., 2020; as cited in Csako et al., 2022, p. 532). Finally, women who masturbate frequently report different sexual practices than those who masturbate less frequently or never. The authors state that “New Zealand women who engage in masturbation frequently are more likely to incorporate clitoral, vaginal, breast and anal stimulation into their masturbatory behaviors (sic), compared to those who masturbate less frequently or almost never”.

⁷ Followed by anal sex (35.1%) and oral sex with a person with a vulva (29.7%).

This indicates that those who masturbate frequently are more likely to incorporate a diverse range of masturbatory practices.

Two recent publications also discuss sex toys in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Arafat and Kar (2021) explore the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the panic buying of sex toys. As with panic buying of other consumer goods like hand sanitiser, gloves, fuel, and toilet tissue the authors found that sex toy sales tripled “in New Zealand after the declaration of a month-long lockdown” (p. 175). Arafat and Kar attribute this sex toy sales boom to factors like peoples inability to meet their sexual partners or being away from home, the compromise of recreational facilities, and anticipating a price increase or supply shortages. Similarly, Qalatai et al. (2022) investigated the impact of COVID-19 on sexual practices and sex toy consumption. These authors reviewed literature relating to the themes of COVID-19, sex toys, “sexual life, sex, sexuality, sexual health, sexual behaviour [and] factors (i.e. affecting, influencing, motivating) the use of sex toys during COVID-19” (p. 469). They identified that, among other countries, the rate of sex-related product consumption increased in Aotearoa New Zealand. Qalatai et al. cite similar reasons for increased sex toy consumption as Arafat and Kar (2021), such as inability to meet partners and social distancing measures.

Lastly, Pérez-y-Pérez (2003, 2015) examines sex toy use in Aotearoa New Zealand in the context of sex work. Concentrating on the region of Christchurch in their 2003 PhD thesis Pérez-y-Pérez sought to examine how “the competing but overlapping markets of massage parlours, escort work and telephone sex are assembled and reassembled throughout patterns of conflict and cooperation between diverse actors and groups of actors” (p. III). As part of their research this author engaged in ethnographic participant observation (receptionist work in two Christchurch ‘massage parlours’) and conducted interviews with sex workers. It was during these interviews that the topic of sex toys was brought up by interviewees.

Opinions of their use during sex work varied: some saw them as part of a sex workers basic kit and some managers consider them essential, others refused to use them or considered their use indication of a 'sleezy' establishment, and some workers found them useful in expediting their customers climax or to minimise the length of penetrative sex. Pérez-y-Pérez (2015) used actor network theory to examine "things" such as sex toys in the sex work context whereby they argued that the sex worker is "an assemblage of a body + skills + condoms + sex toys + clothing etc. Through viewing sex work as a network of continuously shifting assemblages, the unstable nature of sex work can be revealed" (p. 115). This is, however, the only instance that sex toys are referenced directly. It is clear that my research is well situated to fill the gap in scholarly literature about sex toy use in Aotearoa New Zealand. There exists a dearth of literature of qualitative research into the discursive social construction of the meanings of and reasons behind women's sex toy use. My research also provides much needed comparison with overseas (mainly USA/UK based) research.

Conclusion

In summary, this review provides an overview of both theoretical and topic literature. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) posits that reality is constructed through discourse, emphasising the influence of linguistic devices in shaping our understanding (and experience) of reality. Similarly, Sexual Script Theory (SST) views sexual practices as guided by dominant socio-sexual discourses. By combining these approaches, I can identify and expand on sexual scripts in my data by connecting them to underlying discourses, providing a robust interpretive lens for addressing my research question. It also allows for a nuanced understanding of the ways in which sex toys are promoted and enacted (individually and socially) and how these promotions reflect post-feminist values (regarding self-pleasure via

hetero/homo/masturbatory sexual practices), heteronormativity, and androcentric/phallic norms. It also provides an exploration of historically contingent sexual discourses and scripts that dynamically (re)produce and/or contest cultural and socially contextual sexual norms, ideals and practices. In turn, these feedback into generating sexual discourses and are, in part, articulated through and/or generated by the marketing and promotion of sex toys. The review highlights the potential of sex toy parties as sites for reproducing, contesting, and expanding traditional gendered scripts and fostering sexual self-fashioning while also acknowledging the possibility of reinforcing androcentric/phallic discourses. Additionally, the limited research on sex toy parties in the New Zealand context points to a gap in knowledge that my research, and future studies, could address.

I placed the literature review before the following chapter, “Methodology”, as the premises of CDA and SST inherently inform my methodological approach. The ontological and epistemological assumptions of these approaches underscore the socially constructed nature of lived reality and knowledge, emphasising the importance of understanding discourse, power dynamics, and social practices within specific contexts. Given this, qualitative research methods such as ethnography, content analysis, and in-depth semi-structured interviews are well-suited for exploring the complexities of language, discourse, and resulting practical embodiment of dominant ideals and values.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The methodology chapter of my thesis presents an in-depth examination of the philosophy, approach, and methods deployed in my research on the promotion of sex toys and other related products and their relationships to various sexual discourses. The ontological and epistemological foundations of my research are rooted in social constructionism and interpretivism. This chapter outlines the specific research strategies employed, including participant observation, in-depth interviews, content and discourse analysis, and provides a detailed account of the data generation process, encompassing ethical considerations and challenges encountered during data generation and analysis. By adopting a coherent and consistent methodology, I am able to generate meaningful insights into the complex relationship between the rhetoric of contemporary sex toy promotions and the kinds of wider social/cultural/sexual norms, embedded in established discourses, these both draw on and inform. Most notably, qualitative research attempts to make sense of the meaning or meanings underlying a particular phenomenon. The essentialised 'nature of sex' (both in form and idealised) underpins all sex toys and products which often emulate, enhance and/or embellish (either latently or explicitly) what are assumed to be natural aspects of sex i.e. penile-vaginal penetration, orgasm, etc. This ultimately results in the belief and practice of 'nature given' right to multiple orgasms.

Research Philosophy and Approach

The theoretical literature review section (see Chapter 2) outlines the ontological and epistemological approach to my thesis at length. This is because in

critical discourse analysis “theory and method are intertwined and researchers must accept the basic philosophical premises in order to use discourse analysis as their method of empirical study” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 4). Similarly, the methods of Sexual Script Theory (SST) research presuppose certain ontological and epistemological entanglements and understandings. This will be briefly restated to illustrate the coherence between methodological paradigm and research design, data generation, and data analysis.

This section provides a brief overview of the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of my overall methodology. Both Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and SST are rooted in social constructionist ontology (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Gagnon & Simon, 2017) which assumes that reality is not fixed or objective but is constructed through social processes and interactions. CDA, specifically, views language (via the expression of specific meaning and values) as a crucial element in constructing and shaping our understanding of the world, and it plays a central role in producing and reproducing power relations and ideologies that contribute to social inequalities (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). SST is a way of viewing the manifestations of discourse (language use) as socio-cultural guidelines for sexual behaviour (Beres, 2014). This ontological perspective allows me to examine how the expression of sexual scripts and discourses are shaped by cultural and social contexts, and how the marketing of sex toys can both reflect and influence these wider socio-cultural scripts and discourses. Epistemologically, both CDA and SST are consistent with a constructivist ontology and thus necessarily adhere to an interpretivism/constructivism epistemology. This emphasises that knowledge is (inter)subjective, context-dependent, and co-constructed with interlocutors, thesis supervisors, academic colleagues, associated research/researchers, and others through varied social interactions. Such a perspective attunes me to both how other individuals interpret sexual scripts and discourses in relation to the marketing of sex toys, as well my own dialogically generated interpretations.

These ontological and epistemological assumptions then inform my overall qualitative research approach. Qualitative research “is primarily naturalistic, interpretive, and inductive” and “qualitative researchers attempt to interpret or make sense of the meaning ... underlying a particular phenomenon” (Mayan, 2009, p. 11). A qualitative, rather than a quantitative, approach is better suited to my thesis for several reasons. Firstly, as my research question seeks to understand the relationship between sex toy promotion and reproduction or contestation of associated sexual discourses, a qualitative approach allows me to explore this issue in depth: capturing the nuances and intricacies (especially context-based and evolutions) of language, power dynamics, and social interactions that are both subjectively and intersubjectively (or socially) rendered and which cannot be easily quantified. Secondly, this approach allows me to explore interlocutor’s experiences, perceptions, and interpretations, providing insights into the diverse and multifaceted ways in which marketing strategies may reinforce and/or contest sexually androcentric discourses especially. And lastly, a qualitative approach emphasises the importance of context in understanding social phenomena. Both sex toy marketing and sexual discourses are generated and reproduced in the intersecting dynamics of particular social, cultural, economic and political contexts, and a qualitative approach allows me to explain discursive reproduction and contestation in relation to these and the different subjectivities and social relations that are likewise are both context generated and generative.

Method

In line with an overall qualitative approach, my research strategies are comprised of participant observation, in-depth interviews, and content analysis. Participant observation (participating in and observing social phenomena of

relevance) is an ethnographic research method commonly used when “we know little about a particular social context [and] where we need to achieve detailed, fine-grained understanding of it” (Greener, 2011, p. 3). In the context of my thesis the social context participated in and observed were two promotional sex toy parties. As Mayan (2009) explains “focus [is] on the language of the group and how it develops and [how it] gives clues to what is going on in the culture” (p. 37). Of course, ethnographic data includes more than just language use of the group. It also includes physical actions/interactions, silences, materialises, etc; all of which I observed, participated in and have analysed. However, marketing language, party consultants’ narratives, and participants’ conversations were the primary foci of my sex toy party participant observation and discourse analysis. Additionally, in-depth, semi structured interviews were conducted with several sex toy party participants – a method in line with a general qualitative research approach. The primary goal of in-depth interviews was to gather additional rich, detailed information about participants’ narratives of their experiences, feelings, beliefs, and opinions regarding their sex toy party and sex toy experiences. Interview data was analysed in the same way I analysed party transcriptions and is discussed later in the chapter. I also undertook content analysis of the promotional catalogue distributed at the parties, which I kept, and of the company’s website. In combination these research strategies helped me address my research question by generating data about what was said at the parties, how the products are marketed, and how my participants interpreted both the parties and the products. Lastly, I made an application to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) for ethics approval prior to any data generation. To do so I submitted a thesis proposal to MUHEC that outlined the process of obtaining informed consent from participants, addressed how participant confidentiality would be maintained, and how data would be anonymised. It also outlined the methods for data collection and explained how they aligned with ethical principles.

Data generation

Participant Observation: The Parties

This section provides a detailed account of my data generation process, including the procedures for participant observation, conducting interviews, and gathering materials for content analysis. It will also discuss any epistemological considerations related to my data generation, such as respectively my prior experience of sex toy parties and sex toys, and will also address ethical considerations such as issues of informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity.

During the participant observation (PO) data generation process, I hosted a Pure Romance sex toy party in my home. Additionally, I attended a second Pure Romance sex toy party organised and hosted by a friend. Prior to attending both events I obtained informed consent from the host and the company representative, ensuring that they were aware of my research intentions and that their anonymity and would be protected. At each party, I adopted the role of a participant observer, engaging in the activities and discussions while also observing and taking detailed field notes on the interactions, presentations, and dynamics among attendees. I took quick key word notes during the party, and more detailed notes upon conclusion. There are several important personal factors that inevitably impacted/influenced the way I practiced the PO method. Firstly, I am a reasonably experienced sex toy party attendee having attended eight sex toy parties since the age of 21, research parties inclusive. As such, I am aware that this habitus can render the 'unfamiliar' familiar and/or unconsciously reproduced, and that I will have both conscious and unconscious existing thoughts and feelings about the phenomena. Consequently, one of the ideal aspects of PO (especially as practiced by anthropologists), immersion into the unfamiliar, was nullified. However, in depth discussions and

transcript analysis with supervisors and others not as familiar assisted me in remaining sensitive to the nuance and constructed character of sex toy parties, sex toy promotions, and interlocutor narratives (both ethnographic and interview based). The immersion aspect of PO was further nullified by the 'thin' nature of my PO as it was event-based, over a short period of time, and involved many fleeting and transitory social relationships – mostly in regard to publicly recruited interlocutors. This was countered, in part, by my own 'thick' ethnographic experiences and knowing several interlocutors intimately. This facilitated ongoing informal discussions and the ability to meaningfully interpret utterances, body language, silences, and other conversational cues during both the sex toy parties and interviews.

Furthermore, I focused on aspects such as the promotional strategies deployed by the company representative, the reactions and responses of party participants, and the language and discourse surrounding the sex toys and products being showcased. I choose to audio-record the presentations with the permission of the presenter and participants, which allowed me to accurately capture and transcribe the content and tone of the discussions for transcription and further analysis. By enthusiastically participating in the party environment and carefully documenting the proceedings, I was able to gather rich, context-specific data about the promotion of sex toys and the ways in which they draw on various established sexual discourses. The data generated from the party I hosted and the party I attended constitutes the primary (participant-observation?) data set,. My secondary data set is comprised of the (image and text based) catalogue distributed at the party combined with promotional rhetoric and product descriptions/images from the Pure Romance website. Data generated from interviews with party attendees serves as supplementary data.

I recruited participants for the party I hosted from my personal, friendship networks. My relationship to these participants included: friends of friends, friends co-workers, and family friends. I also designed a promotional poster to publicise the research, highlighting the general aim of the study and the associated activities involved. The poster featured contact information and encouraged women of all ages who were interested to reach out to me for more details. These were distributed around the Manawatu Massey University campus. Seven women had contacted me after three weeks of distributing the poster, and four decided to attend. Everyone invited to attend was supplied with an information sheet and signed research consent forms prior to committal. The information contained in these consent forms meant that each participant specifically consented to audio recording of the party, photographs being taken during the party (with the guarantee that no photo of any participant will be used without their explicit permission), participation in the study under the conditions set out in the information sheet, and an option to receive a summary of the research results and analysis.

Strengths and Limitations of the Participant Observation Method

Firstly, participant observation allows for an in-depth understanding of the social context of female-only sex toy parties. The immersive nature of the method provides nuanced insights into the dynamics and interactions that might be difficult to capture through other research approaches such as surveys. This includes the capture of non-verbal cues (body language, facial expressions, and other non-verbal cues captured through note taking) which can be important in understanding unspoken aspects of the event. Furthermore, by recording and transcribing the parties I generated fairly naturalistic data that preserves the authentic language and expressions used during the events. This method also allowed for the exploration of the facilitator's role in shaping the atmosphere and discussions. It shed light on how

the facilitator influenced the dynamics, which created a space for more comprehensive analysis. The influence of a women-only space is both a strength and limitation. While this exclusive space encourages openness, it may also introduce biases or inhibit certain discussions. Participants may have (consciously or unconsciously) tailored their behaviours due to the perceived expectations within this setting. A further limitation was the presence of alcohol (both provided and brought along). This may have led to altered or uninhibited expressions, and therefore the challenge of interpreting their validity. I was unable to audio record or be present for any conversations that occurred between the party facilitators and participants in the private ordering room. As such, this limited any data generation regarding in-depth and personal discussions that may have not occurred in the party environment.

Gathering Materials

For the content analysis portion of my data generation process, I gathered materials from two primary sources: the catalogues distributed at the sex toy parties (which were identical) and the company's website. This was adequate material for my analysis. I systematically analysed the catalogues, focusing on the product descriptions, images, pricing, promotional language and the underlying (latent and explicit) values informing the narratives used to market the sex toys and other products. For example, explicit values include androcentrism, heteronormativity, and self-pleasure while latent values include good and orgasmic sex as a natural right and non-heterosexual sex. Additionally, I explored the Pure Romance website to supplement the data harvested from the catalogues. I carefully navigated the site paying particular attention to product pages, promotional banners, the kind of language/rhetorical devices and imagery used. By gathering and examining both print and digital materials, I was able to conduct an in-depth content analysis to

investigate how the marketing of sex toys may reproduce, change and/or contest sexual discourses through the use of language, images, and representations employed in these promotional materials.

Interviews

For the in-depth interviews, I utilised the contacts I had established during the sex toy party I hosted as part of my participant observation. After obtaining informed consent from the party attendees, I selected five participants who demonstrated a range of perspectives and experiences. For example, the age range of interviewees is 19 – 55. This group includes a married woman, single women, and women who had previously had several long-term relationships. It also includes both heterosexual and bisexual orientations. Regarding education, the group of interviewees includes two women with post-graduate degrees, a woman with a design-based undergraduate degree, a woman beginning an undergraduate degree, and one with a certificate from a polytechnic.

Prior to each interview, I provided the participants with an overview of the research objectives, their rights as participants, and the confidentiality measures I would implement. Separate consent forms were signed for party attendees and interviewees, and I tailored the information within the consent forms to each of these research situations. For example, both the consent forms contained permission to be audio recorded but the party form discussed photographs while the interview form included the option of transcript revision. I conducted semi-structured interviews, using a pre-prepared interview guide with open-ended questions (see appendix X) designed to encourage participants to share their thoughts, opinions, and experiences regarding the sex toy party and the products being marketed. I also allowed for flexibility during the interviews, enabling me to adapt my questions and

follow up on interesting or unexpected responses. Each interview was audio-recorded, with the permission of the participant. I subsequently transcribed each interview verbatim to ensure the accuracy of the data. I kept all audio recordings until I had finished writing the thesis, in case any aspect of a transcript required double checking. Upon completion they were deleted from my laptop where they were stored. I anonymised each transcription through the use of pseudonyms and exclusion of any identifying data. This anonymity was continued throughout the entirety of the thesis. By engaging in thoughtful, in-depth conversations with the participants, I was able to gain valuable insights into their perspectives on, and interpretations of, sex product promotion in this context and how this relates to wider socio-sexual discourses.

Data Analysis

The data analysis techniques I employed are derived from CDA and SST. This ensures alignment with my research approach and theoretical frameworks. Applying SST to data analysis often involves examining various aspects of sexuality and gender dynamics through the lens of sexual scripts. Simon and Gagnon did not include specific techniques for application of SST to data analysis, stating “what we attempted was to provide a conceptual apparatus that might have utility in examining specific patterns of behavior (sic) observed in the context of pervasive social change and concurrent levels of individuation” (p. 496)”; although, in my case, it was primarily articulated narratives regarding interview data and this, plus observing individual-actions and social interactions, in respects of participant-observation in the ethnographic contexts of promotional sex toy parties. The way I employed SST in analysis involved line-by-line coding of transcribed sex toy party and interview data to identify specific sexual scripts (what normative practices were being encouraged/reproduced). Additionally, the catalogue and company website

were similarly examined to identify any additional, reinforcement, evolution and/or contestation, of sexual scripts already noted.

Fairclough's (2010) three-dimensional framework provides a method for data analysis within CDA. This framework comprises three interconnected dimensions for analysing discourse. First is textual analysis which focuses on the linguistic features of the text (transcribed, website and catalogue) itself. This includes vocabulary, grammar, metaphors, rhetorical devices, and linguistic structures. Textual analysis aims to uncover how meanings and values are constructed within the text and how linguistic choices contribute to shaping and expressing ideologies, power relations, and social representations. Beyond the text is discourse practice analysis. This dimension considers the production, distribution, and consumption of discourse in social contexts. It investigates the social practices and processes involved in the creation and dissemination of discourse. This includes looking at the intersecting roles and relationships of different social actors, institutions, power dynamics, and the ways in which discourse is influenced by social contexts. Lastly, Fairclough encourages socio-cultural analysis whereby the broader societal and cultural contexts within which discourses operate are explored. It delves into the historical, political, economic, and cultural factors that influence and are influenced by discourse. Sociocultural analysis aims to reveal how discourse reflects and reinforces social structures, ideologies, and power relations within society. However, as Fairclough (2013, p. 15) states:

I refer to a 'methodology' rather than a 'method'. Methodology is to be understood as a ... process of theoretically constructing the object of research ... particular methods are selected according to how the object of research is constructed. So it is not just a matter of 'applying methods' in the usual sense, and we cannot so sharply separate theory and method. This version of CDA is associated with a general method

The three-dimensional model is a methodology and, as such, extends beyond my technique of data analysis and is evident in all chapters. I principally used textual analysis on my primary and secondary data sets to uncover what meanings and values were constructed within the text and how various linguistic choices/features connected the language used to reinforce and/or contest particular sexual discourses. I used discourse practice analysis in examination of the social context of the promotional sex toy parties and how associated ethnographic social practices and processes were similarly involved in the creation and dissemination of these sexual discourses. This is evident in chapters 5 and 6 whereby I analyse the wider sexual discourses underlying product promotion (generated via textual analysis) and what roles different social actors, institutions, and power dynamics play in reproducing or contesting them. Sociocultural analysis is also evident in chapters 5 and 6 when I consider how the evident sexual scripts and discourses reflect and reinforce social structures, ideologies, and power relations within society with specific reference to androcentrism and heteronormativity. Taken together, this reflects how Fairclough's three dimension model is both a method of data analysis and an overarching methodology based in social construction and interpretivism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the methodology and methods employed in this study are grounded in social constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, aligning with the theoretical frameworks of critical discourse analysis and sexual script theory. Through a qualitative approach utilising participant observation, in-depth interviews, and content analysis, I generated rich and context-specific data and analysed it to explore what kinds of sexual discourses were informing the promotion of Pure Romance's lotions, potions, and sex toys. The overall methodology provided

valuable insights into the experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of my research interlocutors, as well as the promotional strategies employed during sex toy parties. The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between marketing, sexuality, and gender dynamics, shedding light on sex toy promotions role in shaping and reflecting broader socio-cultural discourses. In the following chapter, in which I provide an illustrative account of a sex toy party, I explain how I was first alerted to the dominance of heteronormative and androcentric scripts. However, I was also made aware of other scripts that also (but to a lesser extent) emphasised female masturbatory ideals – some of which simultaneously supported penetrative-centric scripts and others that contested this via a clitoral-centric approach to female sexual satisfaction.

Chapter 4: Ethnography

Introduction

In this chapter, I present a descriptive ethnographic account of a sex toy party that I organised, attended, observed, recorded, and transcribed. The party was undertaken to identify (alongside marketing materials) key themes, tropes, concerns, and practices of my interlocutors – both sex toy facilitators and participants – along with their vernacular language, foci, and values. This is then later expanded on when I analyse the presence and promotion of specifically identified sexual discourses.

Sex toy parties are deemed parties because of the social aspect. As White (2013) explains the sex toy party emulates almost all aspects of a regular party as they are social gatherings where individuals (in this context, only women) come together to eat, drink, talk, and have fun. However, the focus of a sex toy party is not only socialising but the exploration and potential purchase of a sex toy or sex product. Referring to these gatherings as “parties” may help to destigmatise discussions about sexuality and create a more comfortable environment for attendees to discuss sexual pleasure and intimacy. The notion of sex products as ‘toys’ ties into the recreational aspect of the sex toy party. As Attwood (2005) explains the terms attributed to sex aids reflects the meanings attached to sex and masturbation. She explains that “sex aids have more recently come to be understood in terms of recreation. They have become ‘toys’ just as sex has lost its significance as a form of reproduction or relationship and become a form of ‘play’ and ‘individual liberation through bodily pleasure’” (Juffer, 1998, as cited in Attwood, 2005, p. 396). The serving of alcohol, food, and the presence of games are also tied to the notions of

fun and play while also increasing the comfort of the women in attendance. Notably, however, 'play' is often serious and is used to socialise people. This is evident in childhood play and the learning of gendered social roles when playing 'house' or with a baby doll. In this context play is used to socialise attendees into idealised sexual discourses and practices. The women who participated as attendees varied in economic, cultural (especially education), and social (life/sexual experience) capitals and this is, in part, reflected in their responses during the party and later in interviews. As McCaughey and French (2001) illuminate, it is pertinent to note that certain primary aspects of the sex toy promotions are essentialised in this context, such as the notion of sex as inherently pleasurable, sought after, and constantly subject to continuous improvement. Also essentialised is the capacity of all women to experience orgasms and sexual pleasure.

Overall, the purpose of this chapter is to observe and outline how sex toys in my ethnographic study were promoted and marketed to consumers within this specific context. Through my ethnographic observations and descriptions, I put forth illustrative instances of identified sexual scripts which supports further analysis in proceeding chapters. Beginning with bath and shower products, as the presentation does, scripts concerning the importance of women heightening their desirability and sexual allure can be discerned. This is, in part, evoked via the thing-power of these products which are imbued with the potential to transform one's mood, sexual experiences, body physicality and/or attractiveness and sexual desirability. These kinds of sexual scripts draw on the wider traditional and patriarchal discourse which emphasises the male gaze and women's primary role as objects of sexual desire (Ponterotto, 2016). Similarly, body and beauty products are imbued with transformational capacities with regard to the overt signs of physical aging. As such, the scripts that women are expected to work on their physical appearance and that a youthful appearance is central to women's sexual attractiveness. These scripts draw on the beauty imperative discourse (Tseilon, 1993). It emphasises the importance of

adhering to female beauty norms in pursuit of hegemonic beauty ideals and promotes that an individual's worth, particularly for women, is closely tied to their physical/sexual attractiveness and adherence to beauty norms.

The sexual enhancement creams and sex toys differ in that they promote certain sexual practices and values rather than ideals/norms related to appearance. Sexual enhancement creams, in part, promote scripts that encourage playfulness, experimentation, and the centrality of female sexual pleasure. These aspects are rooted in sex positivity discourses and values (Anderson, 2013). However, they also prescribe men a dominant, active sexual subjectivity and women a passive, receptive sexual subjectivity by constructing female pleasure as passively given and contingent on the technical capacity and enduring erection of the man. This echoes wider androcentric social-sexual discourse that associates masculinity with control, power, and dominance.

Lastly, certain sex toys like male masturbation sleeves and cock rings (and to a lesser, but still significant extent, penetrative vibrators) presuppose heterosexuality and reproduce the penetrative imperative which positions vaginal-penile penetrative sex as the ultimate and most pleasurable sexual act for both men and women. Both of these scripts draw on heteronormative and androcentric discourses (Andrejek et al., 2022). However, sex toys like penetrative and dual-action vibrators simultaneously reproduce the penetrative imperative while also overtly emphasising the centrality and importance of female sexual pleasure and agency – in particular, masturbatory/self-pleasure – which is part of sex positive discourse (Fahs, 2014). They also latently promote (or at least not overtly reject) female homosexuality and potentially male homosexuality.

Overt contestation of these discourses within the sex party and promotional material is lacking as female sexual pleasure is typically promoted as innate outcome

of heterosexual penetrative sex that is ultimately enhanced by the use of penetrative sex toy technologies. As such andro/heterosexual discourses and practices effectively remain as dominant pathways to female (and male) sexual pleasure, while clitoral stimulation is framed as a pleasurable 'added on', whether this is partner or self-initiated. Women's orgasmic pleasure is also often compartmentalised as solo masturbatory pleasure, especially when a male partner is away. Overt contestation would involve the promotion of female solo masturbation/same sex relationships as the preferred or idealised alternative. This potential is somewhat acknowledged in the discourses, and realised in practice, by my interlocuters, but is only latently promoted – mostly through a lack of overt denial or rejection – in company promotions as outlined.

Additionally, I explore female participants responses to promotional sexual rhetoric and discourses, and what kind of questions are asked of the company representative Nic. Through this ethnographic account, I aim to contribute to the growing literature on the promotion and marketing of sex toys, and to provide insights into the ways in which normative sexual practices are reinforced and contested in this context.

Pre-party set up

As usual, I was running late. It was 6pm and I had told guests to arrive at 6.30pm in anticipation for a 7pm presentation start time. I still had to put together the food and make the sangria. Luckily, April, Amber, and Nicole (all in their mid-to-late thirties) arrived early so I, taking advantage of the fact that they are friends of mine, put them to work. It was quite a warm, sunny evening so I anticipated the table on our covered back deck would be a good place for people to gather, eat, drink, and talk while waiting for the presentation to commence.

Just as I began to set the outside table two more participants arrived – Deborah and Joyce – two women in their fifties that I recruited from my personal networks and know very well. I welcomed Deborah and Joyce in and provided them with wine glasses as they settled in around the table. I also brought out two information and consent forms and explained their purpose. This would be repeated for every guest that arrived. Next to walk down the driveway were Chloe and Georgia, two women in their late teens/early twenties I recruited through flyers posted around campus. As it was October and therefore exam season, they both explained that they were using this as an opportunity to take a break from studying and declined my offer of alcohol. As they sat around chatting comfortably they told me that they've attended STP's before which explained their apparent lack of apprehension. Zoe, a 19-year-old recruited through my flyers, arrived next. I welcomed her and she accepted my offer of sangria before settling in next to April and Amber. My last flyer recruited participant, Caitlin, arrived next and declined a drink. Both Zoe and Caitlin had never attended a STP before and seemed reserved. Chloe, Georgia, Zoe, and Caitlyn constitute the youngest cohort in attendance.

Next to arrive is Julie, a women in her late thirties, recruited from my personal networks. Being a reserved person, she quickly settled into a chair with her forms and accepted my offer of wine. Soon after followed Beth, an outgoing women in her late forties and a friend and colleague of Deborah's, who also accepted a drink and settled in. The last two participants, Sharon and Nina, arrived together. Both women were recruited through my friend Amber. I did not know Sharon (late forties) very well, but Nina – a women in her late thirties - and I had socialised on several occasions. In total there were thirteen women in attendance; six I knew personally, three invited by my flatmate, and four who had responded to my invitational flyers.

Now that the welcoming and administrative processes were over, I started to relax. I poured myself a drink and sat with my guests. Not long after the consultant Nic, a bright and bubbly blond, arrived at 6.50pm. She wore a low cut pink dress, a black jacket, and a black company name tag. I showed her where to set up and quickly got back to my guests. I had worried about how well a disparate group of women would get along but upon arriving back outside I was happy to see everyone talking, drinking and eating. There seemed to be a slight buzz of excitement in the air about what was to come. A few minutes later Nic reappeared to let me know she was ready. I announced to my guests that it was time to start and with that everyone filed inside. I got up and placed the audio recorder on the mantelpiece, keen not to miss anything.



Figure 2. My lounge room during the demonstration (own photo).

Nic began the presentation by handing out catalogues and telling us about herself. She is a busy mother of two, who works full time, and has a husband who was away frequently for work. She found party consulting work while looking for a hobby and therefore did not describe it in terms of labour but as something she did for herself. She wished she could do more of it but was prevented by the demands of her household. She then announced she will be diving into the demonstration and

that it was “Janelle’s night” so we should all just relax, have fun, and not be afraid of interrupting her to ask questions or to slow her down.

Party part 1: Bath and Shower

As the presentation began everyone was quiet and all eyes were on Nic. The first products presented matched the layout of the catalogue: ‘bath and shower’, followed by ‘beauty and cosmetics’. The products that Nic was about to present to the group constitute an illustrative instance of the sexual script that emphasises the importance of women heightening their desirability and sexual allure to others (primarily men, but also the other idealised self and potentially – but latently – other women). Nic picked up a brightly coloured teal and white tube with ‘Flirt’ splashed across it in yellow italics, saying:

This is our absolute company top seller. And this is called ‘Coochy’ in Flirt ... it is a moisturising shave gel and it works really well for the bikini area. If you have ingrown hairs or you’re prone to red spots it’s really good for that.

Nic continued espousing the transformative (in terms of attractiveness) powers of ‘Coochy’, including its top seller status. She then handed the tube out to be passed around and tested by the attendees (a practice repeated for every product) before introducing ‘Body Dew’; a white spray bottle with gold and pink lettering which she described as an after-shower body oil mist. Next was ‘Kiss’, a similar product. Quiet instances of murmuring between attendees began to ramp up as more products circulated and we interacted as they were passed on. People talked and laughed quietly as Nic continued her demonstration over them. I noticed that everyone had eased into the experience a little and seemed to be enjoying themselves, stopping here and there to grab more food or refill their glasses as Nic

talked. I also felt more relaxed and was enjoying seeing and experiencing what products the company had to offer.

Party part 2: Beauty and Cosmetics

The presentation then proceeded to beauty and cosmetic items which changed focus from shaving, scent, and moisture to more practical skincare which make claims of transforming or enhancing physical appearance. This change was apparent in the overall optics of these products. The packaging and presentation seemed to convey a sense of exclusivity and efficacy.



Figure 3. Catalogue page featuring 'Revive' and 'Body Boost' (prices in USD. Source: Pure Romance, 2017a)

These products were not handed around the group as before: these were less about the scent and feel and more about the change in appearance after long-term use: the power to control aging. The promotional rhetoric of the products Nic was about to present to the group constitutes an illustrative example of the sexual script that insists a youthful appearance is a crucial aspect of a women's sexual desirability, and that continued (in this case, daily) work on one's appearance is expected. Nic picked up a white bottle with minimalist gold and black detailing, finished with a gold cap: "Body Boost" was written down the side in gold font. "This is something that's really good for is for firming the skin. Some women use it as moisturisers on the cleavage and particularly the baby belly" she said, raving about the product and its effectiveness, saying that customer reviews and before and after photos were amazing, although she did not have them with her. 'Body Boost' was recommended in combination with 'Save My Skin' – a stretch mark minimising spray in similar packaging. Interests were piqued by the talk of stretch marks. One participant asked if it would be good for a newly pregnant friend. Group chat occurred briefly and concluded when Nic and the participants agreed that stretch marks never completely go away. I felt some relief at the occurrence of group discussion as it showed increased participant relaxation and comfort. The final product presented in the 'beauty and cosmetics' category was 'Revive' - a small glass jarred face cream with gold detailing. Nic did not like this one personally because of her oily skin, but many women "rave about it". I got the feeling that these products were being promoted, as many similar products are, on the basis that women are expected to actively work on their appearance and minimise any overt signs of aging which would otherwise negate their attractiveness.

Nic then stopped for a moment and there was a feeling among the group (myself included) of expectation: that we were waiting to experience the reason it was called a sex toy party. Even though I had attended many before, both similar and different, I was still eager to play with what they have to offer. Despite trying to

maintain a research focus I found myself caught up in the excitement that this company may have something that could improve the quality of my sex life. However, the price of potential improvement tempered my excitement as a brief flip through of the catalogue established that almost all of the products were beyond my very limited student budget.

I noticed that Nic was walking around my lounge room barefoot and her tone and demeanour had relaxed as the night progressed. The participants continued to be engaged and the upcoming move to more 'risqué' products seemed to heighten excitement and anticipation in the room.

Nic held up a deck of cards showing us that each displayed a letter of the alphabet.

I'll play a game to warm up before we move into the lubes [sexual enhancement products] and toys ladies. I've got the letters of the alphabet and I want you to give me a word pertaining to that letter and you can use your imagination, you can make it as rude or as prude as you like ... the lady who has the most cards at the end wins a prize.

The first person to call out a word beginning with the letter on the card thereby won the card, and whoever had collected the most cards by the end won. I assumed that, in line with other sex toy parties I'd attended, this was intended as a game to 'loosen us up' before presentation of the sex toys. When the game kicked off with 'E' and someone answered "elephant" we unanimously decided to make 'naughty' answers mandatory. As it progressed the game served to unite us through participation and increased the energy in the room. The silliness of it, and the amount of alcohol that had been consumed, made for a fun time and some unabashed (and purposefully rude) answers. Many 'naughty' words were called out, including "jizz", "wank", and "rim job". When the game concluded we tallied up our points. My extensive dirty vocabulary won me the game and prizes which were

product samples and a purchase discount voucher. With the game over it was time for the presentation of lubricants.

Party part 3: Enhancement Creams

“Now I’m going to go right into our lubes ladies” Nic told us by way of introducing the next portion. Someone replied with a dirty sounding “yeah” which makes everyone laugh.

I’m actually going to start with this one. This is my favourite. I love it, I have it at home. I’m not going to lie; my husband loves it. ‘Great Head’. It pretty much lives up to its name.

Nic presented an inconspicuous looking silver capped grey tube, handing the flavour ‘luscious lemonade’ to her left, and ‘succulent strawberry’ to her right. This promotion of ‘Great Head’ provides an illustrative instance of three sexual scripts simultaneously. One evident sexual script concerns a focus on sensory experiences, adventurousness, novelty, and enhancement of physical and psychological comfort in the sexual encounter – as demonstrated by the flavour, encouragement of a novel/titillating sexual practice (‘deep throating’), and the enhancement of comfort for the performer of such. Conversely, another sexual script can be identified in which men are positioned as the active and powerful sexual partner (the recipient of “better” oral sex) and women’s pleasure and comfort is secondary to men’s. Lastly, the promotion of ‘Great Head’ illustrates the companies assumption that intimate relationships primarily take place between men and women, or the assumption of heterosexuality. While the product can be used in any sexual coupling where at least one of the individuals has a penis, in this context it is being sold at a women’s only

sex toy party for use on a male partner. Thus, the assumption of heterosexuality is implicit.



Figure 4. Catalogue image of 'Great Head' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a).

Now, what it does, or how you use it, is you can obviously apply it to the penis, or, you can put it in your mouth, under your tongue, and let your saliva carry it down. So, what it does, is it puts a coating on your throat and you can...

Nic trailed off. "Deep throat!" Deborah finished for her. Everyone laughed and Nic confirmed.

My husband's brainy, he will say to me - of course what guy doesn't - lick my balls. So, you can! You can suck their penis, and lick their balls, at the same time without gagging. It works, it totally works, we use it all the time.

"At the same time - wow" commented one participant. "You'd have to have a big mouth to do that" followed Deborah, and we laughed. It occurred to me that rather than being presented with ordinary sexual lubricants these products entailed the

improvement and enhancement of sexual stimulation. While regular sexual lubricants do improve sexual pleasure through reduced friction/improved comfort, and some are formulated to heighten sensations like warmth or tingling, the products being presented went a step above. They implied a capacity to transform (alter and/or improve) sexual practices. However, as Nic is about to move onto the next product two participants are having a side discussion about gag reflexes. This discussion prompts a personal story of hers. "I shouldn't, I won't over talk about my husband, but he actually grabs the back of your head and rams!". Her personal disclosure is another illustration of the sexual script discussed above.

Nic's comment elicited some laughter, notably from a couple of the older women, but seemed to shock others – admittedly, myself included. I immediately blurted out "they're not allowed to do that!". April and Nina respectively followed with "that's not okay!". "I mean no, wait, wait! In a consensual relationship where the boundaries are already set, that's okay. Otherwise, it's not okay" April clarified loudly. "Of course not, he wouldn't have done it early on" explained Nic, and we laughed. "Non-gag reflex! Get on it! You can do better than that now, if your product works" exclaimed Deborah, who laughed at Nic's 'ramming' story. I could increasingly see the effect of people's alcohol consumption in their outspoken comments, reactions, and bawdy laughter. It was especially apparent when compared to those participants who were not drinking or only drinking moderately – they were interacting with the products and others but were doing so quietly. For clarity, the group was split roughly evenly in terms of those drinking and those not.

Nic continued, responding to the previous comment; "and hence the whole... he knows now that I can suck, and lick, at the same time, using that product and I'm like oh man... he should never have experienced that - now he knows that it works". I began to wonder why she wished her husband didn't know 'Great Head' supposedly works but we were onto the next product and edging closer to the sex

toys. Nic held a silver tube with a multi-coloured polka dot design called 'Whipped' and announced it's a really good 'all-rounder' which seemed at odds with the catalogue, stating its intended use is for 'oral favours' – specifically, fellatio and cunnilingus – as this product is flavoured and creamy.



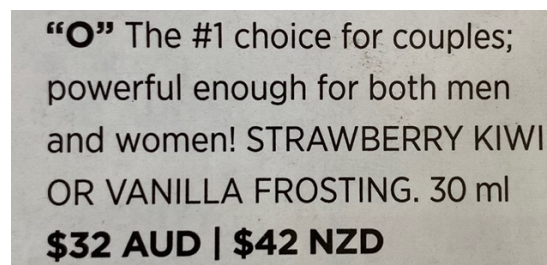
Figure 5. Catalogue image of 'Whipped' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a).

The presentation of 'Whipped' and 'Sensations' is another illustrative example of the sexual script that emphasizes adventurousness, playfulness, and novelty in sexual encounters. We are then shown 'Sensations', a transparent squirt-top bottle with bright pink liquid inside. "Everyone loves 'Sensations'" Nic declared. It is a heat activated lubricant which we're told is primarily for 'oral favours' as well. "It's really, really sweet. It's yummy. And some people even use it as ice cream topping!" to which we all laughed. Pretty expensive ice cream topping, I thought to myself, at \$34 NZD for a 75-millilitre bottle. Aside from the price, the colourful and playful design struck me and again I thought of the potential for experimentation and novelty this product was imbued with.

We're then shown a range of four (female and male) orgasm enhancement products all in the same type of tube but differentiated by colour; hot pink for

'Boost', black for 'O', gold for 'Amp', and white for 'Pure'. "Now we're going to talk about masturbation. Some people do it, some people don't, I think it's okay" Nic states. Nic's presentation of the orgasm enhancement creams is an apt example of the sexual script that encourages foregrounding and heightening female pleasure and enjoyment derived from sexual activity – specifically via enhanced clitoral stimulation. Presenting 'Boost' first Nic detailed how she likes to use it alone and that it's her absolute favourite. "So, again, just a small amount, on the clitoris, it's going to draw the blood to the surface. And when you orgasm, it's going to be, exciting" which elicited laughter. I appreciated Nic's candour and promotion of this product as having the capacity to transform female orgasm in a solo context, rather than focusing solely on partnered sexual practices.

The rest of the orgasm enhancement products were similar to 'Boost' but vary in strength and flavour. I assumed these products are flavoured to enhance the act of oral sex for the partner performing it. All of the orgasm enhancement creams apart from 'O', which can be used for couples, are designed solely for women. 'O' was described by the catalogue and by Nic as being 'for couples' meaning it worked on the genitals of men and women. It occurred to me that the 'couples' Pure Romance have in mind are assumed to be heterosexual, and that there's little affordance (or products explicitly for) same gendered couples.



“O” The #1 choice for couples; powerful enough for both men and women! STRAWBERRY KIWI OR VANILLA FROSTING. 30 ml
\$32 AUD | \$42 NZD

Figure 6. Catalogue description of 'O' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017b).

Exactly how these orgasm enhancement gels function was unclear. The catalogue page stated the products feature an “exclusive TriPlex Tingle™ compound” which didn’t clear any confusion, but did imply some kind of technologically advanced capacity to enhance stimulation. “Can we taste this one?” enquired Chloe, referring to ‘Boost’ which she was holding. “Yep, absolutely” Nic replied “It’s for oral favours, so he’s going to go downtown and you’re going to go...” “All over the world!” April interrupted and we all laughed. “So yeah that’s why it’s flavoured. Because some guys, you know, some guys are fussy and it’s like, just get down there!” Nic exclaimed.

Party part 4: Sex Toys

“Okay so I’ll start talking about our toys. And again, ladies, I’m not going to show you everything or we’ll be here all night. I’ll just show you the best of the best and talk about battery versus rechargeable” Nic announced. Everyone was quiet in anticipation of the most exciting part of the evening. She introduced the ‘Blush’ range first: “you’ll see they’re all in stories. This is the ‘Blush’ range and it’s been out the longest. All [of] the ‘Blush’ is nice and pink and is battery operated”.

I looked over the ‘Blush’ collection in the catalogue. It was indeed very pink – hot pink – aside from the male masturbation sleeve and the couples vibrating cock ring toy which were grey. Male masturbation sleeves are cylindrical sex toys typically made of soft materials like silicone, and are textured on the inside to enhance masturbatory sensations and stimulation. Vibrating cock rings are designed to be worn around the base of the penis, which restricts blood flow and increases the firmness of an erection, while the vibrating component is primarily intended to stimulate the partners glans clitoris during penetrative sex.



Figure 7. Catalogue displaying the 'Blush Collection' (prices in USD. Source: Pure Romance, 2017a)

I surmised that this 'story' range was meant to be unthreatening or easily accessible in that it used an older sex toy aesthetic of bright colours and were made of either jelly or hard plastic rather than silicone. Most are either dual-action, phallic shaped 'rabbit' style vibrators, small bullet clitoral vibrators, or vibrating cock rings. A quick flip through of the catalogue revealed that more sophisticated/technologically advanced designs were to come so it seemed we were starting with the most affordable, and perhaps most familiar, toys.

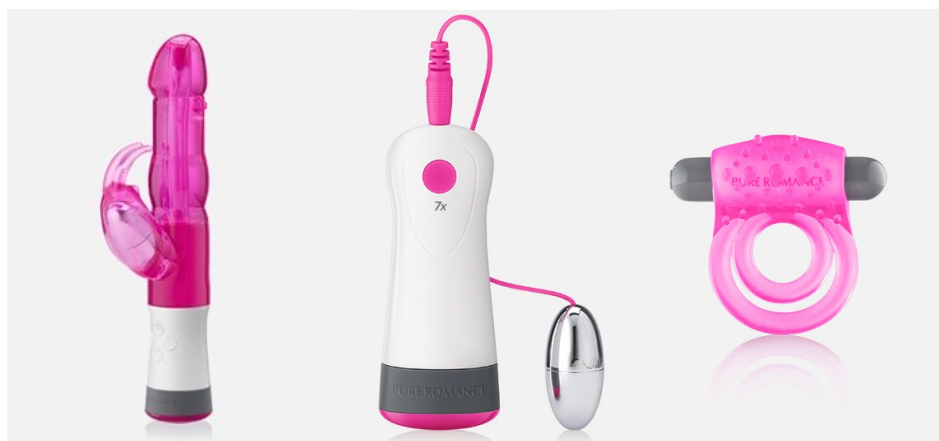


Figure 8. From left: 'Blind Date', 'Tease Me, Please Me', 'Friend With Benefits'
(Source: Pure Romance, 2017).

Out of the nine-item range Nic had two to show us – 'The Flirt' and 'Tease Me, Please Me'. Both are micro-bullets intended for clitoral stimulation however the latter can pair with a pink jelly cock ring. Nic began with 'The Flirt' and held it up for us to see. It consisted of a large white battery pack and a hot pink on/off button. Sitting atop the battery pack was a thin pink cord with a very small 'bullet' on the end. Nic's presentation of a clitoral vibrator, which is designed to stimulate (above what is possible via manual stimulation) an organ known for its high concentration of nerve endings and plays a significant role in female sexual arousal and orgasm, is an illustrative example of the sexual script that emphasises and heightens the importance of female pleasure.



Figure 9. 'The Flirt' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017).

As Nic detailed to the group: "now some women prefer just the clitoris stimulated. So that's a good toy for that. I'm going to pass it around and you'll see it's a micro-bullet, it's quite small". Nicole received it first, already buzzing. "So, it's this tiny – oh! I thought it was that big bit but no!" she said, referring to the battery pack which made everyone laugh. Giggles could be heard as the vibrating toy is passed from one woman to another. Nic told us to play with the functions and that it

is for “the clit, if you’re that way inclined”. “It’s noiseless! Listen. I could use that at work” Beth said as the toy is passed to her and the mental image made us all burst out with laughter. “It does have a cord, though! It does have a cord” April pointed out over the laughter. “I think the facials would give it away” replied Sharon. Nic advised us to press the bullet against the tip of our nose as a way to assess how it feels on the clitoris. People do exactly that as it’s passed around and get hilarious enjoyment from it: “God, I think I want this! I’m in love!” Beth claimed as she played with ‘The Flirt’, touching it to various spots on her face making us all laugh. Nic then demonstrated “Tease Me, Please Me” thereby completing the ‘Blush’ collection.

While those are going around, I’m going to talk about the range here ‘Amplify’. Again, battery operated with this lot and some of them as we talked about, the different materials, some women like more durable vibrators, some like them softer.

I flipped to the ‘Amplify’ catalogue spread. The aesthetics and (some) materials of this line were different to the ‘Blush’ range although the designs were similar. It seemed as though this story was designed to look edgy. The seven-piece bright purple and aqua blue range was set against a muted purple and blue graffiti style background and had names related to live music like ‘Head Liner’ and ‘Jam Session’.



Figure 10. Catalogue displaying the 'Amplify Collection' (prices in USD. Source: Pure Romance, 2017a)

However, the 'Lip Sync' vibrator looked different than the rest. The tip was rounded on one side, and smooth and flat on the other. Nic then presented this vibrator saying she had it and loved it, pointing out that the smooth flat side mimics a tongue – hence the name. There was a brief pause in the demonstration as we talked to one another while circulating toys. “There’s so many vibrating sounds!” I commented about the general state of my lounge. From all directions I could hear vibrations of various speeds and intensities. “Is that your new boyfriend Beth? The other one will get jealous” I heard Deborah say, referring to ‘Tease Me, Please Me’, as Beth plays with ‘Lip Sync’. “I better take them both home” Beth replied and laughed loudly. “Threesome” Deborah replied, and they both laughed heartily. I could hear chatting from groups of women with bursts of laughter every now and then.

“So, ladies, I’m going to talk about this one and oh my gosh! It’s a lovely toy this one. Now this, honestly ladies, this is my ultimate favourite. I love it.” Nic said,

trying to move on but struggling to cut through the various ongoing conversations. As I noted earlier, for those who were drinking alcohol consumption had continued throughout the night. Deborah, who had brought her own bottle of wine, was almost finished it – in fact, when she spoke earlier she was almost slurring. I think the continued alcohol consumption and the fun of finally getting to play with the toys had come together and created a more excited atmosphere. People were chatting, joking, and seemed to be immersed in playing with the toys.

Nic finally managed to move us onto the next story. I looked down at the catalogue as she held up ‘Home Alone’, her “ultimate favourite”. It was part of a two-piece line called the ‘Selfie Collection’ and linguistically plays on the contemporary trend of taking a photo of yourself, (usually) by yourself. The name of the story and of the toys – ‘Home Alone’ and ‘Do Not Disturb’ – heavily implied their intent for solo use. Both toys were solid navy with teal controls, were made of silicone, and rechargeable. Unlike all other stories this line featured no partner toys.



Figure 11. ‘Home Alone’ (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a).

Nic told the crowd that ‘Home Alone’ has thirty speeds of vibration and pulsing patterns, to which someone responded “Jesus Christ”. This is again

illustrative of the sexual script that foregrounds the importance of female pleasure, although in this context the pleasure is solo masturbatory. She then proceeded to exhibit the functionality of 'Home Alone' by turning it on and cycling through some vibration speeds, demonstrating that "you can see the ball of that has a nice vibrate there". This prompted Beth to ask "so that's not for the g-spot, that other end that you're holding?" to which Nic responded:

I believe that if you're comfortable using something a certain way, why not? Go for it. I'm not here to tell you how to use something, I'm here to tell you how something works. I'm an orgasm 30 seconds after using this particular toy, it may take you three minutes ... I'm boring, I just like a constant vibration ... so it ['Home Alone'] has some great speeds, it pulsates, and you can just use it as a massager [as well].

The way Nic constructs her sexual identity here reflects a sex positive standpoint, and sex positive discourse is the basis for sexual scripts that emphasise the importance of female pleasure.

"How are we going for time? Should we speed up a little bit? We haven't got too many more to go through" Nic asked, moving onto the 'Spotlight Story'. This five-piece line looked luxurious: all toys were rich purple with gold accents, set against a black background in the catalogue.



Figure 12. Catalogue displaying the 'Seductive Spotlight Collection' (prices in USD).

Source: Pure Romance, 2017a)

I began to notice that each successive collection was more expensive, feature-dense, and technologically advanced than the one before. Nic presented what looked to be the most expensive toy from the 'Spotlight' line, 'Encore' – a rabbit-style dual-action vibrator. She didn't, however, hand it out for circulation and she had stopped spending as much time on each product so I got the feeling she may have been speeding things along. We had started at 7pm and it was then 8.15pm so perhaps she was conscious of time wearing on and feeling the difficulties of keeping the attention of a room half full of drunk women. However, Nic's presentation of 'Encore', a dual-action vibrator, is illustrative of two contradictory sexual scripts simultaneously. In one sense they emphasise and essentialise female pleasure as inherently (and most 'normally') achievable through vaginal penetration. However, they also provide women with an enhanced imitation of the ideal (and technologically enhanced) enduring erect penis which enhances the agency of the user (if the user does, in fact, enjoy penetrative stimulation).



Figure 13. 'Encore' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a).

With this we moved onto the 'Kalypso' story, named as such because it's designed to work well in water. The names of the toys are different than those of the other lines and sound vaguely mythological like 'Mira' and 'Kaia'. Nic briefly detailed the water related features as she introduced the line:

The speed of the vibration works really well under water, so, definitely for spa tubs, baths, things like that – that's what this range is designed for. I've got 'Kaia' and 'Maya' to show you, a clit toy and c-ring. I know I keep talking about clit stimulators but they sell *really* well.

She handed out 'Kaia' for circulation before demonstrating the cock ring. She explained that it is worn around the penis and the vibrating part will stimulate the clitoris or it can be turned around to vibrate on the partners testicles. The demonstration of cock rings provides another example of the script that prescribes and foregrounds penetration as central to pleasurable sexual activity. Furthermore, their physical design positions men as the active sexual participant whereby the erection and movement are central to the products functionality.

"This one has heaps of functions on it" Deborah mentioned as she's handed 'Encore'.

“Yeah, they’re amazing. Once we brought out the USB rechargeable ones the toys just went up a whole other level, it’s amazing. I will honestly say that I will not go back to anything battery operated now” Nic announced. Talk of rechargeable toys and their charge-life led to a conversation about the length of sex.

“I’ve never been a long... make love for hours, I’m just – I can’t, sorry” said Nic, laughing, and we laughed too – perhaps out of understanding, as it certainly was on my behalf. “Yeah, so I’m a real, I’m just over and done with, real quick, so I don’t, yeah. I’m never going to run [out] the battery” and she laughed again, adding “that sounds really sad!”. “So, do you just recharge it after you’ve used it?” April asked while others chatted among themselves. “Yep. For instance I’ve got the ‘Home Alone’, and I might get, say, 12, 15 uses before I have to recharge it” replied Nic.

The party was coming to its final stages. As it does we played a final game to “wind us down”. At this stage it was almost 8.30pm meaning the party had been going for an hour and a half which felt surprising as the time had gone by quickly. Nic started passing out sheets from a ‘nudie doodle’ notepad which featured a ‘hunky’ naked man with blank space where his genitals would be. “I’m going to draw a really big one” exclaimed Deborah. This sparked a group conversation about penis size which then turned into one about labia and vagina size, and whether men care.

“Oh – it does matter” answered Beth. “They like small”.

“Really!?” Deborah exclaimed.

April then piped up and said that, for a lot of women, the labia (more specifically the labia minora) are smaller and more ‘closed’ when a woman is younger, but progresses to being larger and more ‘open’ as they age.

“It sags” Amber added.

“It sags” April repeated by way of confirmation, and added “it’s science!”.

This seemed to be news to many of the guests who replied with various instances of “huh?” and “what?”. She pushed on and insisted it is true, claiming she had looked at pictures. Nic chimed in to reinforce this theory with a story; her and a friend compared vulvas when they were in their twenties and said that while hers is what she called an enclosed “barbie vagina” her friend’s labia minora were more pronounced. Conversation then turned from labia length to vagina tightness. “Well you know how you were [saying earlier] that size matters. So, in general, women prefer a bigger penis, right? Is that right?” Sharon asked Nic. “It’s what you’re comfortable with eh” Beth interjected. “So, on the other – if you flip it, does a male prefer a smaller – “ “Tighter” said Beth, correcting the terminology. “- vagina, or does he not care, because it’s a vagina?” asked Sharon. “I think it makes a difference, it must make a difference” replied Beth. “I don’t think a lot [of vaginas] are not tight though, I think that’s a cultural myth that we get ‘stretched out’” I said. “Yeah” Amber replied in agreement. “The more you use a muscle the tighter it is” April said in agreement. “The irony is you’re more likely to be loose if you haven’t had sex, because if you’re using those muscles they’re going to be tighter”.

Again Nic delved into her personal life to demonstrate her thoughts on the issue, telling us she masturbates a lot because her husband is often away for work. Due to this, plus exploration with the companies toys and enhancement creams, she believed she knows how to use her vaginal muscles to orgasm quickly and is tighter because of it.

“Because your husband travels, like he’s not around that much, you’d have lots of sex when he gets home right?” Deborah asked, making us laugh.

Nic replied that she would love to say they do, and that they used to, but they don't as much anymore. Apparently her husband is a real "blow job guy" and some nights he would say "oh my god, I just need a blow job" and she thinks "really?" – the "really?" said rather dejectedly. Backtracking a little Nic said they have made efforts to spice up their sex life and have "tried a lot of stuff" and their sex is now "effortless". What followed, however, portrayed their sex life (to me, at least) as more routine/obligatory than effortless; "now I'm actually just like, eh, here you are" she said, leaning over to push her bottom out, mimicking offering herself to her husband which made the group laugh zealously. She finished her story by saying; "Man, I'm tired, I've had a long day, we've both worked, we've got children, we're busy, it's chaotic. Like, at the end of the night, like I'm a nana, I just want to go to sleep and I just... yeah. How unromantic is that!? I don't know, but that's what works. For now."

We turned our attention back to the 'nudie doodle' game and proceeded to draw the missing anatomical parts on the naked man with our eyes closed which produced some hilarious results. April won and received a product discount voucher. Nic then began talking about the ordering process which signalled the end of the presentation. This part of the evening can make people feel awkward and obligated to purchase because of the effort the presenter has put into the presentation. I could hear this reflected in Nic's voice as she rushed through the purchasing instructions. All orders are done one by one in a private ordering room (in this case, my bedroom) and anyone who ordered would receive their product immediately unless it was out of stock, in which case they would receive it in discrete packaging delivered via courier. After checking that everyone understood how the ordering worked Nic advised she would leave and go to the ordering room. Several participants thanked her for the presentation and we all gave her a round of applause. With this Nic departed for the ordering room and told us to play with anything we would like to on the display table.

Ordering room

I briefly joined her in the ordering room to make sure it was fit for purpose. Sitting on my bed together Nic confessed that she was anxious and wanted to know whether her presentation was okay. It seemed that being recorded had been weighing on her mind. I reassured her that she had done really well and we had all had a great time. We then get to talking about Nic's experience of working for the company. She told me that she really enjoyed the job and liked being able to talk so openly about sex because this was not done in her family growing up. Sometimes she doesn't make any money at the party but "that's just the way it is". I then left her in the ordering room to make way for any paying customers – if there was an opportunity for Nic to make money I certainly didn't want to delay it.

Back in my lounge Beth noticed the ordering room was free and made her way in. She was very open about her keenness for a new toy and made us laugh with her enthusiasm. Not long after she emerged with a bag looking happy and announced she was "off to play", making us laugh again, and farewelled those still left. After Beth left Zoe told us she was going in next "even though she is a poor student" and headed for my bedroom, departing with her products soon after. Nina then took her chance to order and left the group.

At this point the remaining women were myself, Amber, Deborah, April, and Nina – all of whom were continuing to drink. Once Nina re-joined the group a rather drunk Deborah got cajoled by several of us into ordering something with her husband's credit card. When the ordering was over I checked in with Nic in my bedroom who told me she sold \$460 worth of product meaning I, as the host, had \$46 to spend and I did so gleefully. My choice was 'Whipped' the 'kissable creamy lubricant'. I think I'm a sucker for novelty. I was also very glad that despite it being a research party Nic was able to earn a commission.

After packing her stock Nic came to say goodbye to the remaining guests and gave me a hug saying “I don’t normally cuddle clients!” which I thought was sweet. With the formalities over it was time for the after party to begin, and for many more wines to be drunk.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the sex toy party provided an opportunity to observe and document the promotion and marketing of sex toys in the specific social setting of provincial Aotearoa New Zealand. Through close observation, it became clear that intersecting, mutually reinforcing heteronormative and androcentric – along with adjacent and complementary (if not collusive) female orgasmic and masturbatory – sexual norms continue to shape the marketing and promotion of sex toys, with a focus on male pleasure and penetration. It also became clear that, simultaneously, sex toy party spaces can contest these androcentric sexual norms – albeit within heteronormative parameters where female pleasure is compartmentalised as solo masturbatory or adjunct (and ‘add on’) to male pleasure. Women’s orgasmic pleasure is also often compartmentalised as solo masturbatory pleasure in this context, especially when a male partner is away. For example, Nic provided party participants with guidance on how to use a penetrative vibrator on themselves, describing that “you’re just going to push the soft button until you find something you like – that makes you go ‘oh! Ah!’”. Advocating for vibrator use in a solo masturbatory context enhances female sexual agency, which contests androcentric norms, but simultaneously reproduces the normalisation of male penetration in female sexual pleasure. Overt contestation would involve the promotion of female solo masturbation/same sex relationships as the preferred or idealised alternative. This potential is somewhat acknowledged in the discourses, and realised in practice,

by my interlocuters, but is only latently promoted – mostly through a lack of overt denial or rejection – in company promotions as outlined. This ethnography is primarily intended to provide the reader with a descriptive account of events. The coming chapters expand on the sexual scripts identified above and their significance is explained by demonstrating the relationship between said scripts and the socio-sexual discourses underlying them.

Chapter 5: Lotions and Potions

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to expand on the sexual scripts initially identified in the preceding Chapter using the print and digital marketing of the various 'lotions and potions' sold by Pure Romance and likewise in the associated contexts of the sex toy parties they host that I and my interlocutors attended. In the following sections, I introduce each product category, provide a brief overview of the products in the category, and describe (and subsequently weave through an analysis of scripts and discourses) the primary and specific material vitalism of the products under consideration. I then provide an expanded and detailed analytical discussion of the sexual scripts and discourses previously identified in my ethnographic account.

The sexual scripts identified in the 'Beauty and Body' product category emphasise the importance of maintaining a youthful and attractive appearance, which aligns with the feminine beauty imperative discourse. Data from the 'Bath and Shower' product category reveals sexual scripts that involve heightening women's sexual attractiveness, desirability, and allure, reflecting a discourse that emphasises women's primary role as objects of male or androcentric sexual desire. In this context sexual desirability is constructed as for the 'other'. The primary 'other' as overtly expressed is men, whereby a women's desirability and sexual appeal is heightened in ways that align with the male gaze. There is also the overt intent of heightening sexual appeal of the self for the self. Latently expressed is the importance of heightened appeal to other women, whether that be homosexually or as an expression of social status and value.

In contrast, the 'Enhancement Creams' product category displays contradictory sexual scripts that highlight playfulness, experimentation, and female pleasure (overtly self-directed, but also latently homosexual), but also emphasises men's power, pleasure, and active subject position during sexual interaction, which reflects a sex-positive and androcentric sexual discourse. These product categories are sequential, with 'Beauty and Body' products enabling the generation and maintenance of 'the body beautiful' as sexually desirable and the 'Bath and Shower' products build on this by aiding preparation and enhancement of the sexual body. The sexual experiences of the beautiful and sexually desirable body are then enhanced by 'Enhancement Creams'.

In this chapter I aim for both a micro and macro analysis, with sexual scripts constituting the micro and discourses the macro. To briefly restate: sexual scripts are historically contingent, culturally shared expectations, norms and ideals that frame and guide, but do not necessarily determine, socially prescribed patterns of sexual practice. Moreover, overarching sexual discourses concern the macro level of broader systems of meaning, knowledge, and power from which sexual scripts are derived. The majority of sexual scripts uncovered in this research are therefore essentially practical or instrumental enactments of hegemonic sexual discourses in everyday life – particularly in regard to the conservative reproduction of heteronormative and sexually androcentric values and associated practices. Although in respect of the overt promotion of varied masturbatory activities (especially those exclusively self-pursued) and the latent potentialities of homosexuality and spaces for hegemonic contestation are also apparent.

Beauty and Body

Overview

This section analyses the 'Beauty and Body' product category, which includes the products 'Save My Skin', 'Body Boost', 'Revive', and 'Body Dew'. Although these products are not explicitly sexual, they are important for understanding sexual scripts and discourses. Beauty and attractiveness are closely linked to sexual desirability, and the messages conveyed by these products contribute to shaping and reinforcing cultural norms and beliefs about women's sexuality, attractiveness, desirability, and socio-sexual self-worth. Additionally, these products target women, reflecting and reproducing gendered expectations about appearance. Finally, beauty and attractiveness often play a role in power dynamics within sexual and romantic relationships, particularly in andro-/heterosexual relationships. By examining the discourses surrounding these products, we can gain insights into how notions of beauty, attractiveness, and desirability are connected to power, control, and influence within intimate sexual relationships.

The double page catalogue spread featuring these products is headed 'The Ultimate Essentials' followed by the product category blurb: "every so often our skin needs a boost. Whether you're treating existing skin problems or preventing them before they happen, you need the right tools to maintain a healthy, gorgeous look". 'Save My Skin' is a body oil designed to minimise the appearance of stretch marks. 'Body Boost' is a firming and toning body cream. 'Revive' is a repairing face cream and 'Body Dew' is an hydrating oil mist. These products reflect sexual scripts and discourses related to women's appearance, attractiveness, and the maintenance of youthful and flawless skin.

Thing-Power

This section examines the concept of thing-power in relation to the products that comprise the Beauty and Body category, and how these objects' thing-power contributes to the sexual scripts and discourses employed in promotional materials. Drawing on Bennett's (2010) work, objects possess vibrancy or an agency of their own, and they are not simply passive entities but have effects, create impacts, and act as quasi-agents or forces with their own propensities. The products in the Beauty and Body category exhibit various aspects of thing-power. Their primary thing-power is derived from their materiality, as they are liquid lotions applied to the skin, such as on the face and body but not on the genitals. They have distinct smells and kinetic sensations that users can immediately perceive. Moreover, their efficacy is not immediate like a sex toy but rather is expressed over time and through repeated applications as part of a daily routine. They are also purchased in limited quantities in plastic containers and are difficult to use completely, similar to products like toothpaste tubes and peanut butter jars. Additionally, these products have limited shelf and efficacy lives, requiring regular repurchasing.

Specifically, products in this category are marketed as having the ability to transform or enhance physical appearance. For instance, the website description of 'Save My Skin' claims to help "perfect your skin", while the catalogue description of 'Body Boost' promises to "defy the laws of aging". Such language suggests that the products possess a level of agency or power. These products also promise transformation, which further emphasizes their power to change appearance. The catalogue claims 'Body Boost' can "lift and firm problem areas as it smooths and tones your skin" which implies these products are imbued with the power to preserve or attain socially constructed standards of youthful attractiveness. Lastly, the aesthetic design of these cosmetics, including luxurious packaging, sleek designs,

and branding strategies, conveys a sense of exclusivity and efficacy, suggesting a certain power or potency within the product itself. Overall, Pure Romance's promotional materials for the Beauty and Body category tap into cultural perceptions and social norms regarding beauty, implying that using these products grants a sense of control or empowerment over one's appearance, which aligns with and expands Bennett's idea of thing-power.

Identified Scripts

Because the products in this category are the least overtly/explicitly sexual and they generally target general female body concerns, fewer sexual scripts can be identified than in other product categories. Nevertheless, two distinct sexual scripts can be identified in the 'Beauty and Body' product category. They reveal an expectation for women to continuously work on their physical appearance, especially to maintain a youthful look with minimal visible imperfections and thus optimal beauty and attractiveness. These imperfections are defined by what falls outside the parameters of conventional beauty ideals. The products are presented as agentic modes to transcend and deny natural processes such as skin aging and stretch marks caused by weight gain or loss (especially during pregnancy) respectively.

The first sexual script identified is that women are expected to continuously work on and effectively resist their aging physical appearance to maintain a youthful and therefore attractive look with minimal visible imperfections. Furthermore, they are expected to invest significant time and energy into bodily self-improvement and maintenance. Of course the 'perfect' feminine ideal is never overtly defined by the company. To explicitly define an ideal would be counter to the narrative of female empowerment and enhancement of bodily autonomy. Rather, they emphasise that

which is not desired. For example, 'Save My Skin' is an oil designed to minimise the appearance of stretch marks, which implies this is an imperfection. Therefore, it can logically be inferred that which is considered ideal i.e. a body without stretch marks or other imperfections (like cellulite). This is similarly true for what is considered 'aged' or 'youthful'. However, through emphasis on that which is desirable and undesirable it can be inferred what is considered aged and youthful. The claim that 'Revive' keeps skin youthful and moisturised and that 'Body Boost' defies the laws of aging and gravity while lifting and firming skin implies that an aged appearance includes sagging, dry, and loose skin with a youthful appearance is the opposite: firm, tight, and moisturised.

Several data excerpts illustrate how the products are imbued with agency, vitality, promises of transformation, and symbolism of youth and beauty. For example, the catalogue description of 'Revive' emphasises the importance of "keep[ing] your skin youthful and moisturized". Nic claimed that "a lot of women rave about it [and] love it". Likewise, the website description for 'Body Dew' highlights the products ability to " [keep] even the driest skin happily hydrated and feeling years younger". Youthfulness is also emphasised in the description for 'Body Boost', as is the expectation of minimal visible imperfections. In the catalogue excerpt the product claims to "defy the laws of aging and gravity with a cream that helps lift and firm problem areas" while emphasising it also generally "smooths and tones your skin". During the party, Nic stated that this product is "a great seller and every woman wants to use it, which is fantastic ... the difference, it is amazing". Likewise, Donna was enthusiastic about 'Body Boost', saying:

I love this product ... I am going to be 55 this month and it makes me sick!
I've been using it on my neck and it's honestly working ... I had a bit of
cellulite on my legs [and] I've been rubbing it on every day and it's going.

The expectation for women to have imperfection free skin, or to work on improving imperfections if they exist, is illustrated in data excerpts for 'Save My Skin'. For example, the catalogue and website descriptions both highlight the product's ability to "minimize the appearance of stretch marks" and "diminish the appearance of stretch marks caused by weight gain or loss." This implies that women can expect to 'battle' (the effects of?) weight gain and loss during their lifespan. The expectation of blemish free/stretch mark free skin is also extended to motherhood. This is implicitly implied in the statement "weight loss or weight gain", however, Nic highlights the utility of 'Body Boost' during pregnancy, advising attendees that it can be applied "on the little baby potty belly ... particularly the baby belly". She also felt she "was really lucky in both of my pregnancies because I just lathered and lathered" and therefore "didn't get any [stretch marks] at all on my belly".

The second sexual script identified in the data for this product category suggests that maintaining a youthful appearance is important for women's sexual attractiveness. Youthfulness is seen as a desirable state to be achieved and maintained, often through the power and promised transformative effects attributed to the products. They promise to help women transcend the natural process of aging, positioning them as essential tools in the 'battle' against nature and the passage of time.

As stated above, the introductory blurb for the product line includes that "you need the right tools to maintain a healthy, gorgeous look" which connects the quality of skin to desirability. Furthermore, the way the products are presented repeatedly emphasise the importance of maintaining a youthful and therefore optimally sexually attractive (to men, most overtly) appearance. The descriptions for 'Save My Skin, including Nic's during the demonstration, emphasise minimising the appearance of stretch marks which are often associated with aging or appearing less youthful. Similarly, the website description for 'Body Dew' mentions that the

product keeps the skin "feeling years younger," implying that a youthful appearance is more attractive to others (and latently the self) and the catalogue description of 'Revive' emphasizes keeping the skin "youthful and moisturized" as one of its main benefits.

Discourses Informing The Scripts

These sexual scripts are largely informed by the beauty imperative discourse. This discourse emphasises the transcendence and denial of natural processes—whether it is aging or body imperfections—to achieve an idealised state of beauty and desirability. The products in this category offer agentic interventions to achieve these ideals, acting as an embodiment of the power of these products to help users conform to social expectations of beauty.

More specifically, the beauty imperative discourse is constituted of the idea that "for women, beauty has become an absolute, religious imperative" in contemporary society (Baudrillard, [1998] 2020, p. 279). This discourse emphasises the importance of adhering to female beauty norms in pursuit of hegemonic beauty ideals and promotes that an individual's worth, particularly for women, is closely tied to their attractiveness and adherence to beauty norms (Tseëlon, 1993). Tseëlon further explains that "looks may be important for the man, but they are consequential for the woman: both in terms of how others value her, and how she values herself" (p. 319). Hegemonic, contemporary Western beauty ideals consist of fair skin (Kumara & Jayawardhana, 2018), long and intentionally styled hair, the removal and vigilant maintenance of body hair, the wearing of makeup, a thin and firm body, and youthfulness (Kwan & Trautner, 2009).

How and why female youthfulness is equated with beauty/attractiveness was primarily explained as an evolutionary function. Eagly and Wood (1999) explain that from the perspective of evolutionary psychology sex differences “reflect adaptations to the pressures of the differing physical and social environments that impinged on females and males during primeval times” (Buss, 1995, Tooby & Cosmides, 1992, as cited in Eagly and Wood, 1999, p. 410). As such, the different sexes learned distinct strategies to ensure survival and reproductive success. Put simply, this means that women seek men with sufficient material/social/physical resources to support their childrearing needs and men seek women who are around the age of peak fertility. Buss (1989), in line with this theory, conducted a comparative analysis of 37 cultures and what characteristics each desire in a mate. He asserts that his findings of sex differences in mate preferences are both consistent with evolutionary psychology and cross-culturally. As Buss (p. 9) states:

In each of the 37 samples, males prefer mates who are younger, which is consistent with the hypothesis that males value mates with higher reproductive capacity ... also consistent across all countries [is that] females prefer mates who are older than they are.

Buss asserts that women value a mate's ambition, industriousness, and financial capacity more highly than men do and, correspondingly, men value physical attractiveness and relative youth more highly than women which supports “the evolution-based hypothesis about male preference for females showing cues to high reproductive capacity” (p. 12). Eagly and Wood (1999), however, refute the essentialist nature of this explanation and instead illuminate how gendered social location and division of labour manifest in differing mate preferences. These authors adopt a social structuralist perspective from which they argue that “the underlying cause of sex-differentiated behaviour is [the] concentration of men and women in differing roles” (p. 412). The psychology underlying mate selection demonstrates

individuals' endeavour to optimise their benefits concerning mating decisions within a framework where these benefits are limited by gender norms and the particular expectations linked to marital responsibilities. Consequentially, differences in the preferred age of partners between men and women can be explained by how they seek relationships that align with normative expectations for gender roles and marriage. In traditional marriages where men are the main earners and women handle domestic duties (the conventional gendered division of labour), there is a preference for older men and younger women. This setup often leads to younger women having fewer resources and education compared to their older partners, reinforcing the power dynamic where men typically hold more control in the relationship (Lips, 1991; Steil, 1997; as cited in Eagly and Wood, 1999). To explain Buss's findings of cross-cultural consistency Eagly and Wood "point to similarities in the sexual division of labor (sic) in the studied societies [and that] these similarities produce these relatively invariant sex differences" (p. 416). The authors reanalysed Buss's data to assess whether sex differentiated mate preferences could be explained by the traditional gendered division of labour. They hypothesised "that a higher level of gender equality lessens these sex differences [and that they] represented societies' gender equality in terms of archival data available from the United Nations" (United Nations Development Programme, 1995, as cited in Eagly and Wood, 1999, p. 416). Eagly and Wood found that in countries ranked highly for measures of social gender equality women's preference for a mate with high earning capacity and men's preference for a mate in their fertile prime decreased. They (p. 418 - 419) explain that:

[E]xamination of preferences for a spouse's age showed that as gender equality increased, women expressed less preference for older men, men expressed less preference for younger women, and consequently the sex difference in the preferred age of mates became smaller [which] suggest that

sex differences in age preferences reflect a sex-differentiated division of labor (sic).

Susan Sontag, in her 1972 essay 'The Double Standard Of Aging', reflects on the equation of youth with sexual desirability for women. She argues that in highly industrialised societies youth is highly valued and valorised because it serves ever-increasing productivity and unlimited use of natural resources as per the requirements of consumer capitalism. Sontag argues that the "prestige of youth" afflicts everyone in society, however, a double standard exists whereby women are more severely punished than men for aging and men are 'allowed' to age in ways not afforded to women. Sontag relates this to conventional masculine and feminine ideals whereby ideal masculine qualities are enhanced with age but ideal feminine qualities are not. As she explains (p. 286):

"Femininity" is identified with incompetence, helplessness, passivity, noncompetitiveness, being nice. Age does not improve these qualities ...
"Masculinity" is identified with competence, autonomy, self-control – qualities which the disappearance of youth does not threaten. Competence in most of the activities expected from men, physical sports excepted, increases with age.

These socio-cultural ideals are most brutally manifest in the disparities between men and women in the context of heterosexual pairing. Women are considered sexually viable for a shorter period compared to men. Even in their old age unattractive men can still be considered desirable partners for younger women. However, women, even those who are attractive, often become sexually undesirable at a much younger age, except as partners for very elderly men. This means that aging for women is often associated with a gradual loss of sexual desirability, while men can maintain their sexual viability as long as they can engage in sexual activity.

This difference puts women at a disadvantage because their sexual attractiveness is judged based on stricter standards related to appearance and age. As individuals age, women face greater societal pressure than men to preserve a youthful appearance. In their younger years, women are expected to embody the ideal image of beauty, characterized by a slim physique, smooth skin, and graceful movements. Their goal is to maintain this ideal appearance for as long as possible, despite the natural aging process. However, this youthful look is only sustainable for a limited time before women must contend with the inevitable changes brought about by aging. Consequently, women often expend considerable effort attempting to bridge the divide between societal beauty standards and the natural progression of aging. This endeavour consumes significant energy as women strive to uphold an idealised, unchanging image in the face of aging. As Sontag (1972) states, “a vast array of products in jars and tubes ... exist to stave off, or mask, developments that are entirely normal biologically” (p. 291).

The socio-cultural ideal of youthful sexual desirability is reinforced through the male gaze. Mulvey (1998, as cited in Glapka, 2018), a feminist cinema theorist, first theorised the male gaze which “originally denoted film production techniques that reproduce the voyeuristic and eroticized perspective of the assumed male heterosexual protagonist, which is internalized by the audience” (Glapka, 2018, p. 87). Visual media, heavily influenced by the male gaze (although increasingly less so, as evident in increasingly diverse forms of female representation), predominantly portrays young women as objects of desire. Movies, television shows, advertisements, and other forms of media often feature young female characters who conform to narrow beauty norms which reinforce the idea that youthfulness (along with, typically, whiteness, location in the middle-class, unwrinkled skin, fine facial features, fitness, well-toned, and slimness) is synonymous with attractiveness and desirability (Ponterotto, 2016). Visual culture as controlled by men exerts control over the representation of women and, consequentially, dictates which attributes are

valued. Because these representations are internalised men often express preferences for younger partners which stems from the belief that young women possess greater fertility (although paradoxically they do not always want to reproduce), vitality, and sexual appeal. It is a self-perpetuating cycle.

The beauty imperative discourse thus reinforces and perpetuates hegemonic beauty ideals by emphasizing the importance of conforming to these ideals in order to be valued, successful, and/or desirable. Indeed, Kwan and Trautner (p. 63) emphasise the link between perceived beauty and reward, stating that:

Not only do individuals associate positive traits with beautiful persons, physically attractive people hold a communication advantage in social interactions and are more likely to experience employment, educational, and marital success compared to unattractive persons. While both women and men perform beauty work, in light of the double standard of beauty, beauty work plays a more central role in women's lives.

This section explored the 'Beauty and Body' product category, which includes products aimed at maintaining and enhancing women's physical appearance. The analysis identifies two key sexual scripts: the expectation for women to work continuously on maintaining a youthful, attractive appearance with minimal visible imperfections, including during motherhood, and the importance of a youthful appearance for women's attractiveness. This is further emphasised by the beauty imperative discourse, which emphasises adherence to female beauty norms and hegemonic beauty ideals as crucial for women's self-worth and social value. By examining the products imbued agentic capacities, promotion, and the language used in marketing materials and demonstrations, the ways in which these products reinforce and perpetuate these scripts and underlying discourses have been

highlighted, ultimately contributing to the pressure and expectation placed on women to conform to these norms and ideals.

Bath and Shower

Overview

This section examines the 'Bath and Shower' product category. These products focus on hygiene and fragrance, body hair maintenance, and sexual desirability. They are more overtly tied to sex and sexuality than those constituting the 'Body and Beauty' category and therefore the identified sexual scripts contain more explicit guidance for women regarding sexual practices and in particular the body work considered necessary in terms of preparing oneself for desirable sexual practices. This category contains five products: 'Coochy' is a moisturising shave cream; 'Skinny Dip' is a scented bubble bath and shower gel; 'Kiss' is a scented body spray; 'Basic Instinct' is a "sex attractant" fragrance; and 'Afterglow' is a shimmer body moisturiser. These products reflect various sexual scripts and discourses related to women's attractiveness, desirability, and body expectations.

Thing-Power

The primary difference between 'Bath and Shower' products and those in the previous category is that they are primarily liquids used in water during bathing and rinsed off the body after use or sprayed onto the skin after bathing. Exceptions to this are 'Afterglow'. These products differ from the lotions in the 'Beauty and Body' category, which are designed to be rubbed into the skin as part of a daily skincare routine. The efficacy of 'Bath and Shower' products is more immediate, like

sex toys, and is expressed after use (in the case of 'Coochy' some user effort is required to achieve it as the product only facilitates/enhances shaving efficacy). The two categories have similarities, as products in the 'Bath and Shower' category are also designed to be applied to the skin and are purchased in limited quantities in plastic containers. They also require regular repurchasing, have limited shelf life, and efficacy. Additionally, they have a kinetic feel and scent that users will immediately notice. Scent is a prominent feature of these products, and in the case of 'Kiss' and 'Basic Instinct', it is their primary purpose.

Bath and shower products often have secondary aspects of thing-power. They are imbued with transformational claims and designed to transform the user's experience, mood, or attractiveness. For instance, the bubble bath 'Skinny Dip' enhances sensory experience and indulgence. Nic emphasised how much she loves the scent 'pink paradise' and the website states it is an "indulgent shower gel and bubble bath ... more bubbles = more time soaking, more time relaxing, and more time putting yourself first!". Other products, such as 'Kiss' and 'Basic Instinct', are marketed to increase sexual allure and thus confidence, beauty, and desirability. For example, the website description of the scented body spray 'Kiss' claims it will have users "feeling sexy ... all day long". 'Basic Instinct', the 'sex attractant' scent, claims it has the power to "enhance your natural allure" (website). Additionally, these products' packaging and personal testimonials from party facilitators convey a sense of exclusivity and efficacy. Overall, these products are imbued with transformative power to enhance mood, attractiveness, and sexual confidence, aligning with Bennett's concept of thing-power and an objects capacity to produce effects beyond their physical form.

Identified Scripts

A primary sexual script identified emphasises the need for women to increase their attractiveness, desirability and sexual appeal. This is evident in product descriptions that urge women to improve their appearance (primarily) for men. For instance, the 'Coochy' data excerpts highlight the importance of maintaining smooth, hair-free skin. The catalogue promotes joining the "smooth-skin revolution", ensuring that bikini area, underarms, legs, and other shaved areas are free from red bumps, and having skin that will "look sexy, smell delicious, and feel irresistibly soft to the touch during your most intimate moments". Hair removal is positioned as part of normative essential bodily preparations for attracting a man (or, latently, a woman) and ensuring the durability of this desirability when the body is touched (and in the case of the male gaze, assessed). It also implies that attractiveness and desirability (primarily to men, but also the other idealised self) are important factors in women's grooming choices. Smooth, hair-free skin is particularly emphasised as important in the 'bikini area' which is commonly understood to be the pubic region (often including the labia). Furthermore, 'Coochy' is a slang term for vagina.

Nic and Donna's presentation further emphasised the importance of 'Coochy' for smooth skin, especially in the 'bikini area', and repeated it is one of the company's best-selling products. Nic mentioned that 'Coochy' is effective in addressing ingrown hairs and red spots in the bikini area. She also advised party participants to:

Smooth it over your legs and bikini area and honestly, the tiniest bit goes a really long way. Your razor will just slide over the 'Coochy', it's really moisturising. So, it's going to stop the red bumps and it's safe on your bikini

area ... I really can't rave enough about it, it's such a wonderful product and it is the companies top selling product because it is just amazing.

Donna discussed 'Coochy' in a way that portrays a hair free body, and a hair free vulva in particular, as an inherent part of being a sexually desirable woman and if you do not use these products in the prescribed ways then you are not a woman – which essentialises and naturalises shaving to achieve a hair-free body. She also expressed discomfort with using anatomically correct terms for genitals:

I hate the word [penis] and vagina is disgusting ... I call this my sninny [referring to vagina]. So, as a woman, what happens is – especially if you have children – you kind of just go “fuck I can't be bothered shaving my fancy, I can't be bothered having sex, it's just annoying” but you have to get back to that feeling of being a woman again. So, we start off by doing that with shaving and I love our shaving creams ... you put this on two minutes before you shave your sninny and it softens the hair follicle and makes shaving beautiful, and you get no rash, no pimply anything, it's just beautiful. So, I've got 'Coochy' in the 'Flirt' [a scent], pheromone induced. So, you shave your sninny and the next thing you know your man, or your woman, wants to get right in amongst it”.

Furthermore, Donna's anecdote about women losing interest in their appearance and sex life after having children highlights the expectation that women should highly prioritise their desirability and sexual allure by shaving their genitals, and how women are encouraged to “get back to that feeling of being a women again”, suggesting that maintaining one's pubic hair is a part of an exemplary feminine identity.

Toerien et al. (2005) note that the removal of women's body hair is not a modern or Western invention. Historical accounts of hair removal can be found in Ancient Rome, Egypt, Greece, North America, Uganda, and the Tobriand Islands. However, the reasons for body hair removal that are relevant to my thesis are rooted in contemporary socio-cultural norms and ideals. The desire to emulate a pre-pubescent body, with hairless genitals, as desirable to both men and the self, is an extension of the female preservation of youth, as discussed earlier. Sontag (1972) argues that in order for women to meet idealised beauty standards and norms they must maintain their ideal youthful appearance for as long as possible, despite natural aging processes. Said youthful appearance concerns not only wrinkles and body size, but also the appearance of ones genitals. This is reflected by gendered differences in genital hair removal. Butler et al. (2015, p. 48) state that 95% of their male and female participants had:

Removed their pubic hair on at least one occasion in the past 4 weeks
[however] women were significantly more likely to report their typical status as hair-free (50% vs. 19%) and men were significantly more likely to prefer a hair-free sexual partner (60% vs. 24%).

The sex differences in genital hair removal suggest that while both sexes are concerned with the 'tidiness' of their pubic hair women are much more likely to be entirely genital hair free and desired more by men as a result. Blinne (2015) explains how this practice has been normalised through media attention in recent years, as seen in television, films, and celebrity endorsements. However, the influence of pornography on men's expectations of women's pubic hair cannot be ignored. Women's genital hair removal can be seen as a way to maintain an idealised youthful appearance, which is reinforced by social norms and media representation. This practice is also influenced by pedophilic culture in which (Labre, 2002, as cited in Blinne, 2015, p. 11 – 12):

[A]ssociating female sexual attractiveness with the visual characteristics of girls' genital areas, [pubic hair removal] may contribute to the sexual objectification of girls. In addition, the removal of body hair from women's genital area also seems to provide support of the construction of women as childlike.

As such, women's removal of pubic hair can be interpreted as a logical extension of maintaining an idealised youthful appearance.

Furthermore, the way Donna presents 'Basic Instinct', the pheromone induced fragrance, heavily implies that the motivation for using the product (at least in part) is for women to make themselves more attractive (in this instance) to men by aligning themselves with conventional feminine beauty ideals. She also implies that men may be so entranced by the fragrance that they are amenable to gift giving:

So, we have the 'Basic Instinct'. Basic Instinct is just basically bottled sex, okay? It's pure pheromones. So, you put it on, I'll put it on and like, go down to the BP station. Hope to get some free BP. So, you rub it on, and it goes with your perfume, it enhances any perfume. And it's a sexual – it's a sexual attractant.

The website description of 'Kiss' mentions it as an "alluring scent" that will make the user feel "sexy and rejuvenated," while 'Basic Instinct' is described as a "pheromone-packed sex attractant". These descriptions suggest that women should use scents to enhance their desirability and make themselves more appealing to (primarily, and overtly) heterosexual men. But the agentic capacity of 'Kiss' is revealed by the claim that it will make the user feel "sexy and rejuvenated" and suggests that it also has the ability to heighten a women's attraction to their idealised

selves, which may include being femininely and alluringly scented. However, the 'Basic Instinct' blurb's description of being a sex attractant could potentially and latently refer to same-sex attraction, but this is not explicitly expressed in the context.

The product description of 'Basic Instinct' on the website encourages customers to 'enhance your natural allure' with the product. The company uses the discourse of biological essentialism in marketing by emulating basic 'instinct' with artificial pheromones while denying its actual practice. The statement implies that women already possess some level of natural attraction, and they should use the transformative capacity of products like 'Basic Instinct' to enhance it. Lastly, Donna's anecdote above implies that women should focus on their desirability and sexual allure not only in intimate moments but also in everyday situations. The website and catalogue description of 'Kiss' also imply that women should always be 'primed' for potential desirable sexual encounters. Ultimately, this highlights the sexual identity as the most important and valuable aspect of a woman's subjectivity. It also reinforces the importance of women aligning themselves to the male gaze through the adoption and practice of everyday female ideals.

In summary, the 'Bath and Shower' product category promotes a prominent sexual script that emphasizes the importance of women enhancing their desirability and sexual allure for heterosexual men (most prominently), as well as their ideal self (overtly and latently) and social value through adherence to conventional beauty ideals. The product descriptions and presentations suggest that women should focus on removing body hair, using scents, and enhancing their physical features to increase their attractiveness in both intimate and everyday situations. Overall, this analysis exposes the underlying expectations and discourses related to women's attractiveness, desirability, and body expectations, influencing women's grooming choices and reinforcing the idea that their appeal to others is a crucial aspect of feminine identity.

Discourses Informing The Scripts

The sexual discourse that most prominently informs this sexual script is the traditional and patriarchal discourse. This discourse emphasises women's primary role as objects of desire and their need to cater to the male gaze (Ponterotto, 2016). However, as discussed above, Donna explained that “your man, or your woman, wants to get right amongst it [genitals]” after using ‘Coochy’ which demonstrates the expansion of the male gaze to include (or dominate) women. This discourse positions women's attractiveness and sexual allure as essential aspects of their identity and self-worth, implying that they should continually seek ways to enhance their appeal to others, particularly to heterosexual men in first instance, but also (latently) homosexual women.

Upon closer inspection, the sexual discourse in this script is not solely focused on general physical attraction and sexual appeal; it also promotes a specific, constructed notion of beauty that emulates the prepubescent female body - smooth-skinned, firm, and free of natural odours. According to Ponterotto (2016), this problematic aspect reflects a deeper level of patriarchal control. The male gaze plays a significant role in shaping and dictating aesthetic norms that women are expected to conform to, not only making them appealing to men but also moulding them into a certain fantasy that emphasises the youthful female body and its associated sexual energy and passion. This reinforces the power dynamics inherent in patriarchal societies, as it is not only about who women should be desirable for (predominantly men), but also what form that desirability should take.

The male gaze concept has evolved to encompass women, which suggests a subtle internalisation of patriarchal norms. Women are no longer just subject to male

observation and evaluation, but are also compelled to assess themselves and other women through a patriarchal and androcentric lens. This reinforces patriarchal dominance in all areas, making women active participants in their own subjugation.

Enhancement Creams

Overview

This section focuses on enhancement creams, a product category that includes creams and gels designed to improve, augment, or otherwise enhance sexual experience for both men and women. These creams correspond to various sexual functions and experiences such as heightening sensory experiences, improving oral sex, or prolonging penetrative intercourse. The category consists of five products. 'Great Head' is a flavoured oral gel designed to relax the users throat during fellatio. 'Up All Night' is a flavoured cream that delays ejaculation and prolongs penetrative sex. 'Whipped' is a flavoured creamy lubricant for oral and digital sex. 'Sensations' is a flavoured warming lubricant for enhancing (primarily) oral sex. Lastly, there is a set of four clitoral-based orgasm enhancement products with slight variations in intensity. 'Boost' is an enhancement cream "perfect for first-time users" and is the variant party consultants discussed the most. 'Amp' is a "unique gel consistency [that] supports enhanced arousal and excitement". 'Pure' is an enhancement cream for sensitive women. Lastly, 'O' is an enhancement cream for couples as it "powerful enough for both men and women". All products are flavoured and scented, except for 'Pure', which is designed for sensitive skin.

Thing-Power

The primary thing-power of sexual enhancement products is similar to that of 'Bath and Shower' products. They are primarily gels and liquids that are applied to and rubbed into the skin, but not rinsed off. These products are designed to be used during sexual activities and their efficacy depends on their presence at the time. For example, 'Boost' is applied to the clitoris to enhance pleasure from touch in that area. The effects of these products are immediate (although dependent on subsequent stimulation), expressed immediately after use, and are more similar to 'Bath and Shower' products and sex toys than those in the 'Beauty and Body' category. They are usually sold in plastic containers with limited quantities (and in some cases, very limited quantities – a tube of 'Boost' contains only 30 millilitres), have a limited shelf life, and require frequent repurchasing if the user enjoys the sensations they produce. Additionally, these products have a distinct feel, scent, and flavour that the user and their sexual partner will immediately notice. Therefore, the experience of using these products is intimate, sensory-based, and dependent on further stimulation from the user or their partner.

Secondarily, all five are presented, described, and promoted as possessing the agentic capability to transform (improve, alter, enhance, prolong) a variety of normative (or at least, widely enacted) sexual practices. They offer different transformative attributes, such as improving oral experiences, enhancing pleasure for both partners, transforming oral experiences with flavour and texture, altering sensations during sexual interaction, and intensifying sexual pleasure and arousal. The party presenters provide testimonials to reinforce these transformative attributes. For instance, when presenting 'Boost' (and its variants 'Amp', 'Pure', and 'O') Nic provides an enthusiastic endorsement and Donna uses the product to highlight the importance of clitoral stimulation in female sexual satisfaction. The differentiation of variants target different aspects of pleasure, sensitivity, and arousal, positioning them as tools for catering to diverse sexual preferences and bodily sensitivities. Additionally, the presenters emphasise the different scenarios

(solo, couples, during oral sex) these products can be used in which implies adaptability and transformative potential in various sexual contexts and preferences.

Identified Scripts

The most noticeable and straightforward sexual script in this product category is the assumption of heterosexuality, which implies that sexual partnerships primarily involve a man and a woman. This is evident in the material properties, intended use, and promotional framing of several products. Out of the four orgasm enhancement products ('Amp', 'Pure', 'O', and 'Boost') 'O' is deemed suitable for couples as it works on both female and male genitalia, while the other three are marked for female users only. During the presentation Donna emphasised the significance of clitoral stimulation in female pleasure compared to the perceived simplicity of male pleasure, stating "guys can get off like so easily – we so don't". Nic also described how oral sex can be enhanced by the product when "he goes downtown". The promotion of 'Whipped', 'Great Head', and 'Up All Night' further reinforces this assumption of heterosexuality. The catalogue description of 'Whipped' suggests that it can be used with a "pleasure sleeve [male masturbation sleeve] for an unforgettable experience" (catalogue, p. 14) and Donna referred to using 'Whipped' on a male partner as "flavoured cock". Similarly, 'Great Head' and 'Up All Night', which are designed exclusively for penis use, are promoted at a female-only sex toy party where heterosexual practices are repeatedly mentioned (such as the female attendees ability to "deep throat" after using 'Great Head'). It is evident that there is little consideration for non-heterosexual couples, despite these products being suitable for homosexual, lesbian, or non-binary couples. As a result, any scripts involving same-sex or non-binary sexual practices remain unexpressed in this context.

The study identified additional sexual scripts that prioritise sensory experiences, playfulness, adventurousness, experimentation, and the prioritisation of clitoral stimulation and therefore women's sexual pleasure, enjoyment, and satisfaction during sexual encounters. In contrast, evident scripts in the 'Enhancement Cream' product category emphasise men's power, pleasure, and active subject position during sexual interactions.

The product descriptions for 'Sensations', 'Great Head', and 'Whipped' demonstrate the prevalence of sexual scripts that emphasise sensory experience, playfulness, and experimentation during sexual encounters. The catalogue description of 'Sensations' highlights how the product "delivers exciting heat" when exposed to "your warm breath and a little friction – exactly how is up to you!".

Users are encouraged to rub the product into their skin and breathe warm breath onto it, enhancing the physical sensation of a tongue stimulating the receiving partner's genitals. The product encourages users to explore new and different ways of experiencing pleasure, such as rubbing and licking off the lubricant from nipples and discovering new erogenous zones enabled by the products properties. This emphasises the importance of heightened sensations during sexual interaction. Similarly, the descriptions of 'Whipped' emphasise its use for oral sex and that it can be paired with a pleasure sleeve for an "unforgettable experience". The website description highlights the flavour by comparing it to a decadent bite of cake with vanilla frosting.

A further sexual script identified for this product category encourages foregrounding and heightening pleasure and enjoyment derived from sexual activity, particularly female pleasure. The line of four orgasm enhancement products – 'Amp', 'Pure', 'O', and 'Boost' - demonstrate this through written descriptions and the conversations provided by Nic and Donna.

Firstly, all four products are designed specifically to be applied to the clitoris and enhance subsequent stimulation. This suggests a focus on enhanced clitoral stimulation and therefore promotes women's sexual pleasure, enjoyment, and satisfaction during sexual activity. Nic advised the group that:

You're going to apply a small amount [of 'Boost], and it is basically an orgasm enhancer cream just a small amount, on the clitoris, it's going to draw the blood to the surface. And when you orgasm, it's going to be, ex-cit-ing (laughs).

When presenting the product Donna patently emphasised clitoral stimulation during sexual activity, stating:

We're going to talk clitoral stimulation. Okay, so, sometimes it's hard to get off. Just being honest. Like, who gets off on this [mimes unenthusiastic digital vaginal penetration]. Who gets off on just this? Like, we need more. Guys can get off like so easily – we so don't. Like, they think it's all about them, actually it's all about us. We don't need just the hole we need that little bit on the end, our little friend. So, it's all about clitoral stimulation! Because we forget about that bit! We forget about our girl bits, right? Right, what happens is, especially if you've had babies, you kind of – you forget about your girl bits. And it's like you need sex, you just want to go [moans]. You need clitoral stimulation!

Donna's discussion emphasises the importance of clitoral stimulation for women's sexual pleasure and satisfaction and provides a salient example of the centrality of female pleasure in this sexual script.

Another aspect of the female pleasure-centred sexual script can be identified in Nic's presentation of 'Boost'. She opened by saying:

I'm not going to lie, this is one of my ultimate favourites ... [the] first time I tried it – loved it. Now... we're going to talk about masturbation. Some people do it, some people don't, I think it's okay. I use this alone, that's how I like to use it.

Additionally, the catalogue description claims to enhance "your most intimate moments" which implies those experienced during masturbation and orgasms experienced with partners. Nic encouraging participants to try the product, and discussing her own experiences and acceptance of masturbation, normalises it as an accepted topic of conversation and a necessary aspect of women's sexual pleasure.

Furthermore, 'Boost' is described in the catalogue as being "enhanced with deliciously kissable flavors" and 'O' comes in vanilla frosting flavour, indicating that the product is designed to encourage and enhance oral sex which is a common way for women to reach orgasm (Shirazi et al., 2018). Nic mentioned oral sex with reference to flavour and encouragement during her presentation. She described that 'Boost' is designed for "for oral favours, so, he's going to go downtown, and you're going to go all over the world! (everyone laughs). So yeah, that's why it's flavoured. Some guys, you know, some guys are fussy! Just get down there!" Similarly, when discussing 'Sensations', Donna claimed that "it goes really hot and feels really yummy so if someone's licking you down there you just go off the Richter [scale]". This analysis of sexual scripts presents a detailed picture of how products can have a positive impact on women's sexual experiences.

Contrasting Scripts

The sexual scripts for the 'Enhancement Creams' product category concentrate on men as the dominant and powerful sexual partner, while women's pleasure is depicted as secondary. This reinforces heteronormative dominance, overrides natural resistance, and places men's pleasure during oral sex as primary, while women's comfort is secondary. Nic's personal narrative about using 'Great Head' vividly illustrates this. She casually mentioned that her husband forces her head onto his erect penis during oral sex, reinforcing the traditional sexual script where men are active and in control.

Similarly, 'Up All Night' product descriptions present men as active sexual participants who initiate and control the encounter, while women are depicted as passive recipients of pleasure. This resonates with the wider social discourse that associates masculinity with control, power, and dominance, and portrays the product as a tool for men to assert control over their sexual performance. The catalogue and website descriptions mention that it is designed to "make great lovemaking last longer", placing emphasis on the man's ability to prolong sexual interaction via penetrative sex. This suggests that men are expected to take an active role in the duration and quality of the sexual experience while women are expected to be more passive and receptive. This is further illustrated by promotional claims that the product "can help slow down your man, yet allows him to still have enjoyable sexual experiences" and will encourage men to "spend more time pleasing you". These descriptions suggest that men should take an active role in determining the duration and quality of the sexual encounter, and that their pleasure is the primary focus.

Emphasising the product's ability to 'make great lovemaking last longer' and 'slow down your man,' the descriptions suggest a focus on the man's ability to perform and prolong the sexual experience, which implies that the man's performance is central to the quality of penetrative sexual intercourse. The focus on delayed male ejaculation, and therefore prolonged penetrative time 'pleasing' a female sexual partner, reproduces an andro/erection-centric approach to female sexual pleasure whereby a woman's pleasure is dependent on a man's ability and willingness to provide it. This effectively frames women's pleasure as something that is achieved via men's performance and therefore as secondary. Furthermore, this product is designed to help men "still have enjoyable experiences", which again places emphasis on men's pleasure and satisfaction and suggests that men's pleasure is prioritised over women's. The assurance that the product does not use a mechanism to delay ejaculation that reduces male sexual pleasure reinforces this priority on men's pleasure.

Product descriptions of 'Great Head' and 'Whipped' demonstrate the sexual script that positions men as the more powerful sexual partner. 'Great Head' promises technological means to overcome the natural gag reflex, altering a woman's physiological response to accommodate a man's pleasure. This reflects the social-sexual discourse that women's bodies are mutable and can be altered or controlled for the purpose of male pleasure. 'Whipped', on the other hand, alters the taste of genitals during oral sex and is framed as enticement to perform fellatio.

To illustrate, both products are described as predominantly enhancing the man's pleasure during oral sex. The website description of 'Great Head' mentions it will be the act "as enjoyable for you as it is for him" and Donna claimed 'Whipped' will make it taste "the bomb diggity". This emphasis on male pleasure highlights a power dynamic whereby it is the woman's role to provide pleasure and the man is the recipient of it. 'Whipped' is a product that can be used for oral sex on either

partner however there is no mention of cunnilingus or suggestion of women being the recipients of pleasure from oral sex in the catalogue or website based descriptions or from the sex toy party facilitators. This also was not mentioned by any of the sex toy party participants. This power dynamic is further reinforced by the descriptions of 'Great Head', which emphasise that the product helps to suppress the female gag reflex during oral sex. This suggests that women should make an effort to accommodate the man's desires during sexual encounters, even if it means suppressing a natural reflex or altering their bodies to accommodate and ultimately optimise male pleasure.

Nic and Donna both share their experiences with using 'Great Head,' which highlights the power dynamic in which women are expected to accommodate men's desires during sex. Nic's husband grabs her head 'rams' while she simultaneously performs oral sex, which she finds uncomfortable. Donna jokingly suggests punching a man in the face if he is a 'thruster'. Lastly, there are instances of language use that highlight men's dominance. The product names 'Great Head' and 'Whipped' suggest a submissive role for the women using them. Also, during the conversations about 'Whipped', Donna and the party participants refer to the penis as a "fuck stick" which further reinforces the idea that men are the dominant sexual partners.

Discourses Informing The Scripts

The sexual scripts that emphasise sensory experience, experimentation, and novelty and women's sexual pleasure and enjoyment are primarily informed by the sex positive discourse. As Anderson (2013) explains this discourse promotes the idea that consensual sexual activities, experimentation, and individual expression of

sexuality are empowering and should be encouraged. It acknowledges and supports women's sexual desires, pleasure, and agency, and emphasises the importance of communication and consent in sexual relationships.

In contrast, the sexual scripts (or parts thereof) that focus on men as the active and powerful sexual partner and position women's pleasure as secondary to men's are informed by sexually androcentric and heteronormative discourse. These discourses perpetuate traditional gender roles and power dynamics in sexual relationships, often privileging male pleasure and disregarding the importance of female sexual agency and pleasure. As Dworkin and O'Sullivan (2005) detail androcentric discourses prioritise the male perspective, experiences, and desires in sexual encounters. This bias leads to the normalisation of male pleasure as the primary goal in sexual interactions, often overshadowing or disregarding female pleasure. As a result, women's sexual desires and preferences may be marginalised, and their experiences may be treated as less important or less valid than those of men. Relatedly, but more broadly, heteronormativity is the belief that people fall into two distinct and complementary genders (male and female) with natural roles in life. It assumes that heterosexuality is the only sexual orientation or the norm, and that sexual and marital relations are most fitting between people of opposite sexes (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). This discourse reinforces traditional gender roles and power dynamics in relationships, positioning men as the dominant and active partner and women as passive and submissive (Pascoe, 2005).

Conclusion

In this chapter I analysed the promotion of Pure Romance's 'lotions and potions' to reveal the intricate ways in which the discursive and material elements of beauty products, cosmetics, and sexual enhancement creams intersect with and

perpetuate heteronormative and sexually androcentric values and practices in the form of sexual scripts. The 'Beauty and Body' products reinforce the heteronormative notion that youthfulness and blemish-free skin are essential for women to be socially and sexually recognised as desirable. Through the promotion of self-improvement and bodily maintenance as ongoing pursuits, these products uphold the normative ideal of continuous enhancement to maintain youthful desirability. Similarly, the 'Bath and Shower' products contribute to the enhancement of the sexual body by aiding in its preparation and beautification, catering predominantly to male or androcentric sexual desires most prominently. While overt discourses prioritise women's desirability to men, latent messages promote self-pleasure and heightened social status among women, as well as potential spaces for homosexual desires. In contrast, the 'Enhancement Creams' category presents contradictory sexual scripts, ranging from encouragement of playfulness, experimentation, and emphasis on female-centred pleasure to reinforcement of men's power and dominance in sexual interactions. Despite variations in script emphasis, all three product categories ultimately serve to uphold hegemonic sexual discourses, perpetuating conservative ideals of beauty and sexual practice. Through a combination of micro-level analysis of sexual scripts and macro-level exploration of underlying sexual discourses, in this chapter I was able to elucidate the ways in which 'lotions and potions' contribute to the reproduction of normative sexual norms and values. While opportunities for contestation and varied sexual practices are apparent, the overall findings underscore the enduring influence of hegemonic sexual discourses in shaping women's everyday experiences and practices.

Chapter 6: Sex toys

Introduction

In this chapter I analyse the agentic thing-power and promotional context of the sex toys offered by Pure Romance to identify and illustrate what sexual scripts and wider elemental discourses, as identified in previous chapters, are similarly promoted or contested. In the previous chapters concerning beauty and body, bath and shower, and sexual enhancement products several sexual scripts were identified and illustrated. Of those, the ones relevant to this chapter are the assumption of heterosexuality, the penetration imperative, the prioritisation of male pleasure and agentic sexuality, and conversely the prioritisation of female pleasure and agentic sexuality. These scripts draw from the discourses of heteronormativity, androcentrism, and sex positivity respectively.

I begin this chapter by outlining the primary thing-power of all sex toys sold by Pure Romance at the time of data generation which includes their ability to be switched on and off at will, the emulation of human bio-physical characteristics such as the erect penis and the transcendence of its limitations, and their capacity to provide a variety of stimulative techniques beyond what is typically naturally possible. To provide context I then define each sex toy category under consideration and provide descriptions and pictures of several sex toys Pure Romance sold at the time of data generation. In the latter half of this chapter I demonstrate the existence of dominant yet varied sexual practices, scripts, and discourses underpinned by primary and specific (often enhancing or transcendent of natural capacities) thing-powers of sex toys. Overall, in this chapter I argue that the agentic propensities and promotional framing of some products promoted in the context of the sex toy party,

like cock rings and male masturbation sleeves, can straightforwardly reproduce conservative and male-focused sexual scripts and discourses. However other products, like penetrative/dual-action vibrators and clitoral vibrators, illustrate points of entanglements. They promote of ideals that challenge sexual conservatism, often by enhancing and/or transcending the typical bio-sexual capacities of male sexual partners in particular, and in doing so clearly promote a woman centred approach to sexual pleasure and satisfaction. However, simultaneously, penetrative and dual-action vibrators in particular also reproduce the androcentric ideal of female sexual pleasure as an innate outcome of heterosexual penetrative sex that is ultimately enhanced by the use of penetrative sex toy technologies. Additionally, in comparison to the products discussed in Chapter Five sex toys, over all, represent more of a challenge to conventional/androcentric sexual ideals and norms.

Primary Thing-Power

This is an examination of the primary thing-power of all the sex toys under consideration in this chapter. A discussion of the thing-powers specific to different toys is discussed in the section dedicated to those product categories below.

One of the primary thing-powers of sex toys is their ability to be switched on and off and the expectation of automatic results, allowing users to control their activation and deactivation. Additionally, many sex toys are designed to emulate the bio-physical characteristics of human genitalia, such as erect penises or clitoral stimulation. They are also designed to transcend the limitations of human anatomy, offering stimulation and pleasure beyond what is physically possible. For example, penetrative and dual-action vibrators transcend the limitations of the erect penis by providing enduring penetrative capability for as long as the user desires. Another key thing-power of sex toys is their capacity to offer a range of enduring speed and

vibration settings that can be chosen by the user and tailored to their preferences, which provides the capacity for sexual pleasure beyond what is typical possible in unaided sexual interaction. In sum, they can provide consistent and reliable stimulation that is not subject to the limitations of human motivations, stamina or performance. In this way, sex toys use their thing-power to intervene what is regularly possible, offering new possibilities for sexual pleasure and expression.

Sex toys can also challenge societal taboos and stigmas surrounding sexuality. By entering mainstream discourse and marketplaces, they contribute to the normalisation of discussions around sexual wellness and pleasure. Their increased visibility in society helps reduce stigma, fostering open dialogue and acceptance. However, they also reaffirm many of the androcentric and heteronormative discourses and practices that essentialise pleasure and orgasms as inherently achievable which marginalises those (both female and male) who are biologically, physically, psychologically, socially or otherwise unable to orgasm.

Furthermore, the agency of sex toys extends beyond their immediate physical effects. By challenging traditional sexual norms and opening up new possibilities for sexual pleasure, they can also influence broader discourses around sexuality. They can challenge heteronormative and androcentric understandings of sex, and they can promote a more inclusive and diverse understanding of sexual pleasure that includes a wide range of bodies, desires, and practices. In this way, the 'thing-power' of sex toys is not just about their physical properties or their ability to provide pleasure. It is also about their capacity to challenge and reshape our understandings of sexuality and nature. Through their material agency, sex toys can problematise and intervene on nature, offering new possibilities for sexual pleasure and expression.

Clitoral Vibrators

Discussing clitoral vibrators requires some prior information about the clitoris. As Pauls (2015) explains, the clitoris is a female reproductive organ with a high density of nerve endings, recognized as a significant source of female sexual pleasure. It is important to note that most of the clitoris is not visible externally. The visible part, called the glans clitoris, is a small, sensitive part of the organ located at the top of the vulva. The majority of the clitoris is internal and consists of two legs and two bulbs that extend into the body and become engorged with blood during sexual arousal. The clitoris is highly innervated and sensitive to stimulation and is primarily associated with sexual pleasure. In fact, it is the only organ that exists solely for sexual stimulation and pleasure. The clitoris has not been well researched or understood until recently as, historically, research on an understanding of male sexuality and function has taken precedence. Recently, however, research has led to a greater understanding of the structure and function of the clitoris.

In this section I discuss the specific features of clitoral vibrators, focusing on their design, methods of stimulation, and market trends. Clitoral vibrators are sex toys designed for external clitoral stimulation, differing from other sex toys that are designed for vaginal insertion. They may also be used for anal sphincter and nipple stimulation, although this was not promoted by Pure Romance. These vibrators come in various shapes, sizes, and designs and can be used both individually and with a partner during foreplay or sexual intercourse. Their purpose is to enhance sexual satisfaction and aid in achieving orgasm by concentrating stimulation on the glans clitoris.

Clitoral stimulation devices utilise two main techniques: vibration and pulsation (Nixon & Scarcelli, 2022). Vibrating clitoral toys have been available for a longer time, while pulsating clitoral toys are the latest technological innovation.

Vibrating toys stimulate by maintaining direct contact with the clitoris and vulva, producing vibratory motion. Pulsating toys, also known as 'air-suction', 'clit sucker', or 'clitoral pump' toys, use air pressure and suction to generate 'sonic pulses' that reverberate through the clitoral tissue. Although Pure Romance did not sell pulsating clitoral toys during my data generation period, these toys have gained popularity in recent years, as reported by several media outlets. This is because the pulsating air flows mimic the feeling of cunnilingus, which has become a popular choice among consumers. Vibrating clitoral toys, while still popular, provide conventional 'rumbly' vibrations similar to manual stimulation.

In this section I discuss several of the clitoral vibrators sold by Pure Romance at the time of my research. Firstly, 'Premiere' and 'Take A Bow' are each distinguished by unique design and functional elements. 'Premiere' – described as “discreet yet powerful” (Pure Romance, 2017) – is a small toy designed to slip over the finger like a cuff and be held against the clitoris. It also features 10 speeds of vibration and is made of high grade silicone.



Figure 14. 'Premiere' 1

Figure 14. 'Premiere' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017).

'Take A Bow' is a uniquely shaped clitoral vibrator that is designed to be held against and cover the entire glans clitoridis and vulva. The section designed to stimulate the clitoris protrudes inward to provide more targeted stimulation and the bottom section, designed to stimulate the vulva, features ridges for heightened sensory and stimulative sensation. 'Take A Bow' features 10 vibration speeds and is made of "ultra-soft silicone [that] glides over your skin with velvety smoothness" (Pure Romance, 2017).

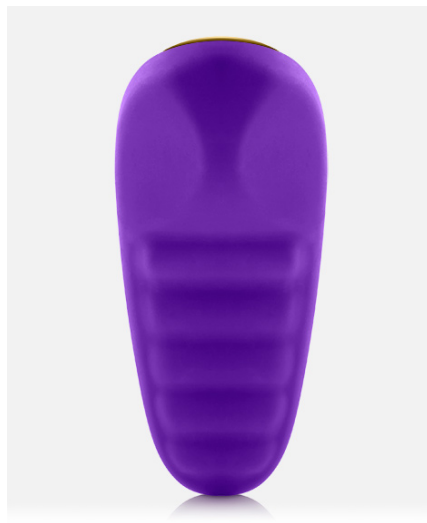


Figure 15. 'Take A Bow' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017).

'Kaia', part of the 'Kalypso Collection', is another uniquely shaped clitoral vibrator. It features two small protruding arms or "flexible, uniquely-shaped ticklers that tease and please you with mind-blowing pleasure" (Pure Romance, 2023). These are designed to surround the glans clitoridis and the bulbous body, which encases the motor, serves as a means of holding it in place. It features 6 vibration speeds and pulsing patterns. 'Kaia' is also made of "velvet-soft" silicone (Pure Romance, 2023).



Figure 16. 'Kaia' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a).

Lastly, 'Fan Favorite' (sic) is a bullet vibrator which features three vibration speeds.



Figure 17. 'Fan Favorite' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017).

Penetrative Vibrators

In this section I elaborate on the specific nature of penetrative vibrators and their thing-power capacities and functionality, drawing on their design characteristics, methods of stimulation, and evolving trends in their market availability.

As Nixon and Scarcelli (2022) explain, penetrative vibrators are typically elongated, curved or straight and designed to mimic an erect penis, although many have evolved beyond mere realism. They often come with additional features such as ridges, bumps, and bulbous tips for enhanced sensations. The 'Penetrative Vibrator' category excludes vibrators with simultaneous clitoral stimulation, which are classified as 'Dual-action Vibrators' and discussed later. These toys are generally made of body-safe materials like silicone, glass, and ABS plastic. The primary form of stimulation provided by penetrative vibrators is internal vibration, with some models designed specifically to target the 'G-spot'. They can be used alone or during partnered sex and offer multi-speed or pattern vibration settings to cater to different preferences and intensities of pleasure. The market for penetrative vibrators has seen an increase in variety and complexity, reflecting the ongoing evolution of the sex toy industry. Additionally, there has been a shift towards more inclusive marketing. Historically, the packaging of penetrative vibrators featured heavily sexualised/pornographised women in 'seductive' clothing and poses. This is because sex toys catered to the male gaze and tended to prioritise their pleasure, in terms of watching a woman use the product, rather than women's pleasure derived from using it. In the past, penetrative vibrators were regarded as tools for preparing women for the experience of penetrative sex with an erect penis. They were often marketed as such and therefore reinforced the male fantasy and an androcentric perspective on sexual pleasure. While women could derive pleasure from using these toys, their primary function was seen as being for the benefit of men (Fahs &

Swank, 2013. Historical advertisements demonstrate this heteronormative and androcentric framing.



Figure 18 (left). 'Give it to her' vibrator advertisement (Source: Montone, 2010).

Figure 19 (right). 'inflatable love maid' advertisement (Source: Tom, 2010).

Contemporary sex toy packaging has evolved from overtly heteronormative designs and advertising to a focus on women's pleasure. This is exemplified by the popular German brand 'Satisfyer', who produce a diverse range of products. The packaging and product design of their sex toys for women (and sometimes for couples) emphasize female pleasure through several key strategies. Firstly, the packaging features feminine silhouettes instead of overtly heteronormative/sexualized images, signalling that the product is designed for women's pleasure. Product descriptions also emphasize the potential for solo and partnered female use, highlighting how the product can enhance female pleasure through its ergonomic design, targeted stimulation of erogenous zones, and customizable settings. The use of inclusive language and imagery appeals to a

diverse range of women, regardless of age, body type, or sexual orientation, promoting the message that pleasure is for everyone. Lastly, the packaging features sleek and discreet designs that convey sophistication and elegance, distancing the products from outdated stereotypes of sex toys as taboo or vulgar. This approach helps normalize the discussion of female pleasure and empowers women to feel comfortable and confident in their sexual exploration.



Figure 20 (left). Satisfyer Pro Plus G-Spot (Source: Adulttoymegastore, n.d1.).

Figure 21 (right). Satisfyer Hot Lover (Source: Adulttoymegastore, n.d2.).



Figure 22. Satisfyer Endless Fun packaging (Source: Cherrycolors, 2022)

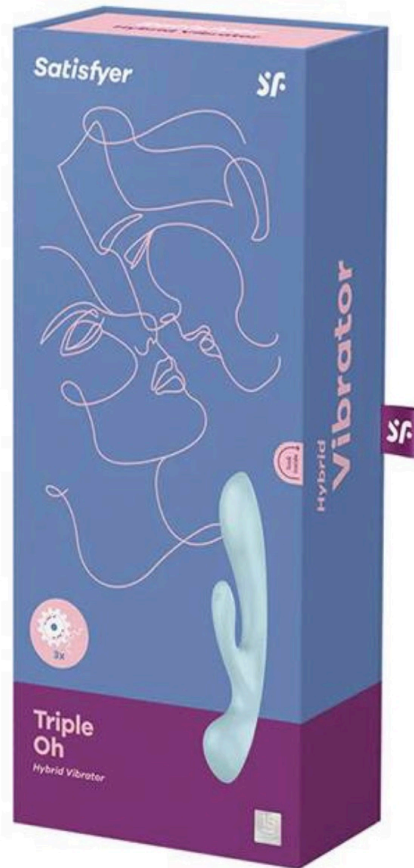


Figure 23. Satisfyer Triple Oh (Source: Adulttoymegastore, n.d3.).

Pure Romance, at the time of my research, sold three varieties of penetrative vibrators. 'Mira' is a non-realistic but phallically shaped vibrator featuring a curved tip for internal clitoral stimulation. It offers 6 speeds of vibration and pulsation and is made of silicone.



Figure 24. 'Mira' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a).

'In The Groove' is a phallically shaped, somewhat realistic, vibrator that features a spiralled shaft for heightened stimulation. Neither the website or the catalogue specifies what it is made of, but it looks to be a somewhat soft or 'jelly' type of rubber based on transparency and sheen. 'In The Groove' features three vibration speeds and four pulsing patterns.



Figure 25. 'In The Groove' (Source: Pure Romance, 2016).

'Rock Star' is a non-realistic vibrator that features indents and raised bumps to create texture and thus enhance stimulation and offers three vibration speeds. Again, neither the website or the catalogue specify what material it is made of but it may be silicone.

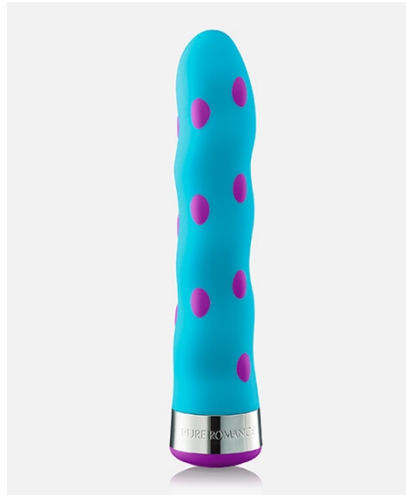


Figure 26. 'Rock Star' (Source: Pure Romance, 2016).

Dual-Action Vibrators

In this section I elaborate on the specific nature of dual-action vibrators and their thing-power capacities and functionality, drawing on their design characteristics, methods of stimulation, and evolving trends in their market availability. As Nixon and Scarcelli (2022) explain dual-action vibrators are a popular type of sex toy that provides simultaneous stimulation to both the external and internal clitoris during penetration. These devices typically consist of a shaft for internal stimulation and an attached protruding extension for external clitoral stimulation. The shaft is often designed to mimic the shape of a penis or has a curved tip to internally stimulate the clitoris, while the clitoral arm is shaped to contour to the body. Dual-action vibrators are equipped with separate motors for each stimulating arm, allowing users to experience varying intensities and patterns of vibration simultaneously. Some models offer additional features, such as rotating beads in the shaft for added internal sensation or pulsation patterns that can be controlled independently. Ridges, bumps, and bulbus tips on the shaft element can provide additional sensation, similar to penetrative vibrators.

Dual-action vibrators represent a notable evolution in the sex toy market, as they cater specifically to the physiological needs of many women who require both internal and external clitoral stimulation for optimum sexual pleasure. Recently there has been a growing trend in advances like app compatibility for remote control and long-distance play functionality. Other trends include luxury vibrators produced with high-quality, body-safe materials like silicone and the sex toys being equipped with powerful, quiet, and rechargeable motors (De Kloe, 2022). Despite these innovations, it's important to note that not all women enjoy the sensation of dual-stimulation, so individual preference and comfort play a crucial role in determining the suitability of these toys.

In this section I discuss several of the dual-action vibrators sold by Pure Romance at the time of my research. 'Main Attraction' is made of silicone, features a curved shaft and bulbous ridged tip designed for enhanced internal clitoral stimulation, and a small tipped protruding external clitoral stimulation arm. It also features ten speeds of independently controlled clitoral and shaft vibration.

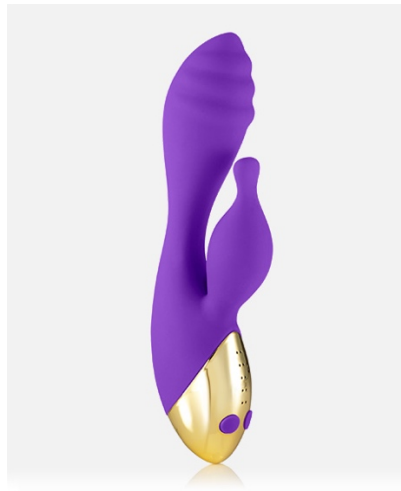


Figure 27. 'Main Attraction' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017).

'Aqua', part of the 'Kalypso Collection', is silicone, conventionally phallic shaped, and features two small 'ears' for external clitoral stimulation.

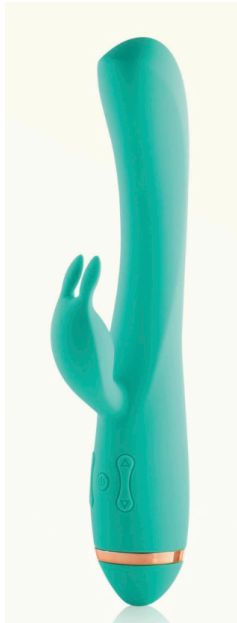


Figure 28. 'Aqua' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a).

'Blind Date' is conventional 'rabbit-style' dual-action vibrator that features a rotating shaft and three speeds of clitoral vibration. Information on composite materials cannot be found, however, it looks to be soft 'jelly' type rubber.



Figure 29. 'Blind Date' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017).

'Do Not Disturb' features a curved insertable shaft and a bulbous external clitoral stimulation arm. It offers seven speeds of vibrations and pulsations, is made of silicone, and features a handle for enhanced control.

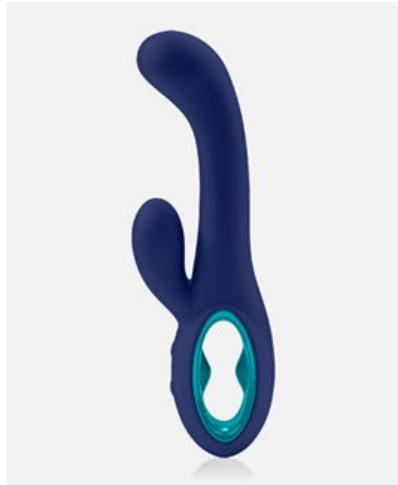


Figure 30. 'Do Not Disturb' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017).

Male Masturbatory Sleeves

This section discusses the ‘Male Masturbatory Sleeves’ product category. As such it begins by providing a brief description of what male masturbatory sleeves are, followed by an overview of the specific design, functionality, and materiality of the two male sleeves sold by Pure Romance at the time of my research.

Male masturbatory sleeves, often simply called masturbators, are sexual devices designed to enhance the sensations experienced during male masturbation (Nixon & Scarcelli, 2022). These devices are typically cylindrical or tubular, intended to mimic the feel of a vagina, mouth, or anus. They are often made of body-safe materials like silicone, TPE (thermoplastic elastomer), or other materials that can provide a soft, stretchy, and tactilely pleasing experience. Masturbatory sleeves can vary widely in complexity and functionality. Some are quite straightforward – essentially a textured tube into which the penis is inserted. Others may have more complex internal structures, designed to provide a variety of different sensations.

At the time of my research Pure Romance sold two varieties of male masturbation sleeves. ‘Free Style’ is described as having a ridged internal sleeve and a closed end which enhances the suction sensation. The website states that this masturbation sleeve “feels like the real thing! (Almost)”; assumed to mean the vaginal canal (Pure Romance, 2017). Neither the catalogue or website specify what material ‘Playmate’ is made of but it appears to be malleable ‘jelly’ rubber.



Figure 31. 'Free Style' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017).

'Playmate' has the same basic function as 'Free Style'. As with 'Free Style' it is not specified what material this toy is made of but it appears to be a soft 'jelly' rubber. The 'Playmate' has "two unique textures" and "can be turned inside out for a completely different sensation" (Pure Romance, 2017). The website also specifies that it is "open ended for solo or couples action". It is implied that the open ended feature of this toy makes it more amenable to partnered play – when the sleeve is slid down the shaft the glans of the penis is exposed through the open end, and therefore can be orally (or otherwise) stimulated simultaneously.

Cock Rings

Cock rings are designed to be worn around the base of the penis and also sometimes also around the testicles. Their primary purpose is to restrict blood flow out of the penis, which can help to maintain an erection, increase its firmness, and potentially prolong the duration of sexual activity (Nixon & Scarcelli, 2022). Cock rings come in a variety of designs and materials, including metal, silicone, rubber, and even leather. They can be adjustable or fixed in size. Some versions are designed

to increase pleasure for the users female partner. For example, many cock rings include vibrational features, or additional components for clitoral stimulation. The vibration can provide additional stimulation to the penis, and if positioned correctly, can stimulate a partner's clitoris during penetrative sex, contributing to mutual pleasure.

The cock rings sold by Pure Romance at the time of my research include a vibrating feature which is why they have been categorised as couples toys. In this section I discuss several of the cock rings sold at the party. 'Double Feature' is comprised of two silicone rings and a protruding, ridged vibrating component.



Figure 32. 'Double Feature' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a).

'Rendezvous' comprised of two jelly rubber cock rings attached to a bullet vibrator - one to be worn around the testicles, and the other to be worn around the base of the erect penis. The bullet vibrator is attached by textured, protruding component.



Figure 33. 'Rendezvous' (Source: Pure Romance, 2017a).

Script and Discourse Reproduction

In this section I describe and analyse prominent sexual scripts and contributing discourses discerned from the promotional materials (catalogue and website based) and sex toy parties. I have scaffolded the structure of this section so that discussion begins with the sexual scripts and discourses that are the most conservative or informed by (and reproduce) the androcentric status quo. These include the assumption of heterosexuality and penile-vaginal penetration as the most important and pleasurable part of sex, demonstrated by male masturbation sleeves and cock rings. I then consider points of contestation where both androcentric (the imperative to penetrate) and sex positive (foregrounding of female pleasure) based sexual scripts are reproduced simultaneously. This is illustrated by penetrative and dual-action vibrators. I conclude the discussion by examining scripts and discourses that most saliently contest the conservative sexual status quo, such as

female focused pleasure, which is most aptly demonstrated by clitoral vibrators. Each discussion of identified sexual scripts and discourses is preceded by an explanation of the thing-power of the specific products that illustrate it, and vital materialism is used throughout discussion to explain how the products agentic capacities interacts with and either supports, contests, or modifies various sexual scripts.

The agentic capacity of these male masturbation sleeves intervenes on male masturbatory practices to enhance stimulation and sexual pleasure. They emulate the sensation of a vagina thus replicating the normative pinnacle of sexual interaction. However, they also heighten this practice by providing different textures, sensations, and tightness levels that might not be experienced (or indeed be possible) in regular unaided human-to-human sexual interactions. The agentic capacity of male masturbation sleeves in generating heightened male sensation and pleasure puts the concerns of party attendees' male partners at the forefront of their minds. While it is certainly possible that bisexual or homosexual men can also use these products, it is far more likely that the female partygoer's consideration of purchase is for use on their heterosexual partner.

This can also be deduced from the catalogue description of 'Playmate': "Ultra-soft, reversible male [masturbation] sleeve with two enticing textures to satisfy every desire ... for his pleasure". This description implicitly suggests that the product, though designed for male pleasure, is meant to be utilised within a heterosexual context, thus perpetuating the assumption of a male-female sexual interaction. Moreover, while presenting 'Playmate' Donna dubbed it the "lazy ladies hand job" which further underlines the heterosexual framing of these products, presupposing a male-female sexual interaction.

Materially, there are similarities between cock rings and other products such as the use of mediums like silicone and jelly rubber. For example, 'Double Feature' and 'Maya' are made of silicone, a material known for its smooth texture, flexibility, and ability to transmit vibrations. This materiality allows the toys to adapt to the user's body, enhancing comfort, pleasure, and sexual responses. Additionally, products like 'Tease Me, Please Me' are made of jelly rubber, a material that is softer and more flexible than silicone.

These sex toys also demonstrate their agentic capacity to modify the sexual experience by introducing new sensations into the (penetrative and primarily heterosexual) sexual act. Cock rings set up conditions for enhanced sexual stimulation and pleasure. For instance, the 'Double Feature' and 'Maya' cock rings, with their silicone material and multiple vibration settings, offer a level of stimulation that is not otherwise achievable. The silicone material, while mimicking the softness and flexibility of human skin, is a synthetic product that can be shaped and designed in ways that natural materials cannot. Similarly, the 'Tease Me, Please Me', 'Friend With Benefits', and 'Rendezvous' toys offer multiple modes of stimulation. The textured, protruding vibrating components and range of vibration settings of these cock rings also provide unique forms of stimulation and a level of consistency and intensity that surpass what is typically experienced in unaided sexual encounters. These products are imbued with the power to optimise and control the sexual experience, introducing a level of predictability, reliability, and enhanced reflexive sexual response that is not always present in unaided sexual encounters.

The idea that sexual interaction primarily occurs between men and women is deeply ingrained in heteronormative discourse, which assumes that this is the most 'normal' and fitting form of sexual interaction. This discourse is reflected in products such as male masturbation sleeves, cock rings, and dildos, which primarily enhance

sexual responses during vaginal-penile intercourse. Cock rings, for example, can intensify male orgasm by constricting the penis, while added vibration can provide additional stimulation for both partners. These products are designed to enhance the stimulation experienced by both men and women during penetrative sex.

The products' agentic capacities and promotional strategies are rooted in the expectation of heterosexual relationships. The 'Double Feature' product promotes simultaneous female and male pleasure, while the website description for this product emphasises heterosexual use. Similarly, the 'Maya' cock ring is presented as a device for enhancing heterosexual sexual experiences, with options for positioning to impact either the woman's clitoris or the man's testicles. The catalogue descriptions for 'Friend With Benefits' and 'Rendezvous' also reinforce the discourse that presumes a male and female sexual partnership.

However, an interesting nuance exists in these discourses, as demonstrated by the potential versatility of the cock ring products. While the explicit promotional framing targets heterosexual couples, the unspoken potential for these toys to be used in same-sex activity on a dildo is present, albeit largely unexplored in the given descriptions. This suggests that while the dominant discourse within this product category is heteronormative, there remains latent potential for these products to disrupt or challenge these dominant scripts.

The penetration imperative is another aspect of sexually androcentric and heteronormative discourse. This imperative is embodied in sexual scripts which prescribe penile-vaginal penetrative sex as the defining sexual practice and the most 'normal' or 'proper' way of achieving sexual pleasure (Andrejek et al., 2022). These scripts often prioritize the pleasure of men over women. Men are more likely to experience orgasm during penetrative intercourse, with 90% reporting satisfaction compared to just 40% of women (Shirazi et al., 2018; Brewer & Hendrie, 2011).

Therefore, sexual scripts that prescribe and foreground penetration foreground and may effectively prioritise male pleasure, and actively posits men in a dominant sexual position. Cock rings are tangible embodiments of these scripts, and reinforce the idea that vaginal penetration is central to pleasurable sexual activity. For example, vibrating cock rings are prevalent in four out of the five ranges of sex toys Pure Romance offers. The vibrating aspect of these toys, intended to provide clitoral stimulation, further reinforces the centrality of penetrative sex. While female pleasure may not be completely absent, it is potentially secondary/adjunct to male pleasure in this context.

The physical design of these toys places the male participant in an active role, where the erection and movement are key to the toy's functionality. This is further reinforced by the discourse presented in the product descriptions and introductions where there is a clear emphasis on male agency and power. Nic mentions that the 'Maya' cock "can sit up and when you ride you may get the impact of that [on your clitoris]," implying that it's the woman who must adjust her movements to achieve stimulation, whereas the man's pleasure is more constant. Similarly, the discourses around the 'Tease Me, Please Me' and 'Jam Session' cock rings reflect the notion of a male-centred sexual narrative. Donna describes the 'Tease Me, Please Me' toy as being a way for women to be "in control," yet the woman's control appears predicated on the male partner's arousal, again reinforcing the notion of male-centred pleasure. Notably, cock rings can indeed be used by women (or men) alone or by a woman on a man (with the added potential of female-on-male use via securing it at the base of a dildo prior to anal penetration). Product use in this way takes away control of penetration away from the erect phallus possessor. In this context, however, this remains latent unexpressed potential.

The way Donna presents 'Playmate' further reproduces heteronormative power dynamics. By naming it the "lazy ladies hand job" and telling participants

that when they “can’t be bothered having sex you just give him a hand” she insinuates that the product serves as a substitute for female participation in sexual activity, therefore normalising the expectation that women should service men's sexual needs. The product is thus a labour saving device for women while being focused on male pleasure.

Conversely, male masturbatory sleeves also offer intriguing counterpoints to those discussed above. Firstly, the products' design allows them to be operated by women during partnered sexual activity, and in doing so positions women as active agents rather than passive receivers of male actions. In the context where a woman uses the 'Playmate' on a male partner it can significantly shift these dynamics, offering a potential contestation of sexually androcentric and heteronormative discourses. If a woman chooses to use this product on a male partner as a form of her own sexual expression, control, or enjoyment, it disrupts the traditional script of passive female involvement. Additionally, in this respect the sleeves are enveloping rather than penetrative, which, in part, contests the coital/penetrative imperative aspect of androcentric discourse and potentially further contributes to women's enhanced agency and active role during the sexual encounter. This is because use of this product by a woman on a man reverses the 'active/dominating' dynamics of thrusting in terms of force, speed, and duration.

Further reproduction of the imperative to penetrate (and in this case, self-penetrate) is illustrated by penetrative and dual-action vibrators. Conversely, and simultaneously, they also promote sexual scripts related to the importance and prioritisation of female please.

The materiality and promotion of penetrative and dual-action vibrators align with the sexual script that centralises and normalises the act of vaginal penetration in female sexual pleasure: as such this sexual practice is positioned as the most

'normal' or 'natural' form of sexual pleasure. Fahs and Frank (2014) explain how this ideal can become embedded in women's solo masturbatory practices. They argue that a disadvantage of not having sexually scripted norms of female masturbation "is that women easily and readily internalize (sic) easily accessible, traditional patriarchal scripts, particularly the imperative for penetrative intercourse" (p. 248). Fahs and Swank (2013, p. 674) found that:

[O]f the 18 women who reported sex toy use, only three women penetrated themselves with sex toys yet most used phallic-shaped sex toys. Nevertheless, women used the sex toys to stimulate their clitorises rather than to penetrate their vaginas; several women described this behavior (sic) as deviant or shameful, as they believed "normal" masturbation meant self-penetration.

Fahs and Frank (2014) note that heterosexual women appear to show a significant interest in self-penetration narratives, even when they place higher importance on clitoral stimulation, which reinforces "the heterosexist notion that "normal" sex—even during masturbation—required penetration" (p. 249). These findings certainly do not rule out the possibility that women find penetrative masturbation enjoyable—indeed, many women derive pleasure from penetration. However, it does indicate a connection between women's experiences of masturbation and traditional conceptions of gender, power, and pleasure.

Several of the toys in these product categories equate female pleasure with vaginal penetration. For example, 'Mira', is promoted as providing "deeper, longer-lasting orgasms," suggestive of the conventional discourse that associates deep, penetrative stimulation with optimal sexual gratification. The 'Encore', a dual-action vibrator, also reinforces this script by offering dual mechanisms for pleasure: one for clitoral stimulation, and another for penetration, subtly positioning the penetrative aspect as integral, if not primary. However, it is noteworthy that this script and

associated discourse is not as prominently illustrated by dual-action vibrators as it is by penetrative only vibrators, given the simultaneous focus on clitoral stimulation. This might suggest an attempt to incorporate diverse female sexual experiences, though still largely within an androcentric and heteronormative framework.

The reproduction of the penetration imperative by penetrative and dual-action vibrators is tempered by their primary intention for use in a solo context. The most likely use of these products in this context, besides solo masturbatory, is heterosexual partnered use. However, other toys (such as 'Premiere') are designed specifically for, and more likely to be used in, partnered sexual activity. Furthermore, marketing narratives subtly frame these products as intended for solo use by implying that interactions occur solely between the user and the product. The catalogue page that features the 'Selfie Collection' frames the use of 'Home Alone' and 'Do Not Disturb' as something that is "completely indulgent and fun" and provides the user a chance to "focus on yourself" (Pure Romance, 2017b).

Furthermore, the sex toy party facilitators narratively position several of the sex toys in a solo context. Nic told party attendees how she loves that Pure Romance sex toys make masturbation "quick and easy" for her and provided party participants with guidance about how to use a penetrative vibrator on themselves, describing that "you're just going to push the soft button until you find something you like – that makes you go 'oh! Ah!'". Similarly, Donna introduced 'Kaia' as her "full time lover", emphasised its quiet motor as a way to masturbate inconspicuously, and provided party participants with instruction about where certain features are meant to sit and how to hold and control 'The Head Turner'. Because these sex toys are primarily framed for use in a solo masturbatory context, which entails the absence of an expectant male partner subject to the sexual script that prescribes (almost guaranteed to be very pleasurable for him) penile-vaginal penetration, its centrality is negated. In other words, because these are sex toys the

imperative to penetrate becomes optionable and the agency of the female user is enhanced. The focus on solo, or at least female only, use of these products illustrates that despite promoting the centrality of vaginal penetration, which essentially stems from androcentrism, there is also a marked tendency to also promote female focused pleasure.

When these products are used enthusiastically in solo or female-to-female sexual practices, practices which consequently do not involve consideration of a male partners pleasure, their agentic capacity sets up the conditions for the centrality of female pleasure via the provision of the ideal techno-penis. Penetrative and dual-action vibrators imitate and enhance the ideal enduring, firmly erect penis while also offering features the anatomical penis cannot provide such as consistent firmness, user determined on-demand availability, and especially additional stimulation through vibrations and pulsations. As such, the penetrative vibrator may constitute the ideal female 'techno-penis', and dual-action vibrators (via dual stimulation) may constitute the deluxe female 'techno-penis' due to the type of agency both exerted by these products and afforded to their users. However, as noted earlier, some women find dual, internal and external, simulation unpleasant or too intense. In this respect it is possible to experience too much 'thing power', to be effectively overwhelmed by the agency of a thing and thus to curtail its potential agentic powers by reasserting one's individual agency by non-engagement.

However, overall, by providing enhanced and alternative means of penetration these products de-centre the natural male penis. This can be seen as a form of agency, where the sex toy challenges the social norm that equates penetration with a natural male penis and thus negotiated interaction (sexual, physical, social, political etc) with men. Furthermore, because these vibrators are offered alongside other, non-penetrative forms of stimulation it shifts the perception of penetration from being the paramount route to pleasure to being one of many

options. This can be seen as a form of thing-power agency, where all sex toys are part of a broader range of products, and which therefore contributes to a more diverse and inclusive understanding of sexual pleasures. Lastly, as penetrative vibrators offer on-demand availability and do not ejaculate, which typically signals the end of any further sexual stimulation for the female partner, this may enhance the agency of the user. The agentic thing-power of these products then act in a way which positions and foregrounds female pleasure and sexual satisfaction as a central aspect of sexual practice. This script is derived from the wider discourse of sex positivity.

The discourse of sex positivity informs the sexual script that emphasises and foregrounds the prioritisation of women's sexual pleasure and enjoyment. As Anderson (2013) states "positive aspects of sexuality include: sexual satisfaction; sexual self-efficacy; sexual self-esteem; and sexual pleasure among others" and that "'positive sexuality' or 'sex positivity' is the acknowledgment and appreciation of the importance and power of these experiences and constructs" (p. 208). The sex positive movement and the values it espouses is especially relevant for women: conservative discourses of sexuality, which this feminist movement emerged in response to, have historically typically concerned repression and control of female sexuality and pleasure (Fahs, 2014; Bowman, 2014). Fahs and Frank (2014) discuss the importance of having culturally accessible, sex positive, female-pleasure focused sexual scripts to guide women when masturbating: when they are absent women often default to hegemonic, patriarchally informed ones that prescribe masturbatory techniques that do not best serve their pleasure seeking. Sex positive discourse is evident in the products' design and marketing implicitly aimed at women's solo use, thereby centring female pleasure, and more specifically, self-penetrative pleasure. As mentioned, the manifestation of this discourse is most prominent when women are engaging in self-pleasure practices in the absence of men, as "she need not concern herself with anyone's pleasure but her own" (Bowman, 2014).

The idea that these products are intended for solo use, and therefore exclusively concern female sexual pleasure, contests heteronormative and sexually androcentric discourses which emphasise the centrality of agentic men and male pleasure in sexual interactions. This is evident in the descriptions of the sex toys in this category – all of which are designed to provide female users with a range of different penetrative experiences. For example, 'The Head Turner' features a rotating, beaded shaft and 'Main Attraction' has a bulbous, rigged tip. These features provision both heightened sensation/arousal and varied/novel penetrative experiences. Moreover, contestation of male-centric sexual ideals and practices is further significantly challenged by dual-action vibrators. The very design of these products embody the central theme of female pleasure. The vibrators are equipped with both clitoral and penetrative stimulators, acknowledging the diverse sexual desires and pleasure points of women. For instance, the 'Main Attraction' and 'Encore' offer multiple speeds for both clitoral and shaft vibration, catering to the simultaneous enjoyment of clitoral and penetrative stimulation. The product descriptions and consultants' demonstrations further emphasise the prioritisation of female pleasure. Phrases such as "pure pleasure in mind," "heighten your most intimate moments," and "experience a thrilling climax" convey a strong focus on women's pleasure. The focus on female pleasure, combined with the strong implication of solo use, decentralises the necessity of a male partner for women to attain sexual satisfaction.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on vaginal penetration is a complex issue. While it reinforces the sex-positive discourse for women who enjoy self-penetration, it simultaneously reproduces sexually androcentric and heteronormative discourses, aligning female sexual pleasure with a practice traditionally associated with male sexual activity. Furthermore, given that a significant number of women do not enjoy self-penetration during masturbation (Fahs & Frank, 2014), the penetration-centric

design of this product category may not be seen as wholly prioritising or enhancing women's sexual pleasure. So, while these products can be seen as contesting the prioritisation of male pleasure, they also highlight a tension between heteronormative/androcentric and sex-positive discourses in shaping perceptions and practices around female sexual pleasure.

The script most challenging to the status quo is that of foregrounding female pleasure which is foundational to the discourse of sex positivity. This is most aptly demonstrated by clitoral vibrators.

Firstly, the materiality of sex toys plays a significant role in their agency and their capacity to effect human and non-human interaction. For example, many of these clitoral vibrators are made of silicone. The website description of 'Take A Bow' emphasises how it is made of "ultra-soft silicone [that] glides over your skin with velvety smoothness" which is capable of easily transmitting vibration. The choice of this material is not arbitrary. Silicone is known for its softness and flexibility, which can enhance the tactile and sensory experience of the user.

Furthermore, the technological capabilities of these products enhance natural sexual responses from clitoral stimulation which surpass the limits of what is possible in unaided sexual practices. The vibrators in the 'Seductive Spotlight Collection', for instance, are equipped with multiple speed settings, allowing users to adjust the intensity of the vibrations according to their preferences and without the necessity of consulting another person in regards to partnered sex or indeed without the limitations of one's own manual dexterity. This feature provides a level of control and consistency that is therefore not possible with human-induced stimulation and it is not subject to the limitations of human motivation, stamina or performance.

Additionally, the ability to control the intensity and rhythm of stimulation can lead to more reliable and potentially more intense orgasms, thereby enhancing the sexual experience. This is hinted at in the website description of both products whereby it states the user can get “hours of fun on one charge”. Moreover, the unique designs of these vibrators, such as the ridged section of the 'Premiere' and the inward-protruding section of the 'Take A Bow', are intended to provide targeted stimulation to the glans clitoris, which is known to be a highly sensitive area with a high concentration of nerve endings. This targeted stimulation can lead to enhanced sexual responses that may not be achievable through physical means alone. As such, the thing-power of these vibrators results in greater processual pleasure and, arguably, the guarantee of an orgasm that is unparalleled. It is also important to note that, while seemingly obvious, these sex toys are turned on and off at will. This enhances both the agency of the product to shape user experience, and the agency of the user themselves. Overall, clitoral vibrators are not just tools that are used by individuals to achieve sexual pleasure, but active agents that have the capacity to shape and influence sexual experiences.

Clitoral vibrators are most exemplary of female pleasure focused, sex positive discourse. These products are primarily designed to stimulate the clitoris, an organ known for its high concentration of nerve endings and significant role in female sexual arousal and orgasm. By focusing on clitoral stimulation, these devices inherently emphasise women's sexual pleasure and underscore the importance of female sexual enjoyment during sexual practices, whether those practices involve solo or partnered activities. Furthermore, they are designed to provide an intensity and consistency of stimulation that is not typically matched by human stimulation alone, heightening and enhancing sexual responses beyond what can be achieved during manual self-pleasure or manual stimulation from a partner. This extends the emphasis placed on women's sexual pleasure and enjoyment. Importantly, several clitoral vibrators are small and designed to be easy to use during partnered sexual

activity (such as 'Premiere', and 'Kaia'). This, therefore, provisions the potential for heightened stimulation, arousal, and pleasure during penetrative sex. While this does not necessarily contest sexually androcentric discourse to the extent that the importance of women's pleasure is elevated above that of men's, it may be seen as an adjunct form of contestation. This may be important considering the significant gendered orgasm gap (Andrejek, 2022). Partnered use is further demonstrated in Nic's discussion of 'Premiere' whereby she informed participants that this sex toy is "really good if you want to do one on one, or he can wear it and he can reach around or do whatever. It's all about imagination".

The recognition of the clitoris's crucial role in women's sexual pleasure is a relatively recent development in human sexuality research, reflecting a significant shift from historical discourses that marginalised or ignored women's sexual pleasure (Fahs & Frank, 2014). Furthermore, the agency of these products also facilitates the achievement of sexual pleasure independently of a male partner, thereby encouraging autonomy and self-exploration in women's sexual experiences. This prioritisation of women's pleasure, alongside the emphasis on self-exploration and autonomy, encapsulates a sex-positive discourse, promoting an open, affirming, and progressive approach to female sexuality.

By virtue of reproduction of sex positive discourse, clitoral vibrators simultaneously disrupts the traditional sexual script that asserts the centrality of men's power, pleasure, and active subject position during sexual interaction, and challenges sexually androcentric and heteronormative discourses. Via their specific design and functionality focused on the clitoris—a central organ for female sexual pleasure—these devices deliberately centralise women's pleasure. These sex toys do so in both a solo and partnered sexual context. This emphasis inherently disputes patriarchal norms that prioritise male satisfaction and sexual dominance. Furthermore, these vibrators encourage and facilitate the solo achievement of

pleasure, further empowering women to assume an active role in their sexual experiences, and to do so independently of a male partner, thereby challenging androcentric sexual norms. The category's reproduction of a sex-positive discourse in its marketing and design, as discussed above, further undermines heteronormative expectations by promoting an understanding of sexual pleasure that is inclusive, diverse, and women-centred. Thus, the 'Clitoral Vibrators' category constitutes a powerful embodiment of contested sexual scripts, challenging conventional, male-centred sexual norms and promoting a more inclusive, woman-centred paradigm of sexual pleasure and power.

Conclusion

In this chapter I provided descriptions of male masturbation sleeves, cock rings, dual-action and penetrative vibrators, and clitoral vibrators. I also included descriptions of the particular products within these categories that Pure Romance promotes as part of their sex toy parties. Following this, I argued that based on the agentic capacities these products are imbued with, various normative sexual practices are encouraged which express ideals embedded in wider discourse. I explored identified reproduction of sexual scripts and their underlying discourses from most sexually conservative to that which is most directly challenging the sexual status quo. The primary agentic thing-power of all sex toys, which is essentially emulation and enhancement of touch/stimulation and the erect male penis, enables the capacity for diverse use of these products and as such underpins the spectrum of conservative to innovative and/or contesting sexual discourses and practices.

The first sexual script identified assumes female party attendees are heterosexual and thus that sexual interaction and intimate relationships primarily take place between a man and a woman. This script is rooted in heteronormative

discourse. A prominent illustration of this is the thing-power and promotional framing of male masturbation sleeves and cock rings. Sleeves are designed to emulate the feeling of a vagina, primarily for straight men, and sold to their straight female partner at sex toy parties. This perpetuates the assumption of a male-female sexual interaction. Similarly, cock rings – while enhancing sexual stimulation for both sexual participants – are designed to be worn around an erect penis and to stimulate the clitoris during penetrative sex. As such these products are clearly intended for opposite sex couples and presuppose the sexuality of Pure Romance customers.

Cock rings also demonstrate prescriptive penetrative sex which more aptly caters to men's sexual pleasure than women's, and as such is part of androcentric discourse. Simultaneous and contrary promotion of the penetrative imperative and the prioritisation of female sexual pleasure can also be discerned. Penetrative and dual-action vibrators, in their agentic propensities and promotions, encourage both the idea that phallic penetration is central to female pleasure and that provision of the ideal penis for solo use encourages and enhances agentic female pleasure. Lastly, clitoral vibrators most strongly demonstrate the encouragement of sexual practices that centralise female sexual pleasure. The design of these products in combination with technological capabilities target and stimulate the most sensitive part of female anatomy and provision women with the most effective means of orgasm. Overall, in this chapter I argue that discourses and scripts identified in previous chapters are similarly reproduced by the agentic thing power and promotional framing of sex toys. By structuring illustration of reproduced sexual ideals from most conservative to most progressive, noting points of entanglement along the way, I argue that the sexual values espoused via sex toys are not straightforwardly sexually empowering for women. Wider issues regarding gendered sexual power dynamics (who receives what sexual pleasure, to what extent, and in what context) shape and are shaped by different sex toy designs.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Summary Of Findings

This thesis has been an exploration into party and print/digital promotion of sex lotions, potions and toys in Palmerston North, Aotearoa New Zealand, what kinds of underlying socio-sexual discourses they drew on, the range of sexual scripts (overt and latent) they reproduced, prescribed, or contested, and consequentially the range of scripts and narratives, values and ideals of sexual practice that female sex toy consumers generated in response. I also investigated the agentic thing-powers that sex lotions/potions and toys possessed. These ranged from the universal, for example, being technological interventions and enhancements of sexual pleasure, and as such the lotions/potions were positioned as foundational and ongoing bodywork designed to enhance sexual desirability and/or sexual-physical responsiveness, while the toys promised immediate enhancement effects with the flick of an on-switch. Moreover, both categories have specific agentic thing-powers which I note below. It is important to note that the thing-power of the sex products did not determine the sexual scripts of either the party facilitators, promotional catalogues or my cohort of female consumers. They did, however, provide opportunities to be deployed in ways that supported conservative, through to contesting, sexual scripts.

The theoretical framing of this thesis draws heavily from sexual script theory (Simon and Gagnon, 1973) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). However, no other literature I reviewed use these theoretical lens together as I did both for theoretical framing and in the analytical interpretations of the discourse and scripts' dialogic. Combining these approaches enabled analysis on both a macro

and micro socio-cultural level. Sexual discourses concern the more macro level of broader systems of meaning, knowledge, and power from which sexual scripts are derived. Whereas sexual scripts are practical or instrumental enactments of hegemonic and/or contesting sexual discourses in everyday life. By using combined approaches I am able to provide a rich and detailed analysis of both how encouragement of distinct sexual practices are generated by sex products promotions, and what wider social and cultural discourses they embody. Resultingly, more is known about why women may choose to say they engage in various sexual practices over others and why.

I also deployed Bennett's (2010) concept of thing-power to illustrate how the material vitalism of sex lotions, potions and toys interacts with and either supports, contests or modifies various sexual scripts. Literature exists that applies this concept to varied topics like politics (Lemke, 2018), nursing philosophy and practice (Neff, 2020), romantic fables (Baker, 2021), and health apps (Lupton, 2019). However, I was unable to find any literature in which this concept is applied to any topic/subject related to sex, sexuality, or sex products.

As I mentioned in the introduction, I went into this research project with a certain positionality, bias, and anticipated familiarity regarding what I assumed I would find. Because I held (and to an extent, still do) D.Vice in such high regard (especially regarding their business practices and sex toy party model) I had assumed that other companies like Pure Romance would straightforwardly reproduce hegemonic, conservative socio-sexual ideals – primarily because these discourses are the most familiar to and easily digestible by attendees, and party facilitators are not required to critically examine them or learn otherwise. Additionally, I was already aware that independent contractor sex toy party facilitators are under considerable pressure to sell products and thus earn commission to not render their efforts fruitless. Upon reflection, what I found was

much more nuanced, contradictory, and complicated than I had anticipated. Admittedly, I grappled with this at first. My undue confidence, bolstered by having been a highly achieving undergraduate sociology student, took a hit when I first realised heteronormative and sexually androcentric discourses were not the only overtly evident discourses throughout the company's promotions. They were clearly overtly evident throughout but were 'supplemented' by other scripts and discourses.

As demonstrated, I found a rhizome of different and often competing/conflicting sexual scripts. Some scripts were more dominant in being overt, foregrounded and extensively articulated. As such, the dominance of sexually conservative ideals was most apparent in the products presented first at the sex toy parties and in the corresponding promotional catalogue (the 'Beauty and Body' and 'Bath and Shower' categories). Whereas points of entanglement and contradiction are more salient in the 'Enhancement Creams' and overall sex toy category. Specifically, the 'Beauty and Body' products reproduce the heteronormative notion that youthfulness, which manifests primarily as blemish-free, soft and almost pre-pubescent hairlessness (especially of genitalia, legs and underarms) is a non-negotiable aspect of women being socially and sexually recognised as beautiful and desirable.

Furthermore, self-improvement and bodily maintenance were framed as an ongoing, ceaseless pursuit which requires a significant amount of investment, time, and energy. The 'Bath and Shower' products then build on an established foundation of regimented feminine body maintenance by aiding preparation and enhancement of the 'body (made) beautiful' by the products that came before. Desirability, in this context, is overtly articulated as for men and the male gaze. However, less overt were discourses that advocated desirability to other women and to the 'other' idealised self – thus latently promoting homosexuality in the first

instance, and sexual self-pleasure and/or acknowledgement of heightened social status in the second.

The 'Enhancement Creams' product category also demonstrated points of entanglements and contestation. Some products in this category encourage playfulness and experimentation during sexual interaction, while others squarely place emphasis on the crucial role that clitoral stimulation plays in female sexual pleasure. Conversely, others frame women's sexual pleasure as inherently achieved through (technologically enhanced) male-controlled, heterosexual penetrative sex whereby men are positioned as the dominant causal force, and thus responsible (physically and ideally ethically) for, delivering sexual pleasure to a passive female recipient. The agentic thing-power of these products, both primary and particular, intersected with and supported these differing scripts. For example, 'Beauty and Body' products express their efficacy over periods of regular and extended use and are imbued with the power to transform and enhance one's appearance. This reinforces the normative ideal of continuous work on and improvement of the body to maintain youthful desirability.

The sex toys under consideration most aptly illustrate points of contention in sexual script reproduction. Some of these products, like cock rings and male masturbation sleeves, are clearly promotionally and narratively framed in a way that assumes party attendees are heterosexual. They also overtly reproduce, in the first instance, sexually androcentric and conservative ideals about the active, dominant, male partner and the socio-cultural centrality of penetrative sex. As such, the agentic capacities of these products are both reflective of, and contribute to the reproduction of, heteronormatively androcentric scripts. For example, the physical design of cock rings enables an active male sexual subjectivity as his erection and movement are key to its function and therefore ability to provide female sexual pleasure. However, these products still provided latent (i.e. not articulated, yet still existent possibilities

because they were not openly rejected or criticised) possibilities for contestation. For example, if the male masturbation sleeve were to be literally taken out of the hands of the male consumer and put under the control of female (and potentially another male) sex participant, then the penetrative aspect is potentially transformed into an enveloping motion. As such both physical and pleasure control and responsibility is likewise transferred. In some ways such a situation would be analogous with the 'dominance' (which ranges from whole to partial) accorded heterosexual women when positioned atop a male partner during sexual intercourse. Whereas solo use of a cock ring by a female consumer moves the agency into female masturbatory paradigms.

Penetrative and dual-action vibrators were the most prominent examples of conflicting script reproduction. These products are designed to emulate, and indeed often enhance, the erect penis and be inserted into the vagina for internal stimulation which reproduces the normalisation of male penetration in female sexual pleasure. Conversely, sex toys that emulate while also enhancing the ideals of the erect penis (e.g. especially in terms of selected size, endurance and motions), when used in a solo masturbatory situation (by women who enjoy penetrative stimulation while masturbating) or homosexual contexts, the power of the phallus is transferred into the female user's hands.

However, clitoral vibrators were the product that most strongly challenged the sexual hegemony, yet this still did not constitute an overt contestation of androcentric ideals. The vitalism of clitoral vibrators, through direct and targeted clitoral stimulation at a variety of speeds and vibration patterns, most strongly exemplified contestation of the cultural discourse that privileges male sexual pleasure (particularly, penis penetrative and ejaculatory) at the expense of female orgasmic pleasure. However, in the context of this research, women's sexual pleasure was typically compartmentalised as solo masturbatory pleasure. As such,

whenever self-initiated clitoral stimulation was not compartmentalised, it was typically framed as a pleasurable 'add on' to heterosexual penetrative sex – not a viable alternative. Overt contestation would have involved the promotion of female solo masturbation/same sex relationships as the preferred or idealised alternative, or indeed the primary and most celebrated goal of heterosexual encounters.. This potential is somewhat acknowledged in the discourses, and realised in practice, by my interlocuters, but was only latently promoted by Pure Romance facilitators and promotional material, mostly through the omission of rejection or criticism as noted above. Consequently, androcentric and heteronormative discourses and practices effectively remained as the most dominant and most celebrated pathways to female (and male) sexual pleasure.

The Literature

This research contributes to the literature on sex toy promotions by uniquely combining theoretical and analytical foci thereby filling a gap in the literature. Much of the existing literature about sex toy promotion also uses discourse analysis, however, the focus of analysis is on how women are addressed as sexual consumers in the context of post-feminism. Smith (2007) argues that contemporary sex toy promotion uses discourses of style, luxury, and fashion to frame products as a means of personal empowerment and expression of fashionable lifestyle choices. Attwood (2005) concluded after analysing sex toy e-commerce websites that retailers used discourses of sexual health, self-care, and style in promotions which is indicative of consumption as a site for women's sexual self-fashioning. Similarly, Crewe and Martin (2017) argue that sexual consumption is a matter of taste, distinction, and formation the sexual self. My research is similar in that it concerns subject narration of their consumption practices (that occur during the sex toy party and via semi-structured interviews), but this is not its primary focus. I use critical

discourse analysis to understand not only which scripts and discourses underlie the address to women as consumers, but also which specific sexual ideals and practices are encouraged or discouraged in this address. These authors focus on the individual consumer while I focus on meanings in relation to the web of inter-subjective connections that surround the consumer; wider society (specifically, the male gaze), their partners, their potential heterosexual male partners, the idealised 'other' self (masturbatory and as sexually desirable to self and others), and potentially to other women sexual partners.

Concerning sex toy parties specifically ample quantitative literature exists about the characteristics of sex toy party attendees and the potential for parties to be sites for adult female sexual education (for example, Herbenick et al., 2013; Jozkowski et al., 2012; Herbenick et al., 2009; Herbenick and Reece, 2009). These studies do not address what kinds of messages about sexual practices are communicated to women at sex toy parties and as such my research contributes to the literature by using a qualitative focus. McCaughey and French (2001) and Curtis (2004) use participant observation and ethnography in their research on sex toy parties and are the most closely aligned to my own. McCaughey and French argue they observed only a 'self-help band-aid' narrative in response to sexually neglectful men and Curtis observed that, in response to varied consumer choice, her participants sexual practices changed from moderately to radically. I argue that my analysis is more nuanced than that of McCaughey and French which allowed me to demonstrate a deeper level of entangled and contradictory discursivity.

Furthermore, I combined discourse and material (thing-power) analysis to explain how the agentic capacities (universal, primary and specific) of these "things" intersect with and are deployed by my interlocutors to support certain sexual script and discourses. I also organised the products I researched into categories which enabled said analysis. A combination of discourse and material analysis in tandem

with fine grained categorical analysis is not evident in any of the sex toy or sex toy party literature I reviewed. Had I included interlocuters' interviews I could have demonstrated that contradictory to Curtis, little evidence was found of altered sexual practices as a result of sex toy party attendance.

In addition to the ways outlined above, my research also contributes to the gap in literature about sex toy promotion in Aotearoa New Zealand. There is a significant amount of international literature but specificities like location deserve more scholarly attention. As such, this thesis is reflective of the global but also the local simultaneously. Many of the sexual scripts and underlying discourses identified throughout these chapters reflect broad, global, and homogenised trends. For example, feminine beauty ideals and sexually androcentric norms tend to be consistent across most of the western world (Ponterotto, 2016). However, elements of the local are also reflected. The sex toy parties described in McCaughey and French and Curtis (both US based) were very rowdy, titillating, and featured far more lengthy and open discussions than those that occurred at mine. I believe this reflects socio-cultural differences between the two locations. While there were discussions and mild titillation/excited chatter at my party it was not at the level described by these authors. Holmes et al. (2012) explain how Aotearoa New Zealanders (both Māori and Pākehā) tend to embody the cultural values of politeness and reservedness and therefore are suspicious of (and often socially censure) demonstrations of status or boastful behaviour. As such, I think the observed dynamics at my party reflects this. I believe that the party behaviour described by the above authors would be evaluated negatively by my 'kiwi' party attendees.

Methods

Using participant observation helped me to gain invaluable insight into the phenomena of sex toy parties, the associated use of promotional rhetoric, and the dynamics between those taking part. This insight came via being and doing, rather than relying purely on accounts of doing. I think participating in the embodied experience of what I was trying to capture as a researcher (in tandem with print and digital promotional material) is why I was able to analyse evident discourses with some depth. I had attended several parties prior to conducting this research but never with a primed focus on trying to understand and interpret a secondary layer of meaning (what are the promotions and materiality of these products telling us, and where is that drawn from?) beyond what I saw as immediately apparent. However, if I were to repeat this research method, I would ensure that all the attendees had pre-existing (at least semi) close connections with one another and conduct pre- and post-party interviews to comparatively measure changes and enduring aspects. At the party I hosted several of the attendees did have this dynamic however I think if it existed among the entire group this would allow for more (and perhaps more in-depth) conversation to occur. Additionally, I relied heavily on the print and digital promotional materials to corroborate/support analytical findings, expand on the sexual scripts identified during participant observation, and to provide further illustrative instances of such to the reader. This thesis also includes many literal illustrations taken from these materials. Sex toys can often be difficult to describe, especially considering the reader may be unfamiliar, and a picture is worth a thousand words.

Ultimately, I did not use the interviews I conducted with sex toy party interlocutors. This is primarily because I did not have enough words to incorporate

an analysis about the possible influence of education, socioeconomics, age-life experience, and sexual biographies on my interlocutor's engagement with Pure Romance's toys, lotions, and sexual scripts. However, these interviews did contribute to my overall understanding and developed my positionality by helping me maintain sensitivity to the nuance and constructed character of sex toy parties and promotions. I believe my overall methodological approach is beneficial as, to my knowledge, no ethnographic-based research has been conducted on sex toy parties in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. This fills the gap in the literature about ethnographic-based knowledge of female sexuality in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Concluding Thoughts

I had made assumptions about the kind of sex toy party a company like Pure Romance would facilitate which stemmed from their business model, my prior experience at presentations given by similar companies, and my experience attending D.Vice parties. As such, I had presupposed that these 'bad' sex toy parties must straightforwardly reproduce heteronormative and androcentric discourses. Admittedly, upon hearing some of Donna's language use for the first time, I took it as confirmation. But with continually developing awareness of my biases (largely thanks to ongoing discussions with interlocutors – my supervisors, friends, and colleagues) I set initial assumptions aside as thoroughly as I could to delve into the many nuanced layers of meaning that I interpreted in my data. Overall, I found that Pure Romance sex toy parties are more nuanced and complex than I had thought. In this thesis I demonstrate that sex toys are not monolithic and to examine what normative work they do fine-grained categorisation is crucial. I illustrate that, essentially, there is a big distinction between cream and machine.

Conducting ethnographic research, alongside content analysis and in-depth interviews, enabled me to present an in-depth and nuanced analysis of broad, socio-sexual ideals and norms. Additionally, because this thesis is analytically heavy, my illustrative ethnographic sex toy party account provides a useful bridge between theory and practice which helps breathe life into the analytical chapters that follow. The limitations of my research largely reflect the restrictions of a MA thesis. I was unable to use analysis of interviews due to my small sample size and word count restrictions. Consequentially, there is a lack of critical discussion regarding the influence of socioeconomic, education, and life experience factors on synergies and alignments with sexual scripts. There is also a lack of pre- and post-party interviews to measure any changes in opinion, expectations, and reported sexual practices. Additionally, I was unable to test the validity of interlocutor's sexual narratives with observation of actual sexual practices. But this is an issue inherent to ethnographic based research and an omission of much social science based sex research. Furthermore, I was unable to undertake comparative research into other companies which again reflects MA thesis restrictions.

My research opens up several potential avenues for future research. Firstly, researchers could conduct comparative studies of sex toy parties across different cultural, social, and geographic contexts to explore variations in the promotion and negotiation of sexual scripts and discourses in diverse socio-cultural contexts. Furthermore, future research could adopt an intersectional approach to analyse how various social categories such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexuality, and age intersect to shape individuals' experiences and perceptions of sex toy parties. By considering how multiple axes of identity intersect and interact within these contexts, scholars can utilise my work in uncovering the complex interplay of power dynamics and inequalities. Lastly, given the increasing prevalence of online communities and digital platforms related to sexual culture and commerce, future research could explore the role of digital spaces in shaping sexual scripts and

practices. Through digital ethnography methods, researchers can investigate how online interactions, virtual communities, and e-commerce platforms influence individuals' engagement with sex toy generated sexual scripts and discourses.

References

- Adulttoymegastore. (n.d1.). *Satisfyer Pro Plus G-spot – 8.8 inch*. <https://adulttoymegastore.co.nz/sex-toys/vibrators/suction-vibrators/satisfyer-pro-plus-gspot/211401/1115/>
- Adulttoymegastore. (n.d2.). *Satisfyer Hot Lover – Silver/champagne*. <https://adulttoymegastore.co.nz/sex-toys/vibrators/app-controlled-vibrators/satisfyer-hot-lover/261427/1121/>
- Adulttoymegastore. (n.d3.). *Satisfyer Triple Oh – Light Blue*. <https://adulttoymegastore.co.nz/sex-toys/vibrators/rabbit-vibrators/satisfyer-triple-oh/275371/58/>
- Anderson, R. M. (2013). Positive sexuality and its impact on overall well-being. *Bundesgesundheitsblatt - Gesundheitsforschung - Gesundheitsschutz*, 56(2), 208–214. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00103-012-1607-z>
- Andrejek, N., Fetner, T., & Heath, M. (2022). Climax as Work: Heteronormativity, Gender Labor, and the Gender Gap in Orgasms. *Gender and Society*, 36(2), 189–213. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08912432211073062>
- Arafat, S. M. Y., & Kar, S. K. (2021). Sex During Pandemic: Panic Buying of Sex Toys During COVID-19 Lockdown. *Journal of Psychosexual Health*, 3(2), 175–177. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26318318211013347>
- Attwood, F. (2005). Fashion and Passion: Marketing Sex to Women. *Sexualities*, 8(4), 392–406. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460705056617>
- Baker, R. (2021). Is There a Place for Spirit in Jane Bennett’s Vital Materialism? *Cultural Critique*, 111(1), 1–25.
- Barbarellas. (n.d.). *About Us*. <https://www.barbarellas.co.nz/about>
- Baudrillard (2022). In M. Fraser & Greco, M. (Eds.). *The Body: A Reader*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003060338>

- Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Duke University Press.
- Beres, M. A. (2014). Points of Convergence: Introducing Sexual Scripting Theory to Discourse Approaches to the Study of Sexuality. *Sexuality & Culture: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, 18(1), 76–88. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-013-9176-3>
- Blinne, K. C. (2015). The Hair Down There: Untangling Pubic Hair Politics. *Women & Language*, 38(1), 1-25.
- Bottlesoup. (2018). *But is it Pure Romance for your wallet?* <https://bottlesoup.com/2018/06/10/pure-romance-financial-opportunity/>.
- Bowman, C. P. (2014). Women’s Masturbation: Experiences of Sexual Empowerment in a Primarily Sex-Positive Sample. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 38(3), 363–378. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684313514855>
- Brewer, G., & Hendrie, C. A. (2011). Evidence to Suggest that Copulatory Vocalizations in Women Are Not a Reflexive Consequence of Orgasm. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 40(3), 559–564. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-010-9632-1>
- Burr, V. (1995). *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203133026>
- Buss, D. M. (1989). Sex differences in human mate preferences: Evolutionary hypotheses tested in 37 cultures. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 12(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X00023992>
- Butler, S. M., Smith, N. K., Collazo, E., Caltabiano, L., & Herbenick, D. (2015). Pubic Hair Preferences, Reasons for Removal, and Associated Genital Symptoms: Comparisons Between Men and Women. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 12(1), 48–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jsm.12763>
- Cherry Colors. (2022). *Review: Satisfyer Endless Fun*. <https://www.cherrycolors.com/2022/03/review-satisfyer-endless-fun.html>

- Cleveland, M., & Laroche, M. (2007). Acculturation to the global consumer culture: Scale development and research paradigm. *Journal of Business Research*, 60(3), 249–259.
- Crewe, L., & Martin, A. (2017). Sex and the city: Branding, gender and the commodification of sex consumption in contemporary retailing. *Urban Studies*, 54(3), 582–599.
- Csako, R. I., Rowland, D. L., Hevesi, K., Vitalis, E., & Balalla, S. (2022). Female Sexuality in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Factors and Sexual Response Associated with Masturbation. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 34(4), 521–539. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2022.2099499>
- Curtis, D. (2004). Commodities and Sexual Subjectivities: A Look at Capitalism and Its Desires. *Cultural Anthropology*, 19(1), 95–121.
- D.Vice. (n.d.). *Customer Care*. <https://www.dvice.co.nz/pages/customer-care>
- D.Vice. (n.d.). *Home Page*. <https://www.dvice.co.nz>
- de Kloe, C. (2023). ‘Pleasure with a purpose’: datafication and a phallogocentric logic to sexual pleasure in the Lioness vibrator. *Porn Studies*, 10(2), 210–230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2022.2105257>
- Dienberg, M.-F., Oschatz, T., Kosman, E., & Klein, V. (2022). Does Clitoral Knowledge Translate into Orgasm? The Interplay Between Clitoral Knowledge, Gendered Sexual Scripts, and Orgasm Experience. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 49(5), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2022.2147112>
- Dworkin, S. L., & O’Sullivan, L. (2005). Actual versus Desired Initiation Patterns among a Sample of College Men: Tapping Disjunctures within Traditional Male Sexual Scripts. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 42(2), 150–158.

- Eaton, A. A., & Rose, S. (2011). Has Dating Become More Egalitarian? A 35 Year Review Using Sex Roles. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 64(11–12), 843–862. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-9957-9>
- Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (1999). The origins of sex differences in human behavior: Evolved dispositions versus social roles. *American Psychologist*, 54(6), 408–423. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.54.6.408>
- Ellis, S. J., & Aitken, R. (2020). Sexual health practices of 16 to 19 year olds in New Zealand: An exploratory study. *Journal of Primary Health Care*, 12(1), 64–71. <https://doi.org/10.1071/HC19037>
- Evans, A., Riley, S., & Shankar, A. (2010). Postfeminist heterotopias: Negotiating “safe” and “seedy” in the British sex shop space. *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 17(3), 211–229. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506810368817>
- Fahs. (2011). *Performing Sex: The Making and Unmaking of Women’s Erotic Lives*. SUNY Press.
- Fahs, B. (2014). “Freedom to” and “freedom from”: A new vision for sex-positive politics. *Sexualities*, 17(3), 267–290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460713516334>
- Fahs, B., & Frank, E. (2014). Notes from the Back Room: Gender, Power, and (In)Visibility in Women’s Experiences of Masturbation. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 51(3), 241–252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2012.745474>
- Fahs, B., & Swank, E. (2013). Adventures with the “Plastic Man”: Sex Toys, Compulsory Heterosexuality, and the Politics of Women’s Sexual Pleasure. *Sexuality & Culture*, 17(4), 666–685. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-013-9167-4>
- Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical discourse analysis. In T. A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as social interaction* (pp. 258–284). London: Sage.
- Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Longman.

- Fairclough (2013). Critical discourse analysis. In M. Handlrod & P. J. Gee. (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (2nd ed.) (pp. 11-22). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003035244>
- Gill, R. (2000). Discourse analysis. In M. W. Bauer & G. Gaskell, G. (Eds.), *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound : a practical handbook* (pp. 172-190). SAGE.
- Faustino, M. J. (2017). Rebooting an Old Script by New Means: Teledildonics—The Technological Return to the ‘Coital Imperative.’ *Sexuality & Culture*, 22(1), 243.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge*. Pantheon Books.
- Fröander, R., & Halkosaari, N. (2019). The construction of women’s sexuality: A critical discourse analysis on consent research (Dissertation). Retrieved from
<https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-166351>
- Gagnon, J. H., & Simon, W. (2017). *Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Glapka, E. (2018). ‘If you look at me like at a piece of meat, then that’s a problem’—women in the center of the male gaze. Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis as a tool of critique. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 15(1), 87–103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2017.1390480>
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor Books.
- Greener, I. (2011). *Designing social research: A guide for the bewildered*. SAGE.
- Hall, P. M. (2007). Symbolic Interaction. In *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Gill, R. (2000). Discourse analysis. In M. W. Bauer & G. Gaskell, G. (Eds.), *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound : a practical handbook* (pp. 172-190). SAGE.

- Herbenick, D., & Reece, M. (2009). In-home Sex Toy Party Facilitators as Sex Educators: What Questions Are They Asked and What Makes Them More “Askable”? *American Journal of Sexuality Education, 4*(2), 178–193. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15546120903001415>
- Herbenick, D., Reece, M., & Hollub, A. (2009). Inside the ordering room: Characteristics of women’s in-home sex toy parties, facilitators and sexual communication. *Sexual Health, 6*(4), 318. <https://doi.org/10.1071/SH08086>
- Herbenick, D., Reece, M., Sanders, S. A., Dodge, B., Ghassemi, A., & Fortenberry, J. D. (2010). Women’s Vibrator Use in Sexual Partnerships: Results From a Nationally Representative Survey in the United States. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 36*(1), 49–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00926230903375677>
- Herbenick, D., Schick, V., Jozkowski, K. N., Jawed-Wessel, S., & Reece, M. (2013). The Sexual Consumer: Characteristics, Expectations, and Experiences of Women Attending In-Home Sex Toy Parties. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy, 39*(2), 160–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2012.691949>
- Holmes, J., Marra, M., & Vine, B. (2012). Politeness and impoliteness in ethnic varieties of New Zealand English. *Journal of Pragmatics, 44*(9), 1063–1076. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2011.11.006>
- Hua, D. M., Jones, R., Bardzell, J., & Bardzell, S. (2022). The Hidden Language of Vibrators: A Politico-Ontological Reading. *Designing Interactive Systems Conference, 400–414*. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3532106.3533448>
- Jozkowski, K. N., Schick, V., Herbenick, D., & Reece, M. (2012). Sexuality Information Seeking and Sexual Function Among Women Attending In-Home Sex Toy Parties. *International Journal of Sexual Health, 24*(2), 112–123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2011.640386>
- Kumara, C., & Jayawardhana, W. (2018). International beauty pageants and the construction of hegemonic images of female beauty. *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences, 41*, 123. <https://doi.org/10.4038/sljss.v41i2.7699>

- Kwan, S., & Trautner, M. N. (2009). Beauty Work: Individual and Institutional Rewards, the Reproduction of Gender, and Questions of Agency. *Sociology Compass*, 3(1), 49–71. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2008.00179.x>
- Lemke, T. (2018). An Alternative Model of Politics? Prospects and Problems of Jane Bennett's *Vital Materialism*. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 35(6), 31–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276418757316>
- Lieberman, H. (2016). Selling Sex Toys: Marketing and the Meaning of Vibrators in Early Twentieth-Century America. *Enterprise & Society*, 17(2), 393–433. <https://doi.org/10.1017/eso.2015.97>
- Lieberman, H. (2017). Intimate Transactions: Sex Toys and the Sexual Discourse of Second-Wave Feminism. *Sexuality & Culture*, 21(1), 96–120. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-016-9383-9>
- Lieberman, H., & Schatzberg, E. (2018). A failure of academic quality control: The technology of orgasm. *Journal of Positive Sexuality*, 4(2), 24–47. <https://doi.org/10.51681/1.421>
- Lupton, D. (2019). The thing-power of the human-app health assemblage: Thinking with vital materialism. *Social Theory & Health*, 17(2), 125–139. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41285-019-00096-y>
- Maines, R. P. (2001). *The Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria," the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction*. JHU Press.
- Masters, N. T., Casey, E., Wells, E. A., & Morrison, D. M. (2013). Sexual Scripts among Young Heterosexually Active Men and Women: Continuity and Change. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 50(5), 409–420. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2012.661102>
- Mayan. (2009). *Essentials of Qualitative Inquiry*. Routledge.
- McCabe, J., Tanner, A. E., & Heiman, J. R. (2010). The Impact of Gender Expectations on Meanings of Sex and Sexuality: Results from a Cognitive Interview Study. *Sex Roles*, 62(3), 252–263. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-009-9723-4>

- McCaughey, M., & French, C. (2001). Women's sex-toy parties: Technology, orgasm, and commodification. *Sexuality and Culture*, 5(3), 77–96.
- McCormick. (2010). Preface to sexual scripts: Social and therapeutic implications. *Sexual & Relationship Therapy*, 25(1), 91–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681990903563707>
- Ménard, A. D., & Cabrera, C. (2011). 'Whatever the Approach, Tab B Still Fits into Slot A': Twenty Years of Sex Scripts in Romance Novels. *Sexuality & Culture: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, 15(3), 240–255. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-011-9092-3>
- Neff, I. (2020). Vital and enchanted: Jane Bennett and new materialism for nursing philosophy and practice. *Nursing Philosophy*, 21(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/nup.12273>
- Nixon, P., & Scarcelli, C. M. (2022). Coming of age: The alluring development of sex toys. In E. Rees (Ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Gender, Sexuality and Culture*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367822040>
- Montone, C. (2010). *1960s Vibrating Massager Vintage Advertisement For Women Vibrator Photo Campy Kitsch Sexy Bawdy*. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/christianmontone/4346574556>
- Jørgensen, M., & Phillips, L. (2002). *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. Sage Publications.
- Kiefer, A. K., & Sanchez, D. T. (2007). Scripting sexual passivity: A gender role perspective. *Personal Relationships*, 14(2), 269–290. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.2007.00154.x>
- Klein, V., & Conley, T. D. (2022). The Role of Gendered Entitlement in Understanding Inequality in the Bedroom. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 13(6), 1047–1057. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506211053564>
- Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. Verso.

- Oliver, M. B., & Hyde, J. S. (1993). Gender differences in sexuality: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 114(1), 29–51. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.114.1.29>
- Pascoe, C. j. (2005). “Dude, you’re a fag”: Adolescent masculinity and the fag discourse. *Sexualities*, 8(3), 329–346. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460705053337>
- Pauls, R. (2015). Anatomy of the Clitoris and the Female Sexual Response. *Clinical Anatomy*, 28(3), 376–384.
- Pérez-y-Pérez, M. (2003). Discipline, autonomy and ambiguity: Organisations, markets and work in the sex industry, Christchurch, New Zealand.
- Pérez-y-Pérez, M. (2015). Ethnography in a “Sexy Setting:” Doing Research in a New Zealand Massage Parlour. In J. De Lamater & R. F. Plante (Eds.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Sexualities* (pp. 109–122). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-17341-2_7
- Ponterotto, D. (2016). Resisting the male Gaze: Feminist responses to the “Normatization” of the female body in Western culture. *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 17(1), 133–151.
- Pure Romance (2017a). *Spring/Summer 2017*.
<https://mediacenter.pureromance.com/p/bb4bdf249648e74261a06cf09ad8c903>
- Pure Romance (2017b). *Intimate Collection 2017* [Product Catalogue – Australia and New Zealand]
- Pure Romance. (2016, 2017). *Product pages*. <https://pureromance.com>
- Qalati, S. A., Limón, M. L. S., & Bhayo, S. H. (2022). A review study of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on individual sexual behavior, purchasing sex toys, and related consequences. *Sexologies*, 31(4), 468–476. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sexol.2022.06.002>
- Guill, A. (2022). *Thousands paid for sex toy without seeing the product first*. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/300746958/thousands-paid-for-sex-toy-without-seeing-the-product-first>

- Sakaluk, J. K., Todd, L. M., Milhausen, R., & Lachowsky, N. J. (2014). Dominant Heterosexual Sexual Scripts in Emerging Adulthood: Conceptualization and Measurement. *The Journal of Sex Research, 51*(5), 516–531.
- Schilt, K., & Westbrook, L. (2009). Doing gender, Doing Heteronormativity: “Gender Normals,” Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality. *Gender and Society, 23*(4), 440–464.
- Seabrook, R. C., Cortina, L. M., Ward, L. M., Giaccardi, S., & Lippman, J. R. (2017). Girl Power or Powerless Girl? Television, Sexual Scripts, and Sexual Agency in Sexually Active Young Women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 41*(2), 240–253. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684316677028>
- Shirazi, T., Renfro, K. J., Lloyd, E., & Wallen, K. (2018). Women’s Experience of Orgasm During Intercourse: Question Semantics Affect Women’s Reports and Men’s Estimates of Orgasm Occurrence. *Archives of Sexual Behavior: The Official Publication of the International Academy of Sex Research, 47*(3), 605–613. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-017-1102-6>
- Simon, W., & Gagnon, J. H. (1984). Sexual scripts. *Society, 22*(1), 53–60.
- Simon, & Gagnon. (1986). Sexual scripts: Permanence and change. *Archives of Sexual Behavior: The Official Publication of the International Academy of Sex Research, 22*(1), 53–60.
- Stats NZ. (2018). *Palmerston North City*. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-place-summaries/palmerston-north-city>
- Stuff. (2021a). *New Zealand’s top 10 adult toys for 2021 revealed*. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/wellbeing/300482079/new-zealands-top-10-adult-toys-for-2021-revealed>.
- Stuff. (2021b). *Wellington adult store turns on recycling scheme for unwanted sex toys*. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/industries/125551033/wellington-adult-store-turns-on-recycling-scheme-for-unwanted-sex-toys>.

- Rossolatos, G. (2016). Good vibrations: Charting the dominant and emergent discursive regimes of sex toys. *Qualitative Report*, 21(8), 1475-1494-1494.
- Smith, C. (2007). Designed for pleasure: Style, indulgence and accessorized sex. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(2), 167-184.
- Sontag, S. (1972). The double standard of aging. *Saturday Review of Literature*, 39, 29-38
- Storr, M. (2003). *Latex and lingerie: Shopping for pleasure at Ann Summers parties*. Oxford: Berg.
- Strauss, S., & Feiz, P. (2013). *Discourse Analysis: Putting Our Worlds into Words*. Routledge.
- Tiefer, L. (1994). The Medicalization of Impotence: Normalizing Phallocentrism. *Gender and Society*, 8(3), 363-377.
- Toerien, M., Wilkinson, S., & Choi, P. Y. L. (2005). Body Hair Removal: The 'Mundane' Production of Normative Femininity. *Sex Roles*, 52(5), 399-406. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-005-2682-5>
- Tom. (2010). *20 odd vintage products you won't find today*. <https://www.boredpanda.com/strange-vintage-products-and-inventions/>.
- Tseëlon, E. (1993). The Ideology of Beauty. In H. J. Stam, L. P. Mos, W. Thorngate, & B. Kaplan (Eds.), *Recent Trends in Theoretical Psychology* (pp. 319-323). Springer New York. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4612-2746-5_29
- Vannier, S. A., & O'Sullivan, L. F. (2012). Who Gives and Who Gets: Why, when, and with Whom Young People Engage in Oral Sex. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 41(5), 572-582. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-012-9745-z>
- Waiwiri-Smith, L. (2022). *New Zealand's sex toy capital? It's Palmerston North, of course*. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/gender-and-society/300766190/new-zealands-sex-toy-capital-its-palmerston-north-of-course>.

- Ward, L. M., Rosenscruggs, D., & Aguinaldo, E. R. (2022). A Scripted Sexuality: Media, Gendered Sexual Scripts, and Their Impact on Our Lives. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 31(4), 369–374. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09637214221101072>
- White, D. (2013). *All the buzzzzz: Women making gender and sexuality at sex-toy parties in St. Louis* [Doctoral thesis, University of Illinois]. <https://hdl.handle.net/2142/42438>
- Wilner, S. J. S., & Huff, A. D. (2017). Objects of desire: The role of product design in revising contested cultural meanings. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 33(3/4), 244–271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2016.1240099>
- Wiederman, M. w. (2005). The Gendered Nature of Sexual Scripts. *The Family Journal*, 13(4), 496–502.
- Wiederman, M. W. (2015). Sexual Script Theory: Past, Present, and Future. In J. DeLamater & R. F. Plante (Eds.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Sexualities* (pp. 7–22). Springer International Publishing.
- Willis, M., Jozkowski, K. N., Lo, W.-J., & Sanders, S. A. (2018). Are Women’s Orgasms Hindered by Phallogentric Imperatives? *Archives of Sexual Behavior: The Official Publication of the International Academy of Sex Research*, 47(6), 1565–1576. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-018-1149-z>