

Automatic Lover¹ - History, Consumer Practice and Cultural Texts about the Vibrator

Autoria: Luciana Castello da Costa Leme Walther

Abstract:

The idea for this exploratory study arose during a previous research on the emergence of a more overt female consumer of erotic products. The ethnographic method was used then, comprising in-depth interviews and participant observation at women-only sex shops in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which is popularly and scholarly known as a highly sexualized culture. During interviews with shop attendants, an episode of “Sex and the City” was repeatedly mentioned as the reason for which the so-called Rabbit vibrator became the best sold item in all stores visited by the researcher. Therefore, studying the vibrator as a commoditized product and understanding the way consumers deal with its representation in cultural texts seemed like a promising path of investigation. Thus, the aim of this study is twofold: (1) to further understand, with a cultural approach, how women in Brazil create and negotiate meaning through erotic consumption; and (2) to examine, with a marketing approach, the effectiveness of product placement as a tool to market sex to women, considering consumers’ interpretive strategies. In this study, we applied Hirschman, Scott and Wells’ Model of Product Discourse (1998) to consumption practices and cultural texts about the vibrator. This model assumes that, in order to acquire meaning, any good must go through a process that will culturally construct it as a symbol and hierarchically place it amidst a product constellation or object system. Therefore, understanding *how* goods acquire meaning is as important as understanding *what* they mean. Through the model, we analyzed Sex and the City episodes in which a vibrator played a relevant part, comparing them to practices, as described by respondents during our previous study, and then to history, in order to understand how things came to be the way they are. Erotic consumption and its cultural representations revealed the contradictions that contemporary women face in current western societies. They want to be independent consumers who may overtly shop for erotic products, but at the same time they still long for being wives. On the one hand, they are proud of having attained financial independence. On the other hand, they fear the isolation that may accrue from it. However, the conciliation between their feminist postures and their taste for feminine aesthetics into a coherent identity is not seen as a problem for these female consumers. Exploring the relationship between consumer culture, sexuality and gender seems, therefore, like a confirmed path to relevant discoveries about new social codes and roles. It has also transformative potential, since marketing practices, such as product placement in cultural texts, may impact social contexts and redress gender inequalities. As for managerial implications, the main recommendation generated by this study would be to profit from Brazilian soap operas enormous reach and influence. Product placement may be a good strategy to market sex to women, due to the perception of meaningful characters as part of a trusted expert system.

INTRODUCTION

People are having sex. At this very moment, millions of people are either engaging in sexual intercourse or planning to (Mackay, 2000). They always have been; they always will be. And while they are at it, it is highly likely that there is also some sort of consumption involved. Be it of preservatives, lubricants, porn magazines, movies, paid sex TV channels, sex toys, sex services, erectile dysfunction drugs, birth control pills or the Internet, in present day western societies, one can hardly have sex and not be a consumer at the same time. So why does literature on consumption rarely address sexuality?

Although sexuality has been an important topic in the social sciences literature for decades, it has to date received relatively little attention in consumption studies. The existing marketing research that, to some extent, relates to sexuality has more frequently focused on topics like homosexuality, gender issues, hedonism, desire, and sex in advertising (Belk, Ger & Askegaard, 2003; Elliot & Ritson, 1995; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Kates, 2002; Reichert & Ramirez, 2000; Roberts, 1981; Stern, 1991) while the actual consumption of erotic products and services has been addressed by very few (Gould, 1991; Jantzen, Ostergaard & Vieira, 2006; Kent, 2005; Langer, 2007; Malina & Schmidt, 1997; O'Donnell, 1999).

The idea for this exploratory study arose during a previous research on the emergence of a type of contemporary Brazilian woman as a more overt consumer of erotic products and services. The original research used the ethnographic method, comprising in-depth interviews and participant observation at women-only sex shops in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which is popularly and scholarly known as a highly sexualized culture (Parker, 1991). During the interviews with shop attendants and owners, an episode of North-American television series "Sex and the City" was repeatedly mentioned as the reason for which the so-called Rabbit vibrator became the best sold item in all stores visited by the researcher. Therefore, studying the vibrator as a commoditized product and understanding the way consumers deal with its representation in cultural texts seemed like a promising path of investigation.

Thus, the aim of this study is twofold: (1) to further understand, with a cultural approach, how women in Brazil create and negotiate meaning through erotic consumption; and (2) to examine, with a marketing approach, the effectiveness of product placement as a tool to market sex to women, considering consumers' interpretive strategies (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

Furthermore, by straight-forwardly facing marketing practices of erotic products designed for women and female erotic consumption, researchers may help transform social realities where gender inequalities persist. The growth of the erotic market, the birth of women-only sex-shops, and the overt portrayal of female sexualities on television are tokens of social changes already in progress. Since the design of technological products, such as the vibrator, may reflect dominant social patterns (Dobscha, 2004) and marketers may inscribe products with gendered meanings that sustain inequality in gender power relations (Catterall, Maclaran & Stevens 1997), a feminist view of erotic consumption could contribute to the transformative character of consumer research.

METHODOLOGY

For authors such as Hirschman, Scott and Wells (1998), Holt (1997), and McCracken (1988), products acquire meaning when they are transformed into signifiers of a culturally recognized practice or category. The process through which a product is injected with meaning is as important as the meaning itself. Present and historic use, as well as texts about products, are fundamental actors in this process (Hirschman *et al*, 1998).

In order to interpret the symbolism that is part of consumption practices and of cultural texts, we used Hirschman, Scott and Wells' Model of Product Discourse (1998), which is intended to illuminate the process of meaning creation, negotiation and alteration for any product. In this study, we focused on consumption practices and cultural texts about the vibrator.

Hirschman *et al* (1998) used data from primetime television commercials and programs. They also identified the influence of historical habits and historical texts on contemporary product meaning. For these authors, the juxtaposing of cultural texts, consumption practices and history forms a round two-way dynamic relationship. History influences practices that, in turn, influence texts, which also have the potential to influence back history and consumption practices. Ads, for instance, are texts specifically designed to influence practices. Television series are not, although they may end up doing it too, if their storylines meaningfully intertwine with depicted products (Avery & Ferraro, 2000) and if viewers are strongly attached to their characters (Russell & Stern, 2006).

In this study, we used data drawn from three *Sex and the City* episodes. From all seasons, we chose the episodes that included the words "vibrator", "sex toy" or "dildo" in their synopses², meaning that the product played a relevant part in the plot. The entire episodes were analyzed, not just the scenes featuring the vibrator. For Hirschman *et al* (1998), TV shows, as fictional cultural texts, portray products as props and try to represent real-life consumption practices as fairly as possible. As our study later suggests, that is not always true for the show we analyzed. So, in order to use *Sex and the City* episodes as representations of actual consumption practices, we compared the analyzed scenes to practices described by respondents during in-depth interviews from our earlier study.

Product placement is defined as the marketing practice that pays for the inclusion of a firm's branded product in movies and television shows (Balasubramanian, 1994). Although advertising frequently relies on symbolic representations of sexuality (Gould, 1991), this is done for products not directly related to sexual activities (Stern, 1991). Erotic products, in Brazil, are not usually advertised in traditional vehicles, such as newspapers, magazines, TV and radio. In our earlier study, owners and managers of sex shops manifested their preference for more subtle communications strategies, such as PR and encouraged word-of-mouth, in fear of their brand being seen as vulgar if advertised more overtly. Furthermore, as the disciplinary powers of school, church, and even the family decrease, popular culture may increasingly influence the production of moral standards (Cramer, 2007) and practices, turning TV series into guidelines for consumption.

Following Hirschman *et al* (1998), we detected recurrent thematic issues in our cultural texts. These categories were, one by one, plugged into the Model of Product Discourse (1998). That means that, after analyzing text, we compared it to practice, from practice we went to history, and all the way back again. According to the authors, this process provides a conceptual map for sorting through and making sense of product consumption scenes, and helps answering questions about how things came to be the way they are in consumption practices.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

The information comprised in this section was obtained during our previous study, unless otherwise stated. We have suppressed authorship to comply with blind review rules.

The first women-only sex shops in Brazil appeared in 2004. Since then, several other similar stores opened up in different cities across the country, targeting a new type of consumer: affluent, forward-thinking, independent women, in search for novelty in their sex

lives or for ways of rescuing long-term relationships that had gone sour or plain. Not long before that, Brazilian sex shops consisted mostly of tiny obscure joints, associated with filth and immorality. Around 1997, mirroring the growth of sexual consumption around the world, sex shops in Brazil, and therefore popular perception of them, started to change. Stores became larger, lighter, more sophisticated, better located, better decorated and, of course, more expensive. Women became customers. However, they were still embarrassed to purchase in the presence of men. So they solicited a great number of deliveries and product demonstrations at home.

Having detected enormous potential in the female segment, sex shop entrepreneurs decided to invest in women-only stores. Besides the repositioning that sex shops had already gone through, further adjustments were necessary in order to attract and maintain the female public. First of all, there was a nomenclature change. These were no longer sex shops, but “erotic boutiques”. Everything, from decoration to service, was redesigned so that these stores could operate commercially in the luxury segment and, emotionally, in the fantasy domain. The widespread proliferation of this new business model can be seen as evidence of the emergence of a new type of consumer, whose needs must be met. It also reflects shifts in Brazilian women’s social, sexual and affective postures.

The changing and often conflicting roles of women today pose significant challenges for marketers and researchers (Ahuvia, 2005). The choice for this particular empirical field – the erotic industry in Brazil – is due to its potential as a means to understanding Brazilian contemporary women, and as a locus for rich symbolic and economic exchange. It is a growing market, which exceeds R\$900 million³. Women represent 70% of the clientele at Brazilian sex shops. Analyzing this market and its female consumer may result in interesting theories for Social Sciences, enriching gender and sexuality studies in Brazil, and for Business Sciences, identifying managerial implications regarding marketing to women.

In order to better understand the cultural and economic context which enabled the surfacing of this kind of woman, one must revisit Brazil’s colonized and patriarchal roots. A good way to do this is through the work of Brazilian social scientist Gilberto Freyre. In his seminal book “Casa-Grande e Senzala: Formação da Família Brasileira sob o Regime da Economia Patriarcal” (1933/2006), Freyre provides a historical, social and anthropological interpretation of Brazil’s sexual identity and family ties. Deriving from Freyre’s work, other contemporary authors have also attempted to explain Brazilians as highly sexualized people, (Fry, 1982; Moutinho, 2004; Parker, 1991), national trait that became world-renowned, making the country fertile territory for the prosperity of the erotic industry.

As stated by Freyre (1933/2006), the arrival of Portuguese colonizers on the newfound land they later called Brazil established an economic tripod, which became the foundation for Brazilian social character: sugarcane monoculture, latifundium, and slavery. This economic system originated and was enabled by the patriarchal regime, in which families were formed by the Portuguese patriarch, his usually white wife, and his offspring (legitimate children bore by the wife or illegitimate ones resulting of sexual encounters with female black slaves).

Before Africans were enslaved and brought to Brazil, Portuguese colonizers attempted to enslave the native population. However, indigenous men were nomad hunters, therefore not adapting well to the hard and stationary work on the crop. Nevertheless, indigenous women grew immediately fond of Portuguese men, engaging frequently in intercourse with them. So it was that, out of miscegenation and surrounded by what Freyre called a “sexually intoxicating environment” (Freyre, 1933/2006, p. 161), Brazilian civilization was formed.

In this setting, oppositions such as between masculinity and femininity and between master and slave led to the establishment of a complex system of symbolic dominations and of hierarchical relations (Parker, 1991). Women were to be submissive and to remain inside the house, which was built with the purpose of keeping them in. Windows were covered with

Arab inspired trellis structures called “gelosias” (interestingly deriving from the word jealousy), through which one could barely see anything. Women were allowed to speak freely only amongst themselves, in the boudoirs, located in the very center of the house. In the origins of Brazilian society lies, therefore, a double moral standard, which has lasted throughout the centuries. Men were encouraged and free to exercise all their sexual drive, while women were not only deprived from theirs, but had also the obligation to engage in sexual intercourse only when and if their husbands felt like it (Freyre, 1933/2006).

Hence it follows that the recent emergence of a new type of Brazilian woman, who will speak freely about sexuality and who will seek pleasure in erotic boutiques, seems to represent, among other things, an attempt to break with the masculine domination (Bourdieu, 1998a) that hails from patriarchal times.

The questions raised thus far by our study in sex shops may find answers or further useful interpretations in the present study. If, in the one hand, female sex shop customers are free to address their own sexual issues, on the other hand, they are embarrassed to do it in front of male customers. They will only do it among their female peers, in the safe, private, windowless environment of the erotic boutique, where men are not welcome. How truly distant are these erotic boutiques from the patriarchal boudoir?

According to store attendants who participated of our previous study, the major complaint expressed by women when shopping at an erotic boutique is that, in most cases, they are the ones responsible for the bill, and not their husbands or boyfriends, since men are not even allowed in. Studies on Brazilian culture have suggested that the act of paying for an item empowers the one who pays, and not the one who gets paid (Parker, 1991). Taking that into consideration, it could be argued that the independent working woman who has money to shop in an erotic boutique, but who still would like her man to pay for the bill, may be trying to return to the symbolic dominated submissive position (Bourdieu, 1998b), by transferring power back to men. How effectively different is this woman from her patriarchal predecessors?

Giddens (1990) points out that the reflexive modern individual is constantly re-exploring and re-assessing him or herself, attitude which creates uncertainty and anxiety, for many risks start to emerge. Trusting an expert system may be a way of minimizing perceived risks. Be the expert a doctor, a financial advisor or a sex shop attendant, in order to build a trustworthy relationship, according to Giddens (1990), he or she will have to create continual, reciprocal emotional disclosure, bringing about feelings of intimacy and closeness to the advisee. This seems to be what happens in Brazilian women-only erotic boutiques, where shop attendants became informal sexual counselors in an attempt to sooth consumers’ fears when entering a sex shop.

Moreover, the widespread adoption of overt sexual consumption is a relatively recent international phenomena Brazil is only catching up with. The Brazilian erotic industry and the sex toy category are, therefore, in the early stages of their life cycles (Day, 1981). At this point, early adopters do not know how products operate and are unaware of brand names, despite being prone to assess the risk of entering an unknown domain. Our previous study has found that many women arriving at the erotic boutique for the first time do not even know their own bodies, let alone how to please themselves. Not only are sex shop attendants demonstrating products and explaining details of their usage, but they are also advising women regarding orgasm, anatomy and love. Personnel training and communications strategies got crucial, when sex shops became part of an expert system and assumed an educational role.

Another interesting issue raised by the research at erotic boutiques has to do with the strategically adopted visual stimuli. All visited stores are designed with focus on the female customer. A store manager described the decoration as of “a woman’s bedroom filled with sex

toys”. A second store manager referred to Barbie dolls and the pink boxes in which they are sold, when talking about packaging. Decorative items found in these stores were teddy bears dressed in leather, Betty Boop character dolls, feather boas, a heart shaped giant pink ottoman, Venetian mirrors and silk lilac curtains. If vibrators are seen as toys and visual stimuli evoke girlish imagery and colors, there seems to be an infantilization of female sensuality. Perhaps in an attempt to avoid vulgar messages, the erotic boutique resorts to infantile references, despite its customers being between 18 and 70 years old.

Our previous study also showed that, in spite of being free to enter an erotic boutique at any time, Brazilian women still face prejudice and social sanctions when buying sex toys. Single women who buy them for solitary pleasure may be criticized for supposedly trying to replace real men with a vibrator. Women who intend to use sex toys with their male partners may have to deal with their resistance, in case they feel intimidated by realistic looking phallic shapes other than their own. And, finally, married women who use vibrators alone may even be accused of cheating. These three situations were reported in our previous interviews, indicating that guilt and blame still play important roles in contemporary relationships between Brazilian men and women. Specially when a controversial object like the vibrator stands between them.

With the possibility provided by the Model of Product Discourse (1998) of shedding light onto consumption practices, this study attempted to further explore the above issues uncovered by our previous research.

INTERPRETATION

Season 1 – Episode 9

In the analyzed episodes of *Sex and the City*, characters hardly ever appeared in their work environment, even though several moments of their lives were depicted. It is as if they lived in an eternal weekend. This daily routine does not correspond to most viewers’ realities. Work and jobs were only mentioned in order to establish a character’s social status. The main character’s job is central to the plot (she is a sex columnist in a newspaper), but she works at home, frequently in her pajamas or shorts and always smoking, which strongly differs from the work environment one expects to see if TV series need to accurately represent reality in order to ring true to viewers (Hirschman *et al*, 1998). We argue that they need not. On the contrary, if they represent imaginary dreamed lifestyles, they seem to have high chances of impacting viewer’s appreciation and even of changing viewer’s behavior accordingly.

It is possible that this has been one of the reasons for which the Rabbit vibrator, a central “character” in a memorable episode, reached skyrocketing sales after the episode was aired. Even in Brazil, a country geographically distant from the United States where the series were conceived, the Rabbit sales are, to this day, still pushed by one single episode of a foreign program that is carried only by paid TV channels.

In the beginning of the referred episode, the four main characters, Carrie, Miranda, Samantha and Charlotte, were having their usual Sunday brunch, during which they discuss their main worries. In many episodes, the characters are seen in this situation. Very intimate details of each character’s life are shared during this private moment that happens, nevertheless, in a public setting. Many of these details refer to sex, as the series title suggests.

In this particular conversation, the discussion evolved around communication (or lack thereof) between men and women. Should women reveal to men their real feelings and wants? The subject immediately changed when Miranda asked the point of that discussion. She argued that, in 50 years, men would be obsolete and that already women could not talk to

them, already women did not need them to procreate, adding finally that she had recently discovered that men are not even needed for sex.

This intimate dialogue among close friends regarding a commoditized good can reveal many social meanings. Miranda seemed to have found in the vibrator a solution for the everlasting incompatibilities between men and women. Her friends repudiated the idea in different ways. Carrie instantly used the verb “replace” to justify her refusal. Miranda, herself, had already talked about men’s obsolescence when introducing the subject. Charlotte found it sad that a woman should settle for an object that will not do the romantic gestures she associates with the male role. And Samantha, by mentioning a horse, referred to a very strong symbolic element embedded in the masculine social representation: the phallus and its size.

The whole dialogue was encompassed by the notion of the vibrator not as a complementary accessory that may enrich one’s sex life, but as a substitute for men. Seeing the vibrator as a replacement invests the product with very threatening symbolism, not only for men, but also for women and for mankind, creating, therefore, resistance to it.

If we compare the depicted scenes with practice, as told by informants from our previous study and by secondary sources consulted then, we may find similarities. Specially regarding men’s fear of replacement and of comparison. Reports were found of men feeling jealous of their partners’ attachment to the vibrator. Others considered their wives’ or girlfriends’ use of the vibrator as cheating. There were men that mildly encouraged their partners to use a vibrator, but only if it was not shaped as a penis⁴.

After comparing text to practice, we arrived to the following question: why is the vibrator usually seen as a replacement for men and not as a complement for sex? The next step according to the Model of Product Discourse (1998) helps answering that question and will be discussed later in this paper.

A later scene of the same episode showed Miranda taking Carrie and Charlotte to a sex shop, in order to introduce them to the Rabbit. Charlotte still argued that she was saving sex for someone she loved. For this character, sex was inextricably linked to love. Love for a man, that is. It seemed that she could not conceive falling in love with an object, as opposed to Miranda, who had earlier stated being in love with the Rabbit. Before taking the vibrator out of its box, Carrie was surprised by its price, US\$92⁵, reacting as if she found it too expensive. Miranda quickly responded by saying “Please! Think about the money we spend on shoes!”. Taking into consideration many women’s passion (or lust) for shoes (Belk, 2003), one can hardly argue that it is not possible to fall in love with an object. Several studies on consumption have addressed consumers’ love and emotional attraction to objects (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, Ger & Askegaard, 2003; Langer, 2007).

As soon as they opened the box and took the vibrator out, both Charlotte and Carrie immediately reacted positively. Charlotte exclaimed “It’s cute! It’s pink! It’s for girls! I thought it’d be scary and weird”, to which Miranda responded with a look, as if saying “I told you so”. Both women purchased the vibrator.

Later, Carrie and Charlotte were depicted at a yoga class. This time, the idea of the vibrator as a substitute for men gained further insight, when Charlotte made a comparison between the effects obtained with the device and the ones obtained with men, resulting in the Rabbit’s superiority verdict, when it comes to providing orgasms. She expressed fear of the product’s power to modify her, to turn her into a woman who does not comply with her ascribed social role, who does not fulfill society’s expectations of bonding with a man. At the end of the scene, Charlotte tells Carrie she won’t be able to go out with her that evening, giving an unconvincing excuse.

Later in the same episode, Charlotte appeared on satin sheets, calling Carrie to cancel yet another night out. This is the same character that had claimed before to be saving sex for a deserving man. Now she was depicted alone, evidently feeling sexy with herself, and not for

a male partner. Charlotte had become addicted to the Rabbit, the real reason for her not wanting to go out anymore. Carrie and Miranda decided to perform a “Rabbit intervention”. They showed up unannounced at Charlotte’s apartment and burst inside, despite their friend’s protests, in search for the Rabbit. When they finally found the vibrator, Carrie exclaimed “Oh, Charlotte, you hid the rabbit behind a stuffed rabbit. That is so you!”. Once again, the female world is portrayed in a cultural text as pink, cute and infantile, depiction that matches actual practice, as seen in Brazilian erotic boutiques. Why is female sensuality represented with infantile iconography?

Season 3 – Episode 3

In the second analyzed episode, the vibrator belonged to character Miranda, an overworked lawyer and single mother, whose profession seems to be used in the plot as a cue for her status as an independent woman. In this episode, she had recently hired an Ukranian housekeeper, Magda, to take care of her baby and her apartment, after maternity leave was over. Miranda’s relationship with Magda was off to a rough start, since the housekeeper immediately rearranged Miranda’s things around the house and started telling her what to do. Miranda was ready to go to work in the morning, wearing a black suit and drinking coffee in her law school mug by the kitchen counter, when she found a rolling pin in her kitchen drawer. Magda explained that it was a present from her and said “it’s good for women to make pies”. In a second relevant scene, Miranda told her friend Carrie about the rolling pin and about her annoying cleaning lady, stating that, as a partner in a law firm, she does not need to make pies, because she can buy them if she wants.

The next scene featuring Miranda and Magda happened also early in the morning, when Miranda was coming out of the shower, wearing a Mensa T-Shirt - another symbol of the character’s intellectualized lifestyle. Still trying to impose on Miranda a lifestyle that she considered adequate for women, Magda reorganized Miranda’s bathroom and bedroom. Magda opened Miranda’s nightstand drawer and found her vibrator. Miranda reacted by saying “Look! I have a boyfriend! It’s not like I’m sleeping with lots of different men. There’s one guy. And for a long time, there was no guy. And that’s why I have the other... thing.”. Magda asked if Miranda intended to marry her boyfriend, asserting that “everybody wants to get married”.

Later in the episode, Miranda was shown in bed. When she opened the drawer in her nightstand, she found a statue of the Virgin Mary, instead of her vibrator. The next morning, she confronted Magda about it, threatening to fire her if she insisted on acting like a mother.

Season 5 – Episode 6

In the third analyzed episode, forward-thinking character Samantha went to an electrical appliances store to exchange a neck massager that had stopped functioning after six months of use. She unabashedly insisted in referring to it as a vibrator, while talking to the clerk, to which he replied several times: “Sharper Image does not sell vibrators, this is a neck massager”. When Samantha approached the shelves where the neck massagers were displayed, she immediately started giving other female customers advice on several brands and models. The narrator’s voice concluded that “Samantha had become the official in-store sex device critic”. The store depicted is clearly recognizable as The Sharper Image, and the neck massager as Sharper Image’s AcuVibe.

DISCUSSION

The Surrogate

According to the Model of Product Discourse (1998), after comparing text to practices, it is time to resort to history. Understanding the emergence of new technologies may be a good way to clarify the social construction of the tasks and roles they were designed for (Maines, 1999).

The electromechanical vibrator was invented in the 1880s as a medical device to help cure “hysteria” in women. It is argued that, during a long time in History, female sexual behavior that did not fit patriarchal androcentric models of intercourse (that is, the sequence of “foreplay”, penetration and male orgasm) was seen as a disease requiring treatment. That is the case of symptoms grouped under the label of “hysteria” until 1952. Many researchers have pointed out that penetration fails to produce female orgasm for a great number of women (Symons, 1979) or produces less intense sensations than clitoral stimulation (Hite, 1976). The reactions to orgasm deprivation by some women may have been part of what caused the so called hysteria, which was thus treated by physicians and midwives with clitoral massage since Hippocrates until the 1920s (Maines, 1999).

The vibrator was conceived as a device that would perform this job mechanically, freeing doctors’ time and hands and increasing their income. The first vibrators were large professional-looking machines that could only be operated in a doctor’s office. They did not resemble the male genital organ in any manner and they did not perform vaginal penetration. The comforting belief that only penetration was sexually stimulating to women dispelled the idea of vibrator therapy by a doctor as a sexual service. It did not threaten men or husbands in general (Maines, 1999).

Later, in the beginning of the 20th century, technological improvements made vibrators lighter and less expensive, enabling treatments to be done at home. The vibrator became available as a consumer good in department stores. It was sold as a household appliance, rendering unnecessary any medical intervention. Still, as advertisements from the time show (Maines, 1999), they were not shaped as penises and they were not meant for penetration. Their sexual function was not yet overtly acknowledged. The vibrator was still seen as a therapeutic device.

Not until the 1960s did the modern vibrator surface frankly as a sex toy, change documented in magazine advertisements of that period (Maines, 1999). North-Americans became familiar with the use of vibrators as massagers and as “marital aids”. It was then that the product started facing resistance, due to male dismay at its efficacy compared with men’s own efforts, and due to female’s fear of the possibility of addiction. This historical observation by Maines (1999) matches very well what is depicted in the first analyzed Sex and the City episode.

The vibrator was seen, since its invention and for almost a century, as a device to cure female diseases. Perceiving the vibrator as a sex toy is a recent symbolic shift with major implications. This may be an explanation for why sex with a vibrator seems to exclude men. The difficulty to envisage a simultaneous existence of both man and vibrator in a woman’s life reflects very powerful and long-lasting social patterns, such as the androcentric model of sex, which assumes vaginal penetration by the penis as the source of female orgasms.

The challenging of these assumptions may be very disturbing even for contemporary men and women. Not only had the vibrator invaded the household, making orgasm by clitoral stimulation blatantly easier to women, but it also finally adopted the phallic shape. It was the erotic film industry in the 70s that first portrayed the vibrator shaped as a penis. After that, manufacturers followed the lead, creating a typical case of practices imitating cultural texts. Both the realization that female orgasms were more easily produced by a vibrator and its

transformation into a commoditized penis contributed largely to male feelings of emasculation, fear of substitution and, therefore, resistance.

During the conflicts between Miranda and Magda, the vibrator and the masculine company are depicted, once again, as incompatible in a woman's life. First, Miranda felt obliged to explain her ownership of a vibrator to the housekeeper. She attributed it to the loneliness prior to her relationship with current boyfriend.

Are vibrators more socially acceptable when used by lonely women? The practice of masturbation is also known as "self-consolation". In Portuguese, an outdated and now politically incorrect synonym for dildo—"consolo"—also refers to the act of consolation. History shows that, in the 1500s, therapeutic massages were already being used as a second medical recommendation for curing "hysteria". The first was marriage (Maines, 1999). Therefore, in the case of "hysterical" nuns, widows and matrons, the clitoral massage was the only option. This may be a historical explanation for the apparent higher social tolerance to lonely women turning to the vibrator.

Besides justifying her possession of a vibrator with her previous solitary status, Miranda also attempted to establish a hierarchy of values, by saying "it's not like I'm sleeping with a bunch of different men". Her discourse implies that it is more morally permissible to have a vibrator than to have several casual sexual partners. To Magda, the presence of a vibrator in a single woman's nightstand sends men the message that she does not need them. The housekeeper character is purposefully shown as an old-fashioned woman, therefore her inability to accept the coexistence of a real man and a sex toy in a modern woman's life. However, many attitudes and statements coming from the four leading characters in the three analyzed episodes revealed, in a less direct way, similar inability, as exemplified before. Nevertheless, Miranda, Carrie, Charlotte and Samantha are supposed to be modern independent women.

The Home Wrecker

Hirschman *et al* (1998) used their model to understand the meanings associated with coffee as a commoditized product. One of their main findings referred to coffee's role as a social mediator. It seems that the vibrator, according to the fictional texts analyzed here, has the exact opposite role, one of isolating its consumer. One of providing the consumer with the feeling of self-sufficiency. Miranda thought that men were obsolete and Charlotte no longer wanted to go out with her friends.

From the perception of the vibrator as a substitute for men, stems the idea that it is meant to be used by the woman alone, and not by the couple. In the first analyzed episode, the vibrator leads to voluntary social exclusion. We can find some discrepancies if we compare this aspect of this cultural text to practices described in our previous study. When asked if female customers purchase items to use more on their own or with their partners, all interviewed sex-shop attendants replied that both intentions were equally stated by shoppers.

However, if we bring history into the equation, we understand masturbation as the perceived social menace, not the vibrator. Laqueur (1990) gives a great account on how masturbation is seen throughout the centuries. He argues that masturbation puts sociability at stake, having been historically construed, from the 18th century on, as a threat to the possibility of human community. For this author, "the contrast could not be clearer between a fundamentally asocial or socially degenerative practice—the pathogenic, solitary sex of the cloister—and the vital, socially constructive act of heterosexual intercourse" (Laqueur, 1990, p. 229). If the vibrator is seen mostly as a device for producing solitary female orgasms, it may pose the same threat to communal living as once did masturbation.

Recent studies have argued that narcissistic contemporary beauty and fitness regimes self-imposed by women can work to marginalize male demands through focus on

independence and consumption (Goldenberg, 2007; Radner, 1995). According to Attwood (2005), instead of performing for the male gaze, women are now socially allowed to “produce themselves for themselves”. Cultural texts like *Sex and the City* have greatly contributed to the contemporary perception of the vibrator as a fashionable gadget for the independent woman. The device now fits into a self-sufficiency/self-discovery model that may be conducive to ideas or realities of social isolation.

In the yoga scene, Charlotte manifested the same fear of addiction that made women in the 1960s resist the vibrator, when it had first turned from a home appliance with therapeutic properties into an overt sexual device (Maines, 1999). The vibrator had been producing female orgasms since the 19th century without inflicting fear or resistance. It was a shift in its positioning as a commoditized product that changed its popular perception from a useful harmless curing device to a menacing addictive home-wrecking automatic lover.

This shows how marketing efforts may impact not only practices but also history and cultural texts. In this case, the product’s new positioning inaugurated an untapped category and a whole set of business opportunities, on the one hand. On the other hand, being directly related to sex, the new positioning triggered as well a whole set of inevitable accompanying feelings, like fear, which, as the analyzed cultural text depicts, lasts till this day.

The Pink Sex

Historical views of sex as being dangerous to women stand in the way of a sound communication between sex products manufacturers and their female customers. Attwood (2005) claims that, in order to market sex to women, companies must address customers with codes that signify safety, creating therefore a cultural trend towards representing women’s sexual pleasure as fashionable, safe, aesthetically pleasing and cute. This explains linking sex products to fashion and design. Explanations of their linkage to infantile imagery and terminology, as in “sex toy”, may be more complex than that, however.

Attwood (2005) adds that the formulation of the new femininity has a tentative nature in itself, similar to the girlish masquerade of trying on adult clothes. There may reside an explanation for the usage and seemingly positive impact of infantile references. The allusion to the feelings experienced by a girl trying on adult clothes seems like an interesting insight, when illustrated by Brazilian erotic boutiques, and their racks of luxurious design lingerie, pink and lilac decorations and packages that resemble Barbie doll boxes.

In the Rabbit episode, it is the shyest, well-behaved character, Charlotte, who becomes addicted to the vibrator. The fact that she has displayed a conservative personality throughout the series may also say a lot about this product widespread adoption after the episode. Perhaps female viewers that felt embarrassed to purchase such an item needed a role model to inspire them. According to Russell and Stern (2006), viewers of a TV series align their attitudes toward depicted products with the characters’ attitudes regarding the same product, and that is a process driven by the consumers’ attachment to characters as meaningful referent others.

Furthermore, recent studies (Ahuvia, 2005; Scott, 2005) have suggested that independent women find no difficulty in conciliating their taste for feminine aesthetics with a feminist view of gender relations. Feminist women in the 70s proclaimed that fashion and all typically feminine visual stimuli were tools used by men to dominate women (Catterall *et al*, 1997). Present day feminists disagree and see no problem in participating of a consumption arena, from which they can deliberately choose and enact several gender roles (Ahuvia, 2005; Catterall *et al*, 1997; Stern, 2005), and still construct coherent identity narratives. This explains why independent women who shop overtly for vibrators may also enjoy fashion and feminine aesthetics.

To Buy Versus To Make

The rolling pin is traditionally seen as a symbol of the housewife, who stays at home waiting for her husband to return from work. In the second analyzed episode, the law school mug, the black suit Miranda was wearing, and the standing up coffee drinking before leaving to work all signify the modern independent woman. The older foreign cleaning lady and her attitudes represent a female role that both Miranda and Carrie repudiated, as being outdated and sexist.

The activity of making pies at home is depicted in opposition to being partner in a major law firm. For the modern woman, as portrayed by these scenes, to make is the opposite of to buy. Miranda does not need to make pies, she can buy them. The dialogue between Miranda and Carrie took place in a store, while both women were trying on clothes. Female consumption can be interpreted, therefore, as attached to the contemporary woman's financial independence. However, it does not come without guilt, as Miranda admitted hers for hiring a cleaning lady instead of doing household chores herself, right after Carrie showed her mild disapproval towards her friend's decision to hire help.

On the one hand, this episode shows the four main characters as modern independent women, in contrast to what was once the socially adequate role of the housewife. On the other hand, the plot's main thread revolves around marriage. In other scenes, the four women manifest fear of being alone and envy of married couples. Marriage was a recurring subject in several conversations and situations from the three analyzed episodes, to the point of raising the question "is *Sex and the City* more about sex, or is it more about marriage?". Women long for their independence, whilst missing the social role of wife. The study of female erotic and intimate consumption may shed light onto these paradoxes. According to Jantzen, Ostergaard and Vieira (2006, p. 179), "the fascinating aspect about the consumption of lingerie is precisely that it is full of such contradictions".

The Expert

In newspaper articles⁶, Sharper Image's spokeswoman, Mollie Madrigal, stated that the company was more than happy to cooperate when *Sex and the City* producers called wanting to feature an item from the retailer. She also declared that sales rose a remarkable 15% during the month after the episode was aired, although not specifying how much of Sharper Image's sales increase could be credited to the AcuVibe's boost in popularity.

A search for keyword "vibrator" at Sharper Image's website returned quite a few "personal massagers" - including the AcuVibe, which cost U\$47,95 - all described by their soothing, relaxing, therapeutic properties. The word "vibrator" was nowhere in the text, nor was the appliance's possible erotic use mentioned.

In comparison to the Rabbit vibrator, a personal massager seems to have a few advantages. It is cheaper, easier to purchase (electronic appliances stores are more widely spread in Brazil than sex-shops and they do not cause embarrassment to female customers), they bear an extendable one year warranty and a trustworthy recognizable brand, such as Hitachi—manufacturer that carries a personal massager called The Magic Wand. There resides a possible opportunity for respected brands, that have been inside women's homes for decades, to wander into the growing and promising erotic market.

As accounted by sex-shop attendants from our previous research, Brazilian consumers are still unfamiliar with sex toy brands. They do not know which ones to trust. Since these brands do not offer warranty and Brazilian consumer rights laws do not enforce product devolution in case of consumer dissatisfaction, the purchase of an expensive Rabbit vibrator may be perceived as highly risky. For this reason, Giddens' theory of risk reduction through trust in the expert system (1990) seems to operate both in practice and in text. In Brazilian erotic boutiques, the role of the salesperson as an information provider is crucial. Moreover,

characters from a television series like *Sex and the City* are also empowered with influential expertise and trusted by Brazilian viewers. In the third analyzed episode, Samantha acts as an expert advisor, when she informs other female customers about neck massagers erotic possibilities, information which the store itself seems too coy to provide, resorting thus to product placement.

At Hitachi's official website, the only mention we could find to the Magic Wand was: "For information on Hitachi Magic Wands, sold and supported exclusively by Vibratex, Inc., please contact Customer Care and Sales"⁷. Vibratex describes itself as a company "formed 22 years ago in order to fill the need for well-made, high-quality vibrators for a woman and her clitoris"⁸.

Authorized Hitachi massager dealer, The Magic Wand Shop, acknowledges the sexual function of this product. In their website⁹, the Hitachi product is described as "the Cadillac of vibrators". This dealer has commissioned an accessory extension to a manufacturer of adult silicon products, specifically designed to be attached to the wand, enhancing its erotic possibilities. The dealer's website provides a link to Dr. Betty Dodson webpage¹⁰, where she explains how to use Hitachi Magic Wand. Dr. Betty Dodson, a North-American Ph.D. and sexologist that frequently appears on TV in the US, has been recommending this product for sexual use since the 1970s.

Sue Johanson's television program, *Talk Sex*, was also repeatedly cited by sex-shop attendants from our previous study. An interviewed sex-shop owner stated that, every time Johanson mentioned a new product in her program, the very next day a customer would come to the store asking for it. Both Dr. Dodson and Sue Johanson are mature women, endorsed by their life experiences and professional titles (Johanson is a registered nurse, sexual counselor and recipient of the Order of Canada¹¹), who manage to reach a large audience through television shows. They play a very important role in the aforementioned expert system.

Both fiction – with all four *Sex and the City* characters adopting and promoting the vibrator – and non-fiction – through medical counseling given by Sue Johanson – have strongly influenced lives of Brazilian women who have access to paid TV channels. One could only imagine the range of this impact if attempted on nation's largest open TV channel, Globo, during its most popular and profitable show: primetime soap opera.

Globo Network is the fourth largest television broadcaster in the world, covering 98,53% of Brazil's territory and reaching 99,47% of the country's population, which corresponds to more than 183 million people¹². Globo's soap operas are daily primetime shows watched by Brazilians pertaining to all social classes. Originally conceived as a sponsored program to promote soap brands (hence its name), the soap opera in Brazil turned into a genre on its own and is now exported to more than 130 countries. Until 2006, Globo had produced and aired 296 soap operas and miniseries.

Because of Globo Network's huge capillarity, soap operas are able to evenly spread information across the country, to viewers of all social classes and geographical locations, reaching the most remote rural areas. By doing so, the soap opera makes available a shared repertoire that previously belonged only to privileged classes. The soap opera portrays, in the public domain of open television, the private lives of rich communities in major city centers (Hamburger, 1998).

Since the early 1970s, Globo's soap opera writers have strategically focused on contemporary settings and current events, using colloquial vocabulary and expressions. This approach empowers the show as a continental disseminator of social representations. This way, throughout decades, Globo's soap operas have both mirrored and influenced Brazil's cultural, political and economic changes.

Historically, soap operas have been responsible for spreading all kinds of trends, from slang to fashion. Soap opera authors, art directors, set decorators and costume designers have

become increasingly aware of that. Many authors have, therefore, attempted to influence the country in a positive way, by engaging in what has been called social merchandising. Characters and storylines have been created with the intention of casting light onto controversial subjects like missing children, same sex relationships, alcoholism, human cloning and leukemia.

Although social issues and cultural trends have been, so far, successfully addressed and spread by soap operas in Brazil, sponsored product merchandising still looks unnatural, with artificial and misplaced pack shots. Paid brand insertion in these programs could hugely benefit from meaningfully intertwining with the plot (Avery & Ferraro, 2000). Instead of showing isolated episodic scenes of a character shopping for a brand of jeans or drinking a brand of beer with no connection to the plot, it could be wise to incorporate the sponsor's product in the storyline, like it is already done with the social issues soap operas usually portray and like *Sex and the City* does so well.

With the growing possibility of suppressing commercials from television programming by means of digital video recording (Russell & Stern, 2006), soon enough Brazilian viewers will be able to stop watching traditional ads. Product placement will then become an even more powerful tool for promoting brands and so will the soap opera. Following the tradition of featuring strong, controversial, groundbreaking female characters (Hamburger, 1998), it should be only a matter of time before we see a vibrator on Brazilian primetime television.

CONCLUSION

Using the Model of Product Discourse to understand social constructions about the vibrator as a commoditized symbol of new female sexualities proved itself as an enriching endeavor. The comparison of cultural texts with practices and history showed that current social conceptions about masturbation, female orgasm and vibrators, despite significant changes, still remount to ancient times. Erotic consumption reveals the contradictions that contemporary women face in current western societies. They want to be independent consumers who may overtly shop for erotic products, but at the same time they still long for being wives. On the one hand, they are proud of having attained financial independence. On the other hand, they fear the isolation that may accrue from it. However, the conciliation between their feminist postures and their taste for feminine aesthetics is not seen as a problem for these female consumers. Marketers and cultural text producers are well aware of that and have strategically acted on it.

Exploring the relationship between consumer culture, sexuality and gender seems, therefore, like a confirmed path to relevant discoveries about new social codes and roles. It has also a transformative potential, since marketing practices, such as product placement in cultural texts, may impact social contexts and redress gender inequalities.

As for managerial implications, the main recommendation generated by this study would be to profit from Brazilian soap operas enormous reach and influence. Product placement may be a good strategy for marketing sex to women, due to the perception of meaningful characters as part of a trusted expert system, this way avoiding more blatant advertising, which may be perceived as vulgar.

REFERENCES

- Ahuvia, Aaron C. (2005). "Beyond the Extended Self: Loved Objects and Consumers' Identity Narratives". *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 32, 1, 171-184.
- Arnould, Eric, & Thompson, Craig (2005). "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): 20 Years of Research". *Journal of Consumer Research*. V. 31 (March), pp. 868-882.
- Attwood, Feona (2005). "Fashion and Passion: Marketing Sex to Women", *Sexualities*, Vol. 8, 4, 392-406.
- Avery, Rosemary J., & Ferraro, Rosellina (2000). "Verisimilitude or Advertising? Brand Appearances on Prime-Time Television", *The Journal of Consumer Affairs*, Vol. 34, 2 (Winter), 217-244.
- Balasubramanian, Siva K. (1994). "Beyond Advertising and Publicity: Hybrid Messages and Public Policy Issues", *Journal of Advertising*, 23 (4), 29-46.
- Belk, Russell W. (2003), "Shoes and Self", in *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 30, eds. Punam Anand Keller and Dennis W. Rook, Valdosta, GA : Association for Consumer Research, 27-33.
- Belk, Russell W., Ger, Güliz, & Askegaard, Soren (2003). "The Fire of Desire: A Multisited Inquiry into Consumer Passion", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30 (December), 326-351.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1998a). *Masculine Domination*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- _____ (1998b). *Practical Reason – On the Theory of Action*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Catterall, Miriam, MacLaran, Pauline, & Stevens, Lorna (1997). "Marketing and feminism: a bibliography and suggestions for further research". *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, v. 15/7, 369–376.
- Day, George S. (1981). "The Product Life Cycle: Analysis and Application Issues", *Journal of Marketing*, sep-dec, 60-67.
- Dobscha, Susan (2004). "The Gendered Nature of the Evolving Technoscape: Evaluating Identity, Representation, and Locality", *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 31, 152-161.
- Cramer, Janet M. (2007). "Discourses of Sexual Morality in Sex and the City and Queer as Folk", *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 40, 3, 409-432.
- Elliot, Richard, & Ritson, Mark (1995). "Practicing Existential Consumption: The Lived Meaning of Sexuality in Advertising, in *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 22, eds. Frank Kardes and Mita Sujun, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.
- Freyre, Gilberto (1933/2006). *Casa-Grande e Senzala: Formação da Família Brasileira Sob o Regime da Economia Patriarcal*, São Paulo: Global.
- Fry, Peter (1982). "Da Hierarquia à Igualdade: A Construção Histórica da Homossexualidade no Brasil", in *Para Inglês Ver: Identidade e Política na Cultura Brasileira*, Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 87-115.
- Goldenberg, Mirian (2007). *O corpo como capital: estudos sobre gênero, sexualidade e moda na cultura brasileira*. São Paulo: Estação das Letras e Cores.
- Gould, Stephen J. (1991). "Toward a Theory of Sexuality and Consumption: Consumer Lovemaps," in *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 18, eds. Rebecca H. Holman and Michael R. Solomon, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, 381-83.
- Gregori, Maria Filomena (2003). "Relações de Violência e Erotismo", *Cadernos Pagu*, 20. Campinas: Unicamp.
- Giddens, Anthony (1990). *The Consequences of Modernity*, CA: Stanford University Press.

- Hamburger, Esther (1998). “Diluindo Fronteiras: A Televisão e as Novelas no Cotidiano”, in *História da Vida Privada no Brasil: Contrastes da Intimidade Contemporânea*, Vol. 4, eds. F. A. Novais and L. M. Schwarcz, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- Hirschman, Elizabeth C., & Holbrook, Morris B. (1982). “Hedonic Consumption: Emerging Concepts, Methods and Propositions”, *Journal of Marketing*, 46 (Summer) 92-101.
- Hirschman, Elizabeth C., Scott, Linda, & Wells, William B. (1998). “A Model of Product Discourse: Linking Consumer Practice to Cultural Texts”, *Journal of Advertising*, XXVII (Spring) 33-50.
- Hite, Shere (1976). *O Relatório Hite: Um Profundo Estudo sobre a Sexualidade Feminina*, São Paulo: DIFEL.
- Holt, Douglas B. (1997). “Poststructuralist Lifestyle Analysis: Conceptualizing the Social Patterning of Consumption Practices”, *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 23 (March), 326-350.
- Jantzen, Christian, Østergaard, Per, & Vieira, Carla M. (2006). “Becoming a ‘Woman to the Backbone’: Underwear Consumption and the Experience of Feminine Identity”, *Journal of Consumer Culture* 6(2): 177-202.
- Kates, Steven M. (2002). “The Protean Quality of Subcultural Consumption: An Ethnographic Account of Gay Consumers”, *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 29, 3 (December), 383-399.
- Kent, Tony (2005). “Ethical Perspectives on the Erotic in Retailing”, *Qualitative Market Research*, 8, 4, 430-439.
- Langer, Roy (2007). “Marketing, prosumption and innovation in the fetish community”, in *Consumer Tribes*, eds. B. Cova, R. Kozinets and A. Shankar, Oxford, UK: Butterworth-Heinemann, 243-259.
- Laqueur, Thomas (1990). *Making Sex – Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Mackay, Judith (2000). *The Penguin Atlas of Human Sexual Behavior*, London, UK: Penguin.
- Maines, Rachel P. (1999). *The Technology of Orgasm: “Hysteria”, the Vibrator, and Women’s Sexual Satisfaction*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Malina, Danusia, & Schmidt, Ruth A. (1997). “It’s Business Doing Pleasure with You: Sh! A Women’s Sex Shop Case”, *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, Vol. 15, 7, 352-360.
- McCracken, Grant (1988), *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Moutinho, Laura (2004). *Razão, “Cor” e Desejo: Uma Análise Comparativa sobre Relacionamentos Afetivo-Sexuais “Inter-Raciais” no Brasil e na África do Sul*, São Paulo: Unesp.
- O’Donnell, Kathleen A (1999). “Good Girls Gone Bad: The Consumption of Fetish Fashion and The Sexual Empowerment of Women”, in *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 26, eds. Eric J. Arnould and Linda M. Scott, Provo, UT : Association for Consumer Research, 184-189.
- Parker, Richard G. (1991). *Corpos, Prazeres e Paixões - A Cultura Sexual no Brasil Contemporâneo*, São Paulo: Best Seller.
- Radner, Hillary (1995). *Shopping Around: Feminine Culture and the Pursuit of Pleasure*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Reichert, Tom, & Ramirez, Artemio (2000). “Defining Sexually Oriented Appeals in Advertising: A Grounded Theory Investigation”, in *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 27, eds. Stephen J. Hoch and Robert J. Meyer, Provo, UT : Association for Consumer Research, 267-273.

- Roberts, Mary Lou (1981). “Women's Changing Roles: A Consumer Behavior Perspective”, in *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 08, eds. Kent B. Monroe, Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 590-595.
- Russell, Cristel Antonia, & Stern, Barbara B. (2006). “Consumers, Characters, and Products: A Balance Model of Sitcom Product Placement Effects”, *Journal of Advertising*; V. 35, 1 (Spring), 7-21.
- Scott, Linda M. (2005). *Fresh Lipstick: Redressing Fashion and Feminism*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Stern, Barbara B. (1991). “Two Pornographies: A Feminist View of Sex in Advertising”, in *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 18, eds. Rebecca H. Holman and Michael R. Solomon, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, 384-391.
- Symons, Donald (1979). *The Evolution of Human Sexuality*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wolf, Naomi (1991/2002). *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, New York: Harper Perennial.

NOTES

¹ “Automatic Lover” is the title of a 1978 disco song by Dee D. Jackson, in which a woman falls in love with a robot.

² Search performed at website www.imdb.com on November 11th 2007.

³ Source: Associação Brasileira das Empresas do Mercado Erótico e Sensual (ABEME), 2004.

⁴ <http://www.sistemas.aids.gov.br/imprensa/Noticias.asp?NOTCod=60762> website visited on August 3rd 2007.

⁵ In Brazil, the rabbit vibrator costs from around US\$150 up to US\$600.

⁶ The San Francisco Chronicle, by Jenny Strasburg, September 6th 2002, available at <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2002/09/06/BU8239.DTL&type=business>. Website visited on March 13th 2008.

⁷ <http://www.hitachi.us/Apps/hitachicom/content.jsp?page=index.html&path=jsp/hitachi/forhome/HomeAppliancesSupport/>, website visited on February 27th 2008.

⁸ <http://www.vibratex.com/about.htm>, website visited on February 27th 2008.

⁹ <http://www.themagicwandshop.com/about.html>, website visited on February 27th 2008.

¹⁰ <http://www.bettydodson.com/vibhowtouse.htm>, website visited on February 27th 2008.

¹¹ <http://www.talksexwithsue.com>, website visited on March 13th 2008.

¹² <http://redeglobo.globo.com/TVG/0,,9648,00.html>, website visited on March 16th 2008.