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Is the Rectum a Gold Mine? Queer Theory, Consumer Masculinities, and Capital Pleasures

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1 Introduction

While witnessing the deaths and concomitant homophobic debates surrounding the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, the American queer theorist Leo Bersani importantly asked: is the rectum a grave? This question was the starting point of an insightful critique of discourses about gay men's promiscuous anal sexual practices and their pathologisation—demonisation even—in the wake of the AIDS outbreak. Bersani provocatively concluded the essay saying that "if the rectum is a grave in which the masculine ideal […] of proud subjectivity is buried, then it should be celebrated for its very potential for death" (1987: 222). Judging from the burgeoning male sex toy industry, one might begin to wonder whether the condition of the male rectum might be very different thirty years later, having turned from the potential grave of masculinity into a gold mine of neo-liberal masculine identities.

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It is an investigation of this potential shift in the representational regimes, and the attendant consumerist exploitation, of a male body part that this chapter aims to present. The analysis is based on a set of media texts that seek to promote sex toys said to improve the health of the male prostate, as well as produce sexual enjoyment. The chapter also seeks to re-purpose a queer theoretical approach to discourse analysis in light of a neo-Marxian commitment to unveiling the economic rationale underpinning neo-liberal regimes of consumer culture (see in particular Mieli 1980; Kirsch 2000; Penney 2014). I begin with an overview of the theoretical framework that undergirds the chapter; I then move on to give some background to research on masculinities and consumption practices in the age of neo-liberalism, before delving into a detailed analysis of relevant data. The chapter concludes with some considerations about the importance of a queer approach to global materiality for the field of language and sexuality, and masculinities more specifically (see also Peck and Stroud 2015; Bucholtz and Hall 2016; Borba 2016).

2 Re-purposing Queer Theory

Simultaneously cherished by some and loathed by others as the disobedient child of the humanities and social sciences, the notion of *queer* was born in the 1980s out of a sense of dissatisfaction among activists with sexual identity categories (e.g. gay and lesbian) as a means through which to achieve political emancipation and provide social critique. In the academic world, the originally infamous slur queer was wed to the significantly more respectable word "theory" (Kulick 2005) as a heuristic lens that ultimately resists any definition, and hence negates its very essence as theory. Such reticence against precise categorisation emerges repeatedly in the foundational texts of what would later become the field of queer studies. There, queer is presented as "whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without essence" (Halperin 1995: 61–62). Also, as Michael Warner explains, queer embodies "an aggressive impulse of generalization; it rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favour of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal" (Warner 1993: xxvi). Differences

notwithstanding, the proponents of queer theory would agree that *anti-normativity*—whatever this may mean and be in different contexts—is what differentiates queer from other concepts and approaches to understanding social texts.

Unsurprisingly, queer theory has come under fire from a variety of positions since its inception. I have summarised these critiques elsewhere (Milani 2014), so I will limit myself here to the ones that are directly relevant to the arguments mounted in this chapter. While queer was indeed born out of an anti-establishment spirit, in thirty years of life it has become so institutionalised—through conferences, journals, and even academic jobs specifically dedicated to it—that one might begin to wonder whether such institutional entrenchment is not at odds with the very spirit of queer as a form of insubordination against normative and normalising forces. In this respect, Judith Butler, one of queer theory's most authoritative voices, strongly proposes that queer

> will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queer from a prior usage in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes, and perhaps also yielded in favour of terms that do [its] political work more effectively. (Butler 1993: 19)

In light of this recommendation, it might be time to re-think what a resistance to the regimes of the normal would entail in the context of queer institutionalisation. While some commentators say that we should just accept that queer is dead and is not worth reviving (see e.g. Penney 2014), others are less pessimistic and argue for the preservation of queer as an important "common good" for critical scholarship (Sicurella 2016). Cognizant of these disagreements, I believe that we should not necessarily throw the queer baby out with the institutional bath water; yet I also believe that the queer project would benefit greatly from some serious reconsideration, which might even lead to the renewed possibility of a radical politics of sexuality.

A possible way forward is offered by a "southern" perspective on queer recently advocated by a group of Brazilian scholars of sexuality (see in particular Borba et al. 2014; Miskolci 2014; Pelúcio 2014). These critical voices not only question the North American bias of queer scholarship,

and the concomitant erasure of radical work on sexuality in the Global South, they also interrogate the very relevance of the notion of queer in contexts like Brazil where this word does not really have any traction. As a provocative alternative, Larissa Pelúcio draws upon the work of the Spanish thinker Beatriz Preciado in order to suggest a *teoria cu*—a theory of the anus (*cu* means *asshole* in Brazilian Portuguese)—which "is more than an attempt to translate 'queer' […] [than] to highlight our anthropophagy by placing a certain structural emphasis on assholes and mouths; assholes and marginal production" (2014: 47). While this is a standpoint from which Pelúcio seeks to (re)launch Brazilian scholarship as a worthy margin in the global geopolitics of knowledge on sexuality, a return to the anus, in my view, might also be germane to injecting some much-needed anti-normative force into the queer academic project (see, however, Wiegman and Wilson 2015 for a critique of anti-normativity in queer).

Not only will a focus on the anus bring back some dirt to the more sanitised areas of queer inquiry, because, as Preciado aptly notes, "[h]istorically, the anus has been considered to be an abject organ, never clean enough, never silent. It is not and never will be politically correct" (Preciado 2009: 172 in Pelúcio 2014: 47), but, as this chapter demonstrates, paying attention to the anus will also force us to consider current consumerist trends which seek to incorporate the rectum into the logic of global capitalism. Finally, bringing the anus into analytical spotlight is in line with current proposals about "embodied sociolinguistics" (Bucholtz and Hall 2016) or "corporeal sociolinguistics" (Peck and Stroud 2015), which highlight how a focus on the body will bring up "topics that may be viewed as marginal to or entirely outside of some branches of sociocultural linguistics yet are crucial to the advancement of the field as a whole" (Bucholtz and Hall 2016: 174; see also Borba 2016 about the "dystopic body").

The anti-normative mantra I espouse here is not without its critics, who accuse queer theory of violating its own anti-essentialist principles and its distrust of any form of identity consolidation (e.g. Wiegman 2012; Hall 2013; Jagose 2015; Wiegman and Wilson 2015). According to these scholars, queer theory operates by reifying an anti-identitarian, anti-foundationalist, and anti-normative enterprise. As Wiegman puts it,

> Through its own self-animating antinormative intentions, then, Queer Studies gets to have its cake and eat it too: it can function as an organizing referent for queer theory while simultaneously forging an interdisciplinary critique of it; it can promise to fulfill queer theory's anti-identitarian commitments while proliferating identity commitments of its own; it can refuse institutionality while participating in and generating its own institutionalized forms. (2012: 332)

To paraphrase Wiegman, the underlying anti-normative positioning of queer theory has itself become a norm, against which both scholarly and political projects are evaluated and judged (though cf. Duggan 2015 and Halberstam 2015 for trenchant critiques of this argument). Of course, we should be wary of dispensing too easily the label of queer to, say, sexual promiscuity or sadomasochistic sex while critiquing monogamy and same-sex marriage as inherently "homonormative" institutions and practices. That being said, if queer has something that distinguishes from other approaches to the study of gender and sexuality, then its distinctiveness lies in its ability to

> create anxiety and discomfort, and a feeling that theorists and researchers are going where they shouldn't go, lighting lights that ought to stay dark, examining what many would prefer be ignored, and waking up bears that should have been left sleeping. (Kulick 2012: 31; my translation)

In a time when neo-liberalism has become hegemonic, perhaps the bear "that should have been left sleeping" is capitalism and its ability to rope gender and sexual anti-normativity into its logic. In arguing for the importance of accounting for the relationship between regimes of representations and the economic conditions that underpin them, I concur with Michael Penney (2014) that it might be worth re-discovering the ideas of Mario Mieli (1980), an Italian thinker and activist who has been largely ignored by US-based queer scholarship. In Mieli's (1980) view, radical sexual politics cannot be achieved simply through textual deconstruction of representational arrangements, but requires a critical monitoring of how capitalism incorporates non-normative identities and desires in order to reproduce itself. According to this perspective, "humanity will not be emancipated until human labour […] ceases to be

alienated in the production of falsely liberated perverse commodities" (Penney 2014: 102). So, while, in an anti-normative spirit, we might fall into the temptation of celebrating the presence of non- or anti-normative gender and sexual identities, practices and performances in mainstream media, a neo-Marxian perspective à la Mieli raises questions about the economic stakes that that very queer visibility serves for the well-functioning of global capitalism (see also Barnhurst 2007 about paradoxes of visibility, and Kirsch 2000 for a critique of queer theory in relation to class struggle).

Those who are sceptical of the possibility of the demise of capitalism would argue that we should reap the representational dividends that visibility may bring to queer constituencies rather than waste unnecessary energy critiquing a socio-economic system that will not go away so easily. But, as critical discourse analysts have pointed out ad nauseam, any form of representation—no matter how queer it seeks to be—can never be fully inclusive because of the semiotic choices made, which inherently entail the backgrounding or erasure of some elements or participants in order to foreground others (Fairclough 1995). Furthermore, even considering that we might never be able to step outside of capitalism into a different socio-economic system, the more we recognise our "capital enjoyments" (Penney 2014: 106), that is, the affective bondages between commodities, consumers, and their identities, the more likely it is that we gain critical distance from "the dictates of commodity relations" (Penney 2014: 110). But let us first take a look at the gender identity affordances that have been recently sold—quite literally—to male consumers through a variety of media sites.

3 Consumer Masculinities and Neo-liberalism

In the field of language, gender, and sexuality, Bethan Benwell has produced a thoroughgoing and acute analysis of the links between economic imperatives, the emergence of men's magazines, and the production and circulation of new masculine identities (Benwell 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005). Studying the rise of men's lifestyle products in the UK, Benwell carefully illustrates how the advent of the image of the

"New Man" in British popular culture closely tracks the expansion of the body grooming industry towards heterosexual male constituencies. Heterosexual men, who according to the prevailing stereotype were supposed not to worry about their appearance lest they were viewed as less masculine and therefore "gay," began to be hailed as the prime consumers of beauty products. The conundrum between economic growth and gender stereotyping is overcome through careful semiotic choices on the part of the advertisers of body grooming products. The men in the ads, often half-naked, photographed staring directly into the camera, are not looking at potential consumers with a same-sex desiring eye—they do not interpellate the viewer as "gay"—because a no less scantily clad woman is also pictured with the male model, warmly embracing him, thus reassuring the viewer of the heterosexual nature of her partner (see in particular Benwell 2002).

In a similar vein, Claire Harrison's (2008) analysis of advertisements of men's make-up products such as "guyliner" and "manscara" demonstrates how the producers of the ads simultaneously encourage "men to be consumers of feminine-style products while also allowing them to maintain the qualities that have traditionally been gendered as masculine" (Harrison 2008: 55). Benwell's and Harrison's works unveil the double binds engendered, on the one hand, by a growing male lifestyle industry, and, on the other, by ideas about what men should do in order not to lose their masculinity while purchasing their "new look." Such quandaries also emerge very clearly when analysing what British lads say about the products they buy, including the magazines they read (Benwell 2005). Irony, in particular, is a key rhetorical device that enables young male consumers to participate in the "feminised" domain of consumption while at the same time expressing sexist and homophobic views through which they can inhabit powerful masculine discursive positions (Benwell 2003).

An ambiguous and slippery tension between the potential threat of feminisation and the reproduction of chauvinist male dominance not only characterises the British lifestyle industry of male make-up products and lads mags, but can also be found in other areas of popular culture such as the so-called guy-lit, "'romantic sexual comedies' (Thompson 2013), written by men and with a central heterosexual male character, who is struggling with life/growing up, and looking—albeit ambivalently—for love"

(Gill 2014: 187). In these novels, male characters might appear to be unheroic, self-deprecating, or innocent; they are however no less invested in male privilege, and may even embody a post-feminist transmutation of hegemonic masculinity, one that enables men to simultaneously "hold on to social power, while presenting them as harmless and troubled victims of a world where women rule" (Gill 2014: 200).

Most crucially, the changing faces of contemporary masculinities are not simply cultural and/or discursive, but are underpinned by a neo-liberal economic rationale that is often forgotten by post-structuralist approaches to textual deconstruction. Granted, neo-liberalism has become a rather unhelpful buzzword in much scholarship, which in the fervour to define itself as critical often forgets to explain what the connotations of "neo" are in neo-liberalism. Is it just a resurgence of old ideas? Or is it a revival of old tenets under new guises? The former alternative seems to be assumed in the American economist Joseph Stiglitz's definition of neo-liberalism as "that grab-bag of ideas based on the fundamentalist notion that markets are self-correcting, allocate resources efficiently and serve the public interest well" (2008: 1). Such a characterisation is very similar to Adam Smith's (1977 [1776]) original explanation of economic liberalism. In my view, a more useful and nuanced understanding of neo-liberalism can be found in Nikolas Rose's (1999) theorisation of what he calls "advanced liberal governmentalities." Drawing on the Foucaultian notion of technologies of the self, Rose (1999) points out that neo-liberalism is not just about an ever increasing expansion of markets—for example selling grooming products to men when the demand of such goods by female constituencies is about to become saturated—but also involves a more subtle array of technologies of self-government through which the consuming individual internalises a fallacious sense of being a "sovereign subject" (Davidson and Rees-Mogg 1999), who can make his or her own choices and hence become whoever she/he wants to be. In reality she/he is simply following what the producers want him/her to do.

Overall, neo-liberal governmentality can be defined as a "global normative framework which, in the name of liberty and relying on the leeway afforded individuals, orientates their conduct, choices and practices in a new way" (Dardot and Laval 2013: 3). What should be noted in this

context is the role played by "experts" in this new orientation of the conduct of the entrepreneurial self under neo-liberal conditions. As Foucault (1990 [1978]) points out, academic expertise and its knowledge production has been bound up with the emergence of the modern state. Under neo-liberal dispensations though there is a proliferation of those who count or present themselves as experts, which in turn gives rise to a cacophony of voices, each vying for hegemony in a concerted attempt "to install the capacities for self-determination and self-mastery" (Rose 1999: 89). Among these "experts" are pharmaceutical and other companies that market products to be ingested, spread over the skin, or inserted into the body, which have given rise to what Preciado (2013 [2008]) calls "pharmacopornographic capitalism," "a kind of totalized pharmaceutical control of pleasure and pain through the production of new forms of prosthetic subjectivity" (Halberstam 2013: np).

As we will see below, prostate massagers and the promotional discourses surrounding them are key "epistemological sites" (Sunderland 2004) in which heterosexual male pleasure is re-configured via a prosthetic device in the interest of their pleasures, and of capitalism's expansion. In the same way that men's grooming products "threaten" heterosexual masculinities, so do sex toys for men that involve penetration. In order to make these objects desirable for heterosexual male constituencies, then, an interdiscursive net of promotional messages and medical advice is marshalled together with the aim of foregrounding the "normality" of anal penetration as a healthy and pleasurable experience, and its compatibility with the lifestyle of a heterosexual man.

4 Prostate Massagers and the "Queering" of Heterosexual Masculinities

We saw earlier that the main aim of any approach informed by queer theory is to disrupt normality and provide counter-narratives to "common sense" ideas about gender and sexuality. Sex toys might not have become mainstream yet, but they are certainly not an idiosyncratic kink of a few enthusiasts. According to recent statistics, the annual worldwide

sex toy industry revenue in 2013 amounts to over 15 billion US dollars. A comprehensive sociological analysis of who buys what and why has yet to be done on the global sex toy market. However, an investigation of the UK's most popular online retailer *Lovehoney.co.uk* (Millward 2013) might be useful in order to contextualise the analysis of prostate massagers in this chapter. Journalist John Millward analysed the sales of 1 million sex toys over a period of five months in 2013, and demonstrated that the most frequently purchased items are lube and other essentials (22%), followed by vibrators (18%) and lingerie (12%). Anal sex toys like prostate massagers and butt plugs come fourth (7%), just before cock rings (6%), jiggle balls (4%), and dildos (3%). If we then go on and see who buys anal sex toys in terms of their gender, relationship status, and sexual orientation, we discover that single men buy anal sex toys more than those in a relationship, while female customers are more equally distributed between relationship categories. If we add sexual identity into the picture, the most eager buyers are quite unsurprisingly single gay/bi men (34%), followed by gay/bi men in a relationship (29%). However, single and attached heterosexual men are not too far away, with 21% and 19%, respectively. And it is precisely how heterosexual men are targeted for the sale of anal sex toys that the present study seeks to understand. In this context, allow me to introduce Bob, the prostate massager who is the protagonist of this chapter.

Introducing Bob: "A Gentleman's Pleasure"

With its deep blue or red oblong shape, Bob is part of a "family" of no less colourful anal toys that also includes Billy, Bruno, Hugo, and Loki. They are all produced by the Swedish company Lelo, which presents itself on its website as "the world's leading designer brand for intimate lifestyle products" (https://www.lelo.com/company/about-lelo). These products are sold throughout the world not only on Lelo's own website and other specialised sites such as *Lovehoney.co.uk*, *Lovetreats.in*, *Stagshop.com*, and others, but also on general online retailers such as *Amazon.com*, which invites potential buyers with the following description (Extract 1):

Extract 1

BOB is a **gentleman's** pleasure object elegantly sculpted, with LELO's customary attention to detail, to provide exquisite tension and profound pleasure. As a gentleman's plug for deep internal stimulation, including male G-spot massage, **he** helps the user sustain sensation and **reach a new intensity of release.** Hygienic, stylish and ready for play, **he** is smooth and designed **with a ring for full control** of the sensual experience. Use BOB as you wish, whether it be with a **partner** for **added enjoyment** or as **a secret companion**, **worn discreetly**. Comes presented in an elegant gift box, includes a user manual, satin pouch for stylish storage and a 1-year LELO warranty. (https://www.amazon.com/LELO-Prostate-Massager-Deep-Blue/dp/B0029ZALCQ; bold emphasis added.)

Obviously inanimate objects—beers, muffins, or prostate massagers—are not inherently sexed; they do not have a penis, a vagina, or any other sexual organ. However, as scholars of gender and language have pointed out, it is interesting to tease out the processes through which objects become *gendered*, and are thus associated with either men or women and imbued with masculine or feminine traits (see e.g. Baker 2008 for the gendering of muffins, and Milani and Shaikjee 2013 for beer).

Discursive processes of gendering are quite patent in the extract above. Through a nomination strategy—Bob—and the usage of the third-person singular pronoun "he," the prostate massager is simultaneously gendered and personified, and hence partly loses its nature as an object. Furthermore, the usage of a hypocorism—the shortening and diminutive form of Robert—contributes to adding an affective layering typical of an intimate acquaintance or relationship. That this form of intimacy is "between men" (Sedgwick 1993) is made clear in the very first sentence of the product description saying that Bob is a pleasure object for a "gentleman," not a "lady."

Critical discourse analysis has taught us that speakers and writers have to make specific linguistic choices when labelling reality. The English language in its many varieties offers a plethora of options through which to refer to male bodied individuals: man/men, guy/s, dude/s, lad/s, bloke/s, bro/s, bruh/s, oke/s, and so on. Whether intentional or not, these choices are ideological because of the very different

connotations that similar labels for one of the same referent carry with them. In the case of *gentleman*, the word has an aura of formality and politeness; moreover, a quick glance at its patterns of collocations in the 100 million word British National Corpus indicates that it indexes a specific type of masculinity, one that, in the context of the British parliament, is *aware*, *honourable*, *knowledgeable*, and to which other MPs are generally *grateful*. A similar search for the collocates of *gentleman* on the Corpus of Contemporary American English illustrates how this word strongly co-occurs with the following: *English*, *distinguished-* (*looking*), *chivalry*, *portly*, and *dignified*, as well as with adjectives indicating old age (*older*, *elderly*, *white-haired*). I am not implying in any way that, by association with gentlemen, Bob is being advertised to British male MPs, or older, stout, distinguished, and chivalrous men. Rather, the point I want to make is that the choice of the label "gentleman" brings with it a range of generally positive associations with respectability, dignity, knowledge, and honour. I will return later on to the issue of honour in relation to shame and heterosexual erotic practices (Extracts 2 and 3).

What should also be highlighted at this juncture is how Bob is presented as bringing a "new intensity of release," which implies new levels of ejaculation for the gentlemen who buy the product. Male customers, however, are reassured that they are in charge of the situation and that the achievement of such a remarkable ejaculatory ability is always under their control. Here we can see how the trope of male sexual potency is more or less subtly reiterated and revamped at the same time as the self-determining trait of masculine subjectivity is guaranteed with the assurance of the existence of a "ring for full control" (see also below for the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity). Admittedly, it is mentioned in the following sentence that Bob can also be used with an otherwise gender-neutral "partner" for "added enjoyment." It is ambiguous here whether (1) the usage with a partner would give added value to the experience of the product; or (2) Bob would give "added enjoyment" to other sexual activities with a partner. Alternatively, Bob can fill the void of such a partner, becoming himself a "companion" to be carried around or worn "discreetly."

While self-controlled potency typical of masculine hegemony seems to be reproduced, sexual identities remain rather vague. Ultimately, we do not know whether the gentleman in the extract above is identified as heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or none of the above. On the other hand, with regard to sexual practices, there is a gesture—albeit a discreet one—towards a re-territorialisation of the domain of the erotic. Writing about the Victorian period and its historical legacy, Foucault famously pointed out that "[s]exuality […] moved into the home. […] A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged […] at the heart of every household […]: the parents' bedroom" (Foucault 1990 [1978]: 3). This is what ultimately made sex in public not only illegal but also a form of moral deviance which would breach public decency, whatever this may mean. Obviously, there is no incitement to public sex in the description of Bob above. However, the fact that it can be worn anywhere unsettles normative assumptions that (self-)erotic practices can only be conducted in the home. Though inconspicuously, Bob brings anal stimulation and pleasure into the public realm. And while the gentleman who wears it does not lose his respectability, the inconspicuousness of his enjoyment perturbs the very nature of what counts as "public indecency."

In order to unveil how more traditional hegemonic masculinity is interlinked with a more fluid treatment of sexual identities, pleasures, and practices, we need to explore other sites intertextually and interdiscursively connected to Bob and other prostate massagers.

When Anti-normative Erotic Pleasures Need to Come Out While Heterosexuality Stays Put

Like many other online retail companies, Lelo has embedded into its website a corporate blog called *Volonté*, which defines itself as a "pleasure project"; it consists of a variety of posts from condom innovation and sadomasochist sex to sexually transmitted infections. One of the most recent articles at the time of writing this chapter (July 2016) is entitled "Why Anal and Prostate Play is Worth Exploring." There the sex and relationship therapist Dr Joe Kort "discusses the benefits of prostate play

and some of the societal reasons that make straight men hesitate to try anal play." One of these is that

Extract 2

Sometimes, men themselves **worry** that—because they're interested in anal play—it automatically means they're gay … or perhaps even bisexual. I like to tell them: "In the state where I am a board certified sex therapist, your **anus doesn't have a sexual orientation**." That **calms them down**. (Bold emphasis added. The underlining indicates a hyperlink that takes the web user to a webpage on "bicuriosity.")

Against this backdrop, Dr Kort goes on to suggest that

Extract 3

Before discussing anal play with a partner, men first have to come to terms with their own shame. They have to own the fact that this is something they like. If they come into a conversation with their partner with shame, it will only upset her more. He already has to feel that **there's nothing gay about this.**

There are some great books out there that help men come to terms with their own shame. Jack Morin, Ph.D., for example, wrote Anal Pleasure and Health: A Guide for Men, Women and Couples. In it, he writes about how men can come to confront the taboo around anal pleasure, and to understand **the difference between sexual orientation and erotic orientation**. **You can be straight and enjoy anal sex. What we like isn't related to who we are.** If you enjoy anal sex, it's just because you experience erotic pleasure there.

Once you have dealt with your own shame, you can perhaps share with your partner the prevalence of websites that exist showing women giving anal sex to men. **Its commonality may be able to help establish its normalcy**. (https://www.lelo.com/blog/why-anal-and-prostate-play-is-worth-exploring/; bold emphasis added. The underlining indicates a hyperlink that takes the web user to an Amazon webpage where they can buy the book in question.)

To begin with, it is important to point out how in these examples academic expertise works in the service of consumerism. The writer's voice on sexual matters is made authoritative through several discursive devices.

First and foremost is the usage of an honorific ("Dr"), which foregrounds his academic credentials. Another discursive strategy of authority is the reliance on the arguments made by another expert, also identified by his educational achievements ("PhD"), who has written a book on the matter. A third discursive device of authority is the rather legalistic turn of phrase "In the state where I am a board certified sex therapist," which implies that the US state apparatus stands as a warrant of the veracity of the doctor's statement. Granted, there is nothing inherently wrong in the usage of legalistic language and academic titles. What is worth questioning though is how academic knowledge gets incorporated into consumerist discourse, and is thus employed to legitimate the sale of prostate massagers.

Issues of discursive authority aside, both extracts may appear as textbook examples of what queer theorists have been preaching for the past thirty years, namely that sexual *identities* should be distinguished from erotic *practices*. In a queer fashion, Dr Kort debunks the myth according to which what you *do* in bed or elsewhere—the realm of practice—makes who you *are* sexually—the domain of identity. Indeed the human anus does not have a sexual orientation per se. It is its usage for male same-sex practices across time and contexts that have created an indexical tie between male anal sex and homosexuality. In this way, the extracts counter dominant discourses that conflate specific erotic acts with either heterosexual or homosexual identities, thus offering a counter-discourse that complicates too simple views of sexual experience.

However, such an apparently queer distinction between identities and practices fails to produce the radical re-thinking of the boundaries between heterosexuality and same-sex desire that queer theorists have been aiming for. Quite the contrary: heterosexual men are reassured that their heterosexuality remains unquestioned. The rescuing of a heterosexual identity is operated discursively via the distinction between sexual and erotic orientations. So, in line with Sarah Ahmed, we might wish to ask ourselves: "What does it mean for sexuality to be lived as oriented? What difference does it make what or who we are oriented toward in the very direction of our desire?" (Ahmed 2006: 543). And what does it mean to distinguish between erotic and sexual orientation? What Dr Kort does is encourage heterosexual men to separate their sexual orientation towards specific

gendered bodies—women—from their erotic orientation towards their own bodily part—their rectums. But there is a discursive, and emotional, hindrance that must be overcome for this to happen. Prostate massagers may be marketed as a "gentleman's pleasure," as in the case of Bob, but Western masculine values of dignity and honour encoded in the very word "gentleman" are at odds with a heterosexual man openly acknowledging his enjoyment of stimulating his own prostate. This mismatch, crucially, creates the feeling of shame about men's interest in their arses.

Interestingly, the expert's suggestions about defeating shame are highly reminiscent of the advices given to lesbian and gay individuals in the so-called coming out literature (see e.g. Kaufman and Raphael 1996). In the "coming out" genre, the defeat of shame about one's sexual desires typically goes hand in hand with the embracing of a previously repressed or disavowed identity category—gay/lesbian/bisexual (see also Chirrey 2015 for critical work on the "coming out" advice genre). In contrast, in the extract above, heterosexual men are not advised to come out as anyone but themselves. There is no bottled-up identity category that needs to pop out like a jack-in-the box; rather it is their desires and enjoyments that they need to speak about openly. Unlike in Extract 1 where the word *partner* remained genderless, here it is posited as female, and nowhere in the text is it mentioned that men's pleasurable experiences of their rectums could be generated by another man manoeuvring the prostate massager. Moreover, the reference to "the prevalence of websites that exist showing women giving anal sex to men" *normalises* what at a first glance may appear as a "queer" anti-normative erotic practice. In this way, heterosexuality can stay put very solidly. But what about masculinity? While men who get penetrated by women may still be heterosexual, are they still "real" men?

"Woman Fucks Man" Reconfigures Heterosexual Intimate Life—or Perhaps Not?

In a later section of the blog post, Dr Kort addresses the issue of gender roles in the context of penetration, offering interesting views about male/female power relationships as well as mentioning the value of reversing dominant/dominated positions:

Extract 4

For some men, it may never occur to them to experiment with anal and/or prostate play. Others, however, discover the possibilities for pleasure on their own. They may have used their own fingers to explore their own areas. They may have tried using a dildo or other toy or object. Eventually, **they come to realize that solo play is not enough. It occurs to them that, in receiving anal or prostate pleasure, they can be vulnerable. They can feel submissive. They like that idea. They're just afraid to approach their female partner with their desires because they don't want to feel humiliated by it.**

When I can convince a female to try this with her partner, to perhaps use a strap-on, she is sometimes pleasantly surprised. **Many women report back to me that they've never been so wet in their life. That they felt dominant. That they were never so turned on before. He, meanwhile, was able to be submissive and vulnerable, often for the very first time. It can be a very positive experience for both partners.**

In addition to this shift in the power dynamic, many men find the prostate to be a source of great pleasure. In experimenting with prostate play, **they end up experiencing more intense, longer lasting orgasms. Sometimes they even find they can have multiple orgasms.** (https://www.lelo.com/blog/why-anal-and-prostate-play-is-worth-exploring/; underlined sections in original; bold emphasis added.)

Once again, men's anxieties about discovering the pleasures of exploring their own rectums are the backdrop against which new intimate heterosexual experiences can be enjoyed. What is particularly notable is how heterosexual men are portrayed here. They are far from being the decisive selves so common to the many dominant discourses of masculinities. Instead, they are tentative: they might start by playing with their anus on their own, before recognising that it might be more enjoyable with a female partner (see also Extract 1 above). Besides the hesitation, what goes against the dominant grain here is that these men also enjoy being submissive and being pleasured by a more agentive woman. All this suggests a re-signification of the very meaning of "fucking." It is no longer the case that "man fucks woman. Subject, verb, object" as Catherine MacKinnon (1982) cogently put it, a statement that was later buttressed quantitatively by Elizabeth Manning's (1997) corpus linguistic study of

verbs denoting sexual or romantic acts. Rather, it is the woman that does the penetration, and we are told that this action not only produces pleasure for the recipient, but is also gratifying for the agent to the point that women have "never been so wet" before. Moreover, the reversal of the dominant/dominated role is said to be a beneficial experience for heterosexual intimate life in general.

That being said, is it the case that "to be penetrated is to abdicate power," as Bersani (1987: 212) argued? In my view, we should be careful about celebrating the reversal of the gender order in the promotion of prostate massagers. Women indeed become the penetrators, and they might enjoy doing it. But the submissive and vulnerable man who gets penetrated by a woman does not necessarily "abdicate power." Analogous to the post-feminist masculinities in "guy lit" analysed by Gill (2014), the submissive man in the extract above is no less masculine because of the act of penetration. Rather, the prostate stimulation not only generates more pleasure, but also enhances his sexual potency. The "more intense," "longer lasting," and "even multiple" orgasms that prostate massagers can help achieve are based on the assumptions of a "poor man" discourse (see also Sunderland 2004 for the "poor boy" discourse) that positions men as subjects in need of attention and advice; they are not exploiting their bodies to their full potential, unlike their female counterparts, whose multiple orgasms have filled the columns of lifestyle magazines such as *Cosmo* for years. One could argue then that we are witnessing here a form of colonisation of gendered discourse; what has previously been discussed around the female body has now been transferred to the male one; and this is with a view to selling prostate massagers, so that the capitalist machinery is kept well lubed.

That men do not really abdicate power in contexts of promotion of prostate massager can be illustrated with the help of another example taken from a website completely dedicated to the topic of the male orgasm:

Extract 5

Prostate Massager: Achieve the Ultimate Orgasm

The male sexual orientation is changing. For the first time in over a thousand years, it's becoming common for men to explore the pleasures of the anus and more specifically the prostate. While **gay men** have obviously

been keen on this for a long time, **straight men** often ran for the hills when the topic of anal sex came up. Now with the interest in the prostate gland, **men around the world** are exploring a new type of sexual pleasure.

What has drawn men to prostate massage is the stories of intense orgasms that men have experienced with the aid of the technique. Without a doubt that is the number one selling point for prostate massager toys. **With the help of these toys, men are able to have much longer and more satisfying orgasms than they could have through normal means. Whether using the toys during masturbation or while actually having sex, these super male orgasms are the perfect way to end any sexual session.** (http://www.mangasm.com/; bold emphasis added.)

Unlike Extracts 3 and 4, where the boundaries between same-sex desire and heterosexuality are kept watertight, the first paragraph in Extract 5 seems to suggest a diachronic progression from a time when gay and heterosexual men were divided in their very different attitudes to the erotics of the rectum, to a more recent moment of discovery where an all-encompassing category of "all men around the world" irrespective of sexual identification seem to have begun to explore a "new type of sexual pleasure." No matter how undifferentiated these men are in terms of their sexual identities, their masculine subjectivity seems to show the traits typically associated with hegemonic masculinity. The prostate massager is a prosthetic device that allows these men to achieve what had previously been impossible. Real men not only wear mascara (Harrison 2008), they also let themselves be penetrated by their female partners, and prostate massagers turn them into *sexual supermen*.

5 Conclusion

This chapter was born out of the suggestion made by some Southern scholars (Preciado 2009; Pelúcio 2014) that a focus on the anus could allow a queering of queer theory in new ways. A rectal perspective, in turn, is in line with recent proposals about (re)discovering the body as an entry point for understanding the role played by language in social processes as well as re-thinking sociolinguistic inquiry more broadly (Peck and Stroud 2015; Bucholtz and Hall 2016; Borba 2016). Looking at the male anus

and its pleasures enables us to tap into the ways in which neo-liberalism operates by re-shaping heterosexual intimate life; it does so by reproducing old stereotypes of masculinity, but re-packaging them in new ways that both contest and reproduce neat divisions between sexual identity categories, sexual practices, and erotic pleasures (see also the contributors to Cornwall et al. 2016 for a series of studies about masculinities under neo-liberal conditions).

A complex nexus of producers' online advertising material and experts' advice offered a plethora of views about sexual identities and orientations, and affective concerns with the enhancement of erotic pleasure. All these discursive ingredients mixed together are not only manifestations of a new "incitement to discourse" (Foucault 1990 [1978]) about sexuality, but also indicators of that "pharmacopornographic capitalism," which, according to Preciado (2013 [2008]), polices bodies and their desiring potential among other things via a radical hybridisation of the public/private divide. In the case of sex toys for men analysed above, an individualistic male consumer is encouraged to buy prostate massagers in order to fully explore the potentials of his rectum and thus pursue a more satisfying sexual life. For this purpose, he is advised to "come out," talk about his erotic orientation towards his anus, and actively explore the pleasures of the rectum with a female partner. Doing so might imply a momentary loss of sovereignty and a temporary abdication of power, but his heterosexual identity remains intact, and he does not relinquish his masculinity. Quite the reverse: the prostate massager is a prosthetic device that allows heterosexual men to finally get back to the top of the erotic pecking order, at least where orgasms are concerned.

Most importantly, such discourses of heterosexual masculinity are tied to economic imperatives. The purchase of prostate massagers and the incitement to discourse about heterosexual men's discovery of their rectum ultimately satisfy the pleasures of the capital. From a queer perspective, we might be tempted to acclaim the appearance of historically anti-normative forms of male sexual enjoyment. But in doing so, we are actually paying lip service to the very logic of capitalism and its chameleon-like ability "to prey upon dissident desires" (Penney 2014: 101) and sexual practices, turning them into "the squalid fetishes of sex marketed by the system" (Mieli 1980: 101). Heterosexual men are encouraged to

explore new erotic pleasures; through these men's uptake of this alluring promise, capitalism enjoys it too. The rectum seems to have indeed turned into one of capitalism's newly discovered gold mines.

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