

Battery Operated Better?

Mediating sexual pleasure and phallogentric normativity in relation to contemporary vibrators.

Keywords: technological mediation, phallogentric normativity, contemporary vibrators

Two themes are recurrent in academic discourses surrounding contemporary vibrators. First, the vibrator seems to be understood in terms of its instrumentality (see for example Bardzell and Bardzell 2011; Wilner and Huff 2017). Second, so-called 'third-wave vibrators' are assumed to have shed phallogentric normative connotations (see for example Wilner and Huff 2017; Rome and Lambert 2020). In this paper, I will question both the aforementioned assumptions.

First, I will analyze two contemporary vibrators, the WeVibe Nova and the PicoBong Transformer, through the concept of technological mediation. Through such a framework we no longer look at technologies as stable, neutral, instruments that merely function but rather, in the words of Peter-Paul Verbeek, in such an understanding are technologies understood to co-shape human existence and experience (see amongst others: Rosenberger and Verbeek 2015; Verbeek and Crease 2005; Ihde 2009). In the case of the vibrator, this would mean that the vibrator is not just a tool to achieve sexual pleasure, but that sexual pleasure comes into being in specific ways in relation to the vibrator. Following, I will analyze the normative dimensions of these technological mediations. Through the works of Lynne Segal and Luce Irigaray, I will discuss phallogentric ways of thinking about sexual pleasure and how these types of thinking are oftentimes so pervasive that in trying to overturn them "we often, unwittingly, seem to add to their legitimacy" (Segal 1994, 41; Irigaray 1985). Lastly, through the concept of the feminine in a Cixousian sense (which is in no way tied to biological sexed bodies) I will discuss how phallogentric normativity in relation to contemporary vibrators might be transgressed and subverted (Bray 2004; Cixous and Clement 1986).