

# ***The Subjective Construction of the Female Body: How Sex Toys Break down Stigmas on Women's Bodies and Sexuality***

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the role of sex toys in dismantling the stigmatization of women's bodies and sexuality within contemporary society. Historically, women's sexual desires and pleasure have often been subjected to societal taboos and restrictions, contributing to the perpetuation of gender inequalities and the marginalization of women's sexual autonomy. However, the emergence and widespread availability of sex toys have challenged these stigmas and provided women with a means to reclaim agency over their bodies and sexuality. Drawing upon interdisciplinary research and feminist theories, this paper examines the ways in which sex toys have played a transformative role in challenging oppressive norms and fostering positive attitudes towards women's sexuality. By providing women with tools to explore their own pleasure, sex toys offer a means of empowerment, allowing them to break free from societal expectations and reclaim ownership of their bodies and desires. Furthermore, sex toys have been instrumental in promoting sexual education, enhancing communication between partners, and facilitating discussions on consent, pleasure, and body positivity. The findings of this paper underscore the importance of recognizing sex toys as tools of empowerment and liberation, contributing to the broader movement towards sexual liberation, gender equality, and the acceptance of diverse sexual expressions. By breaking down stigmatization and facilitating open discussions about women's bodies and sexuality, sex toys serve as catalysts for positive social change and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society.

**Keywords:** sex toys, female body, gender equality, sexual liberation, body positivity

## **1. Introduction**

This paper explores the transformative impact of sex toys in dismantling stigmatization surrounding women's bodies and sexuality. Women's sexual empowerment has long been hindered by societal norms and taboos that impose shame and silence on their desires and bodily autonomy. However, the rise in popularity and accessibility of sex toys has provided a unique avenue for women to reclaim their sexual agency, challenge traditional narratives, and break down the barriers that perpetuate stigmatization.

Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, this study examines how sex toys play a pivotal role in normalizing and empowering women's sexuality. Firstly, it delves into the historical context of the stigmatization of women's bodies and sexuality, highlighting the deep-rooted biases

and societal attitudes that have restricted women's sexual expression. Subsequently, the paper explores how sex toys serve as tools for self-discovery, fostering body positivity, and promoting sexual health and well-being. Jones conducted a qualitative investigation exploring the transformative potential of sex toys in relation to body image and self-perception among women. The findings demonstrated that using sex toys not only facilitated a positive connection with one's own body but also played a significant role in challenging societal beauty standards and promoting body acceptance [1].

Furthermore, the study investigates the impact of sex toys on women's relationships and the broader social sphere. It demonstrates how these intimate devices facilitate communication and experimentation, fostering healthier sexual dynamics and challenging traditional gender roles. The paper also explores how the utilization of sex toys in partnerships can enhance pleasure, intimacy, and overall relationship satisfaction, thereby promoting gender equality and dismantling harmful stereotypes. A study by Thompson et al. examined the impact of sex toy usage on sexual communication and relational satisfaction among couples. The research revealed that couples who incorporated sex toys into their sexual repertoire reported higher levels of sexual communication, increased sexual satisfaction, and enhanced relationship quality [2].

Research conducted by Smith explored the role of sex toys in empowering women and challenging the traditional male-centric narratives surrounding female pleasure. Smith's study revealed that women who incorporated sex toys into their sexual experiences reported heightened sexual satisfaction, increased self-awareness, and a greater sense of agency over their bodies [3]. The findings underscore the transformative potential of sex toys in dismantling stigmatization and promoting women's sexual liberation. By enabling women to explore their desires, celebrate their bodies, and assert their agency, sex toys challenge societal norms that have historically suppressed female sexuality. This research advocates for the destigmatization of sex toys, emphasizing their role in empowering women, fostering inclusive sexual education, and promoting a more accepting and open-minded society.

In summary, this paper highlights the crucial role of sex toys in breaking down the stigma surrounding women's bodies and sexuality. By examining the historical context of sex toys, their impact on individuals and relationships, as well as their wider societal implications, this study highlights the need for a more positive and inclusive attitude towards female sexuality. Ultimately, the use of sex toys as an empowerment tool will contribute to a freer and fairer society where women's sexual autonomy is celebrated and respected, while they will regain control of their bodies and complete the subjective construction of their own bodies.

This paper will embody both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The author designed a questionnaire on sex toy-related knowledge for this group of college students and collected a large amount of valid data. Some randomly sampled sample interviews are the auxiliary data for this study.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Specific Methods

The authors designed the questionnaire in terms of biological sex, femininity, self-perceived gender, sexual orientation, willingness to use female sex toys, reasons for not using sex toys, knowledge of female sex toys in the market, and perception of problems with female sex toys in the market. As of July 11, 219 questionnaires were collected, all of which were valid.

In-depth interviews were conducted with different respondents, including sex toy users, non-users, and people whose self-perceived gender is female, to obtain qualitative insights into their

experiences, views, and attitudes on the topic. The entire research process was strictly ethical, ensuring the privacy, confidentiality and informed consent of all participants.

## **2.2. Data Collection**

### **2.2.1. Quantitative Research**

The quantitative data collected were statistically analyzed through SPSS and other statistical software. Multiple regression analysis was used to explore the influence of biological sex, self-perceived sex, sexual orientation and “femininity” in traditional language settings on the choice of erotic products. “Femininity” in traditional contexts will be presented in a quantitative form, and respondents will choose a number from one to ten to indicate the extent to which femininity is manifested in them, with one being the lowest and ten being the highest.

### **2.3. Definition of Variables**

Biological sex refers to the biological sex of an individual, i.e. female and male. It is hypothesized that under traditional concepts, women’s biological sex may be restricted and regulated, resulting in their more conservative and restrained choice of sex toys.

Self-perceived gender refers to an individual’s cognition and perception of the gender identity to which he or she belongs. It is hypothesized that women whose self-perceived gender is more open and liberal may be more willing to try and accept novel products in their choice of sex toys.

Sexual orientation refers to an individual’s aptitude for emotional attraction to others. It is hypothesized that women’s sexual orientation may affect their interest in different types of sex toys, e.g. homosexual women may be more inclined to choose homosexual erotic products.

In traditional language environments, there are often fixed perceptions of women’s traits and roles, such as gentleness, passivity, and introversion. It is hypothesized that women in such an environment may be influenced by social expectations, leading them to prefer products that conform to traditional femininity in their choice of sex toys.

### **2.4. Hypothesis**

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study: Biological Gender Hypothesis: In the traditional view, there is a difference between men and women in the choice of sex toys. The demand for female erotic toys may be lower and subject to more social pressures and moral constraints. Self-perceived gender hypothesis: Individuals with non-binary gender identities may be insensitive to traditional gender roles and are more inclined to seek out erotic toys that are compatible with their gender identity. Sexual Orientation Hypothesis: Individuals with different sexual orientations may differ in their sex toy preferences. For example, lesbian women may have a higher interest in lesbian sex toys. The “femininity” hypothesis: The traditional linguistic environment that emphasizes feminine softness and passivity may lead women to be more conservative in their choice of sex toys and may prefer traditional or non-intrusive products.

### **2.5. Analysis of Basic Descriptive Scales**

Firstly, descriptive statistical analysis of the returned valid questionnaires was performed using LIWC and Excel statistical analysis software to understand the basic situation of the surveyed sample. The basic information of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Analysis of basic descriptive scale.

statistical information	type	overall amount	number of people who intend to use or have used sex toys	percentage
Biological gender	male	18	15	83.33%
	female	201	157	78.11%
Self-perceived gender	male	11	9	81.18%
	female	197	156	79.19%
	bisexual	7	5	71.42%
	asexual	4	2	50%
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual male	10	7	70%
	Heterosexual female	166	129	77.71%
	homosexual male	8	7	87.5%
	homosexual female	35	29	82.86%
“Femininity” in Traditional Language Contexts	Above average (average of 4.17)	97	58	59.79%
	Below average (average 4.17)	122	114	93.44%

### 3. Result

The data suggest that sex toy interest is prevalent among both males (83.33%) and females (78.11%), indicating a positive attitude towards sexual exploration and empowerment. Participants who identified as male or female demonstrated similar interest in sex toys, with percentages close to each other (81.18% and 79.19%, respectively). This shows that individuals are open to embracing their sexual desires and preferences, irrespective of societal gender norms.

Heterosexual females (89.62%) expressed the highest interest in sex toys among all categories, followed closely by homosexual males (87.5%) and homosexual females (82.86%). This data highlights that sex toys appeal to individuals across different sexual orientations, emphasizing their potential to enhance sexual experiences regardless of orientation.

Although asexual individuals showed the lowest interest in sex toys (50%), the data still indicate that half of them have an intention to use them. Bisexual individuals expressed a relatively lower interest (71.42%) compared to other categories. These results suggest that promoting sex toy awareness and inclusivity could be valuable in supporting individuals with diverse sexual orientations.

Contrary to traditional beliefs, the data show that individuals who perceive “femininity” to be below average (93.44%) have a higher interest in sex toys than those who perceive it to be above average (59.79%). This challenges the notion that sexual exploration and femininity are mutually exclusive.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Theoretical Support: The Subject Construction of Female Body

The perspective of “subject construction” opposes the objectification of research, advocates starting from the “subject”, and places the “body” in everyday life so that the vividness and diversity of the body can be better reflected. The body’s vividness and diversity are better reflected [4]. The “experiential” approach is an important feature of the study of everyday life, which focuses on a living space centered on the female subject. It includes women’s understanding and feelings about their own bodies, their concerns about their figures, their worries about their health, the various gazes they receive and the meanings they give to these gazes, and their expressions of real-life social situations related to their bodies. The experience of using sex toys has a personal “subjective” character, but it is not just a psychological activity of the individual; it is also an expression of the individual’s oneness with the outside world. Through various channels (the use of sex toys, the exploration of their own bodies and sexuality), women reshape or rebel against popular discourses, integrating them into their own lives and forming rules that are integrated into their own practices. The rules of this group are also impacting and reshaping social norms.

### 4.2. Specific Processes for Breaking down the Stigmatization of Female Sexuality in Relation to Feminist Analysis of Sex Toys

Feminist theory encourages rethinking and challenging society’s stigma and double standards about women’s sexuality. Sex toys are used as tools to help women redefine and reshape their perceptions of sexual pleasure and needs, breaking through traditional gender norms [5].

The feminist theory promotes female sexual autonomy and fulfillment. As a result of the development of feminist thought, sex toys provide tools to explore and satisfy women’s sexual pleasure and needs. Through the use of sex toys, women are able to better understand their own bodies and sexual preferences and to pursue sexual gratification without having to depend on others [6]. Feminism emphasizes female initiative in sexual relationships. The presence of sex toys enables women to take the initiative in controlling their sexual experience, increase sexual satisfaction and share pleasure with their partners. This helps to break down the negative prejudices and stigmatization of women’s sexuality.

Feminism advocates for the provision of comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education that enables women to freely explore and express their sexual needs and preferences. Sex toy manufacturers and retailers can support this goal by providing sex education and information resources that help dispel misconceptions and prejudices about sexuality and increase women’s awareness and empowerment [7].

### 4.3. Suggestions for Sex Toy Companies and Individuals

The author has designed a question for people other than those who are completely unaware of sex toys: what do you think are the problems with sex toys on the market; multiple options have been designed at the same time. The author will tabulate the results.

Table 2: Perceived problems with female-oriented sex toys on the market.

Options	Subtotal	Proportions
Improper use and cleaning can lead to gynaecological problems.	132	68.75%
Uneven product quality	130	67.71%

Table 2: (continued).

Most of the female-oriented sex toys on the market are suspected of being designed by heterosexual male developers to satisfy their own sexual fetishes	75	39.06%
The product does not have a strong experience of use and does not really touch the sensitive points of women	54	28.13%
Ugly and monolithic in appearance	48	25%
There is a potential risk of exposing consumer privacy	33	17.19%
Others((Unreasonable prices, single type, focus on appearance rather than functionality)	20	25%

Table 2 is partly an inspiration of the ways in which people can break down the stigmatization of women's bodies and sexuality, both from the perspective of erotic companies and from the perspective of individuals.

#### 4.3.1.From the Perspective of Sex Toy Companies

Sex toy companies can play a crucial role in challenging societal stigmas surrounding women's bodies and sexuality. Here are some strategies they can adopt:

According to a study by Braun, Gavey, and McPhillips, promoting body positivity is essential for challenging societal norms and reducing body shame [8]. Sex toy companies can develop marketing campaigns and product designs that celebrate diverse body types, emphasizing inclusivity and body acceptance.

Sex toy companies can provide educational resources that aim to normalize discussions around women's bodies and sexuality. These resources can include blogs, articles, and online forums where women can access accurate information, ask questions, and engage in open discussions without fear of judgment. This fosters a sense of empowerment and helps break down stigmas.

According to a study by McCarthy, Meler, and Rubin, sex toy companies can provide a diversity of products and develop diversified sex toy products adapted to different body types, sexual orientations and preferences to meet the needs of different women while emphasizing product safety and ensuring that the materials used in sex toys are safe, harmless and in compliance with the relevant hygiene and quality standards - strict product testing and certification in cooperation with authoritative organizations [9]. Finally, conduct continuous research and innovation: focus on the progress of research on women's sexual health and sexual pleasure, and apply the latest scientific discoveries to product design.

Partnering with sexual health experts, psychologists, and educators can provide sex toy companies with valuable insights and guidance in promoting healthy sexual attitudes and behaviors. By incorporating expert knowledge, companies can ensure their products and messaging align with scientific understanding and promote positive narratives around women's bodies and sexuality.

#### 4.3.2.From the Perspective of Individuals

A study conducted by Davidson, Moore and Fingerhut revisited theories of female sexual pleasure and fulfillment, presenting a viewpoint that goes beyond the male-centered script from which one can draw inspiration [10].

An important aspect of challenging stigma is embracing self-exploration and sexual empowerment. Open discussion with a partner, friend or support group can help individuals gain confidence in their desires, preferences and use of sex toys. This will promote a healthy understanding of one's body and sexuality.



Sharing personal experiences is a powerful tool for breaking down stereotypes and normalizing conversations about women's bodies and sexuality. Participating in online platforms such as blogs, video blogs, or social media communities to share one's experiences with sex toys can create a sense of solidarity and help others overcome feelings of shame or stigma.

Actively engaging in advocacy and education can play an important role in challenging social stigma. Supporting organizations that promote sexual health, women's rights and body positivity can help raise awareness and promote a broader discussion about women's bodies and sexuality.

#### 4.4. Noteworthy Issues in the Sex Toy Industry

In the course of their research and data collection, the author also noticed a worrying trend: many designers create gimmicks for their products by mobilizing feminist discourse to critique gender inequality, which is logical given the history of the sex toy industry. In fact, feminists promoted the industry in the 1970s by advocating for female consumers as a demographic with strong consumer potential. As a result, for those who consider women's sexual disadvantage in hetero sex is caused by the patriarchal denial of women's rights, making sex-positive toys would be an obvious political correction for patriarchal denial [11]. Sex toy designers have taken a more positive approach to female sexuality in a world that is much harsher on women. However, the problem is that the "positive attitude" of some sex toy brands is not equally positive. Sex toy brands are more welcoming to female consumers than male consumers, believing that women are more valuable than men when it comes to sexual consumption. However, this inequality is precisely what the patriarchal perspective has taught us about the stigmatization of women in other areas of society. In other words, in the realm of sex toys, the position of female and male consumers is subtly different from other areas. Moreover, permissive attitudes towards sex, especially those oriented towards increasing the consumption of sex toys, can lead to discrimination against female consumers.

#### 5. Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that sex toys play a vital role in empowering women and combating prejudices related to women's bodies and sexuality. Sex toys provide women with avenues to explore and rediscover pleasure, promoting body positivity, autonomy and self-acceptance. They provide individuals with a safe, non-judgmental space to know and accept their desires, which can improve sexual satisfaction and self-confidence.

Additionally, the use of sex toys helps to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. These devices have opened up conversations about female pleasure and shattered the notion that female sexuality should be passive or focused solely on male gratification. By normalizing female sexuality, sex toys contribute to a more egalitarian and respectful understanding of gender dynamics in intimate relationships.

However, it is important to recognize the limitations of the study. This research focuses primarily on the experiences of cisgender women, and further exploration is needed to understand the unique perspectives and needs of trans women and non-binary individuals. Secondly, there are also problems with the design of the questionnaire. The author did not strictly define the age range of the respondents, which may cause the collected data to not accurately reflect this group. In addition, cultural and social contexts may vary, as may the acceptance and availability of sex toys in different regions, all of which may affect the generalizability of the study. To minimize these limitations, future research could consider including age-related questions in the study. Design questionnaires or conduct separate studies targeting specific age groups and women from different cultures. This approach will allow for a more nuanced understanding of how women's perceptions of women's bodies, sex and sex toys vary across generations and cultures.

Looking ahead, there are many opportunities for research and advocacy in this field. Further investigation is needed to explore the intersectionality of race, class, and ability with regard to sex toys and their impact on subjective constructions of women's bodies. Understanding and addressing these differing perspectives will facilitate a more inclusive and holistic approach to sexual empowerment.

This paper shows that sex toys have the power to break down stereotypes about women's bodies and sexuality. They challenge social norms, promote agency and body positivity, and contribute to a fairer and fulfilling sexual experience. By recognizing these contributions, acknowledging the limitations of the research, and identifying opportunities for future research, the authors hope to inspire further dialogue and action to create a society that embraces and celebrates women's diverse experiences and aspirations.

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