

Changing the Biopower Hierarchy between Women's Bodily Knowledge and the Medical Knowledge about the Body: The Case of Female Ejaculation and #Notpee

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Abstract : The objective of this study is to investigate how technology, such as social media, can influence the biopower hierarchy between the medical knowledge about the body and women's bodily knowledge through the case study of the hashtag 'notpee'. In January 2015, the hashtag #notpee, relating to a feminine physiological phenomenon called female ejaculation (FE) or squirting (SQ) started circulating on twitter. This hashtag, born as a reaction to a medical study claiming that SQ is essentially involuntary emission of urine during sexual activity, sparked an unusual public discourse about FE, a phenomenon that is usually not discussed or referred to in socio-legitimate public spheres. This unusual backlash got the attention of women's magazines and blogs, as well as more mainstream large and respected outlets such as The Guardian and CNN. Both the tweets on twitter, as well as the media coverage of them, were mainly aimed at rejecting the research's findings. While not offering an alternative and choosing to define the phenomenon by negation, women argued that the fluid extracted was not pee based on their personal experiences. Based on a critical discourse analysis of 742 tweets with the hashtag 'notpee' between January 2015 and January 2016, and of 15 articles covering the backlash, this study suggests that the #notpee backlash challenged the power balance between the medical knowledge about the feminine body and the feminine bodily knowledge through two different, yet related, forms of resistance to biopower. The first resistance is to the authority over knowledge production — who has the power to produce 'true' statements when it comes to the body? Is it the women who experience the phenomenon, or is it the medical institution? The second resistance to biopower has to do with what we regard as facts or veracity. A critical discourse analysis reveals that while both the scientific field, as well as the women arguing against its findings, use empirical information, they, nevertheless, rely on two dichotomic databases- while the scientific research relies on samples from the 'dead like body', these woman are relying on their lived subjective senses as a source for fact making. Nevertheless, while #notpee is asking to change the power relations between the feminine subjective bodily knowledge and the seemingly objective masculine medical knowledge about the body, it by no means dismisses it. These women are essentially asking the medical institution to take into consideration the subjective body as well as the objective one while acknowledging and accepting the power of the latter over knowledge production.

Keywords : biopower, female ejaculation, new media, bodily knowledge

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