

A Pink Pill Daily: On the Lust Enhancing Pill for Women and the Medicalization of Sexual Desire

Authors : Maaiké Maria Augustina Hommes

Abstract : This paper reviews the emergence of the recently approved lust enhancing pill for women (sold under the brand name of Addyi) and its status as 'medicine' from a cultural studies perspective to understand the way in which the usage of the pill can be seen as a medicalization of sexual desire. It asks where this medicalization can be localized to understand the current placement of and notions on female sexuality. Via a close reading of a woman's narration of her usage of the pill that appeared in Shape Magazine, this paper critically reviews the pill's relation to the concept of 'cure' and assesses the way this Pink Pill functions as a cure to the DSM-IV based disorder called Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder. As such it finds that in the diagnosis with HSDD meant a huge relief. Now this woman was not just 'bad at life and bad at marriage' but 'just had this health issue'. In order to get to an understanding of the different structures that conjoin in this expression of relief this paper reviews the emergence of the sexual desire disorder within psychology and the way that the loss of desire becomes localized in the brain. This localization will be related to two ways of looking at the human body; the medical gaze as described by Michel Foucault, and the neuromolecular gaze, as introduced by Nikolas Rose and Joelle M. Abi-Rached. Both these penetrating gazes bring about a certain reductionism in which the human body is either viewed as an objectified 'sick body' or as a set of chemical reactions. By referring to these modes of looking as reductionist one assumes that something is lost, or forgotten in the act of reducing. It is both what is gained in the formulation of the disorder, as what is lost in reduction of the disorder in medical knowledge that is at the central inquiry of this paper. As such, this paper brings forward the way in which medicine and cultural narrative are deeply intertwined. It is this way in which different forces of subject formation come together that is addressed via an interdisciplinary and object-centered focus on the pink pill.

Keywords : disorder and cure, female sexual desire, medical gaze, neuromolecular gaze

Conference Title : ICGSH 2017 : International Conference on Gender, Sex and Healthcare

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : February 16-17, 2017