



**prisma
social**
revista
de ciencias
sociales

Revista de Investigación Social

ISSN: 1989-3469

Nº 13 | Diciembre 2014 – Mayo 2015 – Narraciones de masculinidad(es)

pp. 72-108 || Sección Temática

Recibido: 28/7/2014 – Aceptado: 30/11/2014

**"ENEMIGOS DE LA
VIRILIDAD": SEX,
MASTURBATION,
AND CELIBACY IN
NINETEENTH-
CENTURY SPAIN**

**"ENEMIGOS DE LA
VIRILIDAD": SEXO,
MASTURBACIÓN, Y
CONTINENCIA EN LA
ESPAÑA
DECIMONÓNICA**

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RESUMEN

El discurso sobre la sexualidad en la España decimonónica presenta una diferencia fundamental entre el ideal masculino de aquella época y la definición de la masculinidad que predomina actualmente. Según el estereotipo actual, el hombre típico de hoy día va en busca del contacto sexual y toma sus oportunidades siempre que pueda. En cambio, en los numerosos tratados de higiene sexual del siglo XIX se puede notar cierta ansiedad asociada con la actividad sexual y su influencia en la construcción de la masculinidad hegemónica. En particular, el exceso sexual, la masturbación y el celibato se consideraban prácticas antagónicas de la masculinidad burguesa, la cual se definía más bien por la moderación venérea, el matrimonio y la paternidad. El hombre que transgredía este modelo ponía en riesgo su salud y su masculinidad. Tal fórmula revela una cierta fragilidad en el concepto de hombría, hecho que no concuerda con la imagen tradicional de la masculinidad española que data de la Reconquista y se basa en el heroísmo belicoso, la bravura, y la conquista sexual.

Palabras clave

Masculinidad; sexualidad; masturbación; celibato; siglo XIX.

ABSTRACT

The discourse on sexuality in nineteenth-century Spain presents a fundamental difference between the masculine ideal of that period and our current definition of masculinity. According to today's popular stereotype, the typical man seeks out sexual contact and takes any opportunities that arise. By contrast, within the hygiene texts of the nineteenth century one detects a sense of unease associated with sexual activity and its corresponding role in the construction of hegemonic masculinity. In particular, sexual excess, masturbation, and celibacy were viewed as antagonistic to middle-class masculinity, which was instead associated with venereal moderation, marriage, and fatherhood. Men who transgressed this model risked their health as well as their masculinity. This formula reveals an element of fragility with regard to notions of manhood, in contrast to the traditional image of Spanish masculinity that originated during the Reconquest and is based on bellicose heroism, bravado, and sexual prowess.

Key words

Masculinity; sexuality; masturbation; celibacy; nineteenth century.

1. Introduction

What role does sexuality play in the formation of an individual's gender identity? Most would agree that sexuality is one of the pillars upon which gender is built. As the prominent scholar of masculinity R.W. Connell has noted, femininities and "masculinities as cultural forms cannot be abstracted from sexuality, which is an essential dimension of the social creation of gender" (1993: 602). In the case of contemporary hegemonic masculinity one could argue that the importance of sexuality is exaggerated, to such a degree that adult men have difficulty accepting other typical aspects of masculinity if satisfactory sexual performance is absent (Person, 1980). According to the popular stereotype, a "real man" enjoys sex, is always ready for sex, and his virility corresponds to the frequency of his sexual conquests.

While sexual asceticism would be viewed as unmasculine within the current gender paradigm this was not the case in the nineteenth century. In contrast to today's celebration of sexuality, middle-class men in the second half of the nineteenth century were encouraged to exercise extreme moderation. Too much sex was dangerous, but so too was total abstinence. Medical experts of the day set forth guidelines based on a spermatic economy of the male body that would create just the right balance of sexual activity and chastity in order to retain healthy levels of semen.

Permeating this discourse on sexuality is an undercurrent of anxiety expressed as a fear of leaky bodies and a disdain for men who allow themselves to be ruled by their passions as well as those who seemingly reject or neglect their carnal instincts. In sum, because the gender discourse of the nineteenth century is founded on the

concept of essential differences, male sexuality in the nineteenth century is characterized by a disdain of the feminine.

2. Objectives

The primary objective of this essay is to describe and explain the norm of male sexuality in Spain during the second half of the nineteenth century. In doing so, this examination of heteronormative masculinity can provide future scholars of masculinity and male sexuality with a baseline against which non-normative models can be compared. This study will also have as a secondary objective the demythification of "traditional" Spanish masculinity, which has prevailed in the social imaginary since the Middle Ages and is built upon an image of strength, power, and sexual prowess.

3. Methodology

Because gender and sexual identities are informed by social pressures and cultural norms, the prevailing gender paradigm (the models of masculinity and femininity we hold up as ideal) changes over time. Power, Michel Foucault makes clear, is embedded in knowledge (1991: 27). "There are different truths and different ways of speaking the truth," he explains, and these "truths" are the products of discourse (1980: 51; 93). Using Foucault's idea that discourse reflects and creates power relationships in society as a theoretical backdrop this study will delineate the dominant model of male sexuality as it was described in the gender discourse of the nineteenth century.

Hygiene texts, specifically Pedro Felipe Monlau's *Higiene del matrimonio* and Amancio Peratoner's *Fisiología de la noche de bodas*, provide the primary material for the present discussion of male sexuality, which is informed by contemporary theories of masculinity, particularly Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (2005). Hegemonic masculinity refers to a culturally normative ideal of male behavior. It is not static and is not even the most common type of masculinity. Rather, it represents a particular configuration of masculinity that is culturally exalted. It is not a reality but a socially endorsed fantasy. It includes those characteristics and behaviors considered most desirable by a given society at a given moment.

4. Articulating male sexuality

Contemporary scholarship on sexuality and gender in nineteenth-century Spain has, until quite recently, focused almost exclusively on the female body and the construction of ideal femininity. Such research chronicles and analyzes the rivers of ink that flooded newspapers and books of the period with descriptions of the *ángel del hogar*, the paragon of middle-class femininity (Charnon-Deutsch, 2000; Jagoe, Blanco, Enríquez de Salamanca, 1998). This important body of scholarship not only opened new and exciting avenues of exploration for literary scholars and historians, but it has paved the way for those who would take gender studies in new directions.

Despite the overwhelming merits of such studies, the focus on the female body has meant that male bodies and masculinities have been left out of the conversation too often. At times the masculine pole of the sex-gender system is treated as an unproblematic default position against which femininity is measured. The problem with

such a view is that it not only overlooks a large body of discourse on male sexuality, but in doing so it presupposes a monolithic concept of masculinity when the reality is that masculinity is plural, historically variable, and shaped by sociocultural prejudices.

This trend has started to change in recent years. Ana Isabel Simón Alegre's paper on the representation of male genitalia in late nineteenth-century medical discourse highlights many of the same anxieties discussed in this article, and shows that while male sexuality did not occupy as prominent a place in the gender discourse as female sexuality did it was nonetheless a serious concern for medical experts (2005). Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García have made one of the most significant contributions to the study of male sexuality thus far with their seminal study of homosexuality in nineteenth and twentieth-century Spain (2007). Similarly, Jean-Louis Guereña and Pura Fernández, among others, have indirectly addressed the link between masculinity and sexuality by examining such topics as birth control, venereal disease, and prostitution in the nineteenth century (2011; 2008). Despite the obvious importance of these studies, the model of normative male sexuality that serves as a measuring stick upon which other sexualities are defined remains presumed. This study does not seek to contradict the assumption that nineteenth-century Spanish society operated under a system of what Adrienne Rich famously described as a "bias of compulsory heterosexuality" (1980: 632). Far from it. By articulating what has, until now, remained an assumption the present study will attempt to buttress this previous scholarship by providing a clearer view of the sexual landscape in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The focus of this essay is admittedly narrow: middle-class male heterosexuality in nineteenth-century Spain. Despite the narrow focus, the study of normative

heterosexuality remains a pressing field of inquiry with a potentially broad impact on other areas of masculinity studies. I am cognizant of the fact that scholars must exercise caution by not replicating and perpetuating socially constructed power dynamics that privilege one form of sexuality over others by focusing too much on hegemonic models of gender and sexuality lest we dig ourselves deeper into a rut of phallocentrism. But one simply cannot afford to ignore heteronormative models in the study of masculinity. By delineating male sexual practices as they were understood in the nineteenth century, we will improve our understanding of sexuality generally.

Once the nineteenth-century hegemonic model is more clearly delineated, scholars can continue their efforts to queer Spanish masculinities. Because the cultural ideologies of the past are inevitably tied to those of the present, we can more easily deconstruct the hegemonic model of today by articulating its various iterations in the past. As further proof of our need to push forward with this line of inquiry, scholars and social commentators have suggested that the evolving definitions of gender roles have thrust us into a crisis of masculinity on a global scale (García García (2009); Hickey (2014); Ryzik (2011); Morris (2013); Herrera Gómez (2012); McClintock (2013); Amar (2011); Penny (2013)). When that happens societies tend to retreat to traditional expressions of gender identity, espousing models based on what are perceived to be firm boundaries rooted in the past (Kimmel, 2001: 29). This is something we can hardly afford. We cannot de-gender the past, but if we can expose hegemonic masculinity as a discursive fiction rather than a fixed and absolute reality we can undo the imagined moorings of traditional gender identities and throw male sexuality into a state of free play where heteronormative models lose their

hierarchical privilege and sexuality becomes a field of possibilities rather than a phallocentric system of compulsory heterosexuality.

4.1. Gender and sexuality in the nineteenth century

Despite the fact that modern gender roles trace their origins back to the nineteenth century and the rise of the middle class, a close look at the medical literature from that period shows that male sexuality has changed considerably over the last century and a half. One of the most audible voices in the conversation on sexuality in the nineteenth century is that of Catalan doctor Pedro Felipe Monlau. Physician, academic, literary author, and celebrity intellectual, Monlau is usually remembered as the father of the hygiene movement in Spain. His reputation as a pioneer of preventative medicine, and especially the publication of his *Elementos de higiene pública* (1847), earned him the distinction of representing Spain at the first and second International Sanitary Conferences in Paris in 1851 and 1859. But it was the publication of *Higiene del matrimonio*, o, *El libro de los casados* in 1853 that solidified Monlau's reputation in the eyes of the general public as one of Spain's preeminent medical experts.

In the prologue of *Higiene del matrimonio* Monlau suggests that his five hundred page tome will prove a useful resource for family doctors and priests who will be treating and counseling the general public, however the volume was intended primarily for middle class couples. While much of the medical advice in the book is outdated by today's standards, Monlau does provide a useful portrait of the gender paradigm of nineteenth-century Spain. Like England and other industrializing nations

of the period, Spain subscribed to a concept of essential differences, which argued that women and men are diametrical but complementary opposites. In a classic description of the anatomical and psychological dissimilarities of the sexes Monlau writes that woman is physically “más floja y más blanda” and therefore “dotada de una sensibilidad mayor; sus sentidos son más delicados y finos”—qualities that make her an ideal caregiver (1853: 112). By contrast:

El hombre es ardiente, activo, robusto, velludo, osado, pródigo y dominador. Su carácter es ordinariamente expansivo, bullidor; su textura es fibrosa, recia, compacta; sus músculos son fornidos, angulosos; sus fuertes crines, su barba negra y poblada, y su pecho velludo, exhalan el fuego que le abrasa; su genio sublime e impetuoso le lanza a los altos, y le hace aspirar a la inmortalidad. (1853: 111)

Monlau’s description paints an unambiguous and idealized vision of the male body and his corresponding character, one that leaves no room for gender ambiguity. Man is muscular, hairy, and hard; woman is soft and weak. Man dominates; woman submits. Man conquers; woman shelters. Man relies on reason; woman on emotion. These beliefs were used to justify the concept of separate spheres. Woman’s body and disposition meant her natural habitat was the home, where she could fully realize her potential as an *ángel del hogar*, nurturing a family and spending her time on domestic activities (1853: 112). Man, with his robust body and mind, was better suited for the marketplace, politics, and industry: an urban warrior ready to do battle in the public sphere.

After outlining the supposedly innate differences between man and woman that ground this gender paradigm Monlau moves onto the principal topic of *Higiene del matrimonio*: sex, or to be precise, reproductive, heterosexual intercourse between a husband and wife. His treatment of sex is both descriptive and prescriptive. He conflates marriage and sex, as if to suggest that you cannot have one without the other, and he describes these as natural instincts and civic duties. *Higiene del matrimonio* suggests that the only legitimate justification for intercourse is reproduction: “el esposo no debe satisfacer el instinto de reproducción sino cuando se sienta naturalmente llamado a ello, y no provocado por excitantes interiores, por espectáculos voluptuosos o caricias indiscretas” (1853: 126). This, he explains, is not only because the perpetuation of the family is the highest moral ideal to which man can strive, but also because sex possesses the power to create as well as destroy. As the following sections will show, for Monlau and the other Spanish hygienists writing in the second half of the nineteenth century, normative male sexuality is defined as natural, ascetic, and productive.

4.2. Sex and the spermatic economy

Current readers of *Higiene del matrimonio* may be surprised by Monlau’s repeated warning that men should avoid overindulging in sex, which represents a departure from the present-day celebration of sexual pleasure and the role of sexual conquest in our current definitions of hegemonic masculinity. On more than one occasion Monlau counsels men to avoid engaging in sexual activity too often, explaining that doing so leads to a variety of ills including lassitude, migraines, nervous disorders, indigestion,

birth defects in offspring, paralysis, and even premature death. Not only will curbing one's sexual appetite help avoid this multitude of physical ailments, he explains, it also has less obvious benefits such as increased vigor, mental acuity, and longevity (1853: 133-34).

In order to maintain a healthy lifestyle Monlau suggests that even married men should severely temper their libido to the point of staying chaste for long periods, opting for what he calls "continencia conyugal" (1853: 51). This advice applies to all men, but especially to those dedicated to intellectual pursuits. Monlau's comments are informed by the prevailing medical thought regarding the link between sexual exertion and the functioning of the nervous system. In *Elementos de fisiología e higiene*, Manuel Mir y Navarro reminds men that "al satisfacerse las necesidades genésicas entra en una asombrosa actividad el sistema nervioso (1899: 305). For this reason he urges men to observe a "prudente continencia" and, echoing Monlau's comments, discourages his reader from satisfying "la necesidad reproductora" except when "la sienta naturalmente" (1899: 305). The strain such activity places on the nervous system is too great to justify sex for the sake of pure pleasure. Only the noble act of procreation warrants such a risk.

Monlau does not advocate total abstinence, but instead urges extreme moderation, especially for those with physical ailments: "los debilitados por cualquiera causa que sea, deben ser muy parcos, y aun en ciertas épocas del año guardar continencia absoluta" (1853: 130). He offers similar advice to husbands with a nervous temperament, writers, artists, and men with desk jobs, all of whom run the risk of "consumi[éndose] con prodigiosa rapidez su vida, si no andan con mesura en entregarse a los trasportes del tálamo conyugal" (1853: 130). The same holds true for

older men. Quoting cardinal Maury, Monlau notes the drain copulation places on a man's vital energy: "de cincuenta años arriba todo hombre prudente debe renunciar a los placeres del amor: cada acto que entonces celebra es una palada de tierra que se echa sobre la cabeza" (1853: 129). On the other hand, the man who adopts an ascetic approach to intimacy will find his life extended: "En la observancia de esta regla de higiene dinámica, en la severa economía de una fuerza nerviosa que nace del mismo manantial de la vida, encontrarán los viejos el mas precioso elemento de longevidad y robustez" (129). This advice may seem prudish and extreme by today's standards, but Monlau's reasoning was very much in line with the thinking of his peers.

Hygienists were so concerned with the dangers of overstimulation that many recommended specific parameters for regulating the sexual habits of men. London doctor Edward Ferguson's book on male sexuality, *De la impotencia sexual*, was translated to Spanish and published in Sevilla in 1877. In it he counsels against having sexual intercourse more than once a week:

Después de pesar las circunstancias que afectan la salud y el vigor de los que pasan por las fatigas y ansiedades de una vida como la que lleva el hombre de negocios o científico, nos vemos precisados a sostener que el coito no debe tener lugar, entre los individuos de esta clase, sino una vez cada ocho o nueve días. (1877: 13)

His reasoning is that men engaged in professions that require a significant amount of mental energy will quickly become enervated, given that "los sistemas generativo y cerebral están tan íntimamente aliados" (1877: 14). Not only will too much thinking

and too much sex render a man ill, this deadly combination will likely produce sickly offspring as well.

Enervation, or neurasthenia as it is more widely known, refers to a systemic debilitation of the body and mind. It is associated with a diverse list of symptoms and was a common diagnosis of male patients who depleted their vital energy through excessive mental exertion or sexual indulgence. Associated with the hazardous conditions of urban existence and its easily accessible vices such as prostitution and pornography, neurasthenia "puede considerársela como una enfermedad moderna, fruto de nuestra civilización" writes one medical expert: "[La neurastenia] es efecto de ciertos excesos y sobre todo de los vicios secretos" (Hugo-Marcus, 1893: 127, 132). The danger of enervation was not just poor health but loss of virility. Doctors believed that woman's nervous system was infinitely more sensitive to stimulation than that of man (Mir y Navarro, 1899: 28). As a result, men who succumbed to nervous disorders were considered unmanly. They put their manhood at risk when they allowed their passions to get the better of them or when they failed to achieve a proper balance between physical and intellectual pursuits, between activity and rest: "[un hombre] enervado por la profesión sedentaria, se afemina con facilidad" (Salazar y Quintana, quoted in Cleminson and Vázquez García, 2007: 184). The same is true of those on the opposite end of the spectrum, who neglect their intellectual side and instead enjoy sex without moderation "y sólo piensan en economizar cuando ya están arruinados" (Monlau, 1853: 134). The healthy man adopted a Goldilocks sex life, one that was neither too active nor altogether absent.

Like Monlau and Ferguson, Gerardo Blanco —better known by his penname Amancio Peratoner— advocated an ascetic male sexuality. Peratoner was a prominent

disseminator of hygiene theories relating to sex and prostitution in the second half of the nineteenth century, authoring and translating books with somewhat sensational titles. Among his works are *Los peligros de amor, o de la lujuria y el libertinaje en el hombre, en la mujer* (1874), *El culto al falo* (1875), *Fisiología de la noche de bodas* (1875), *De la virginidad física o anatómica* (1876), *Higiene trascendental: los órganos de la generación* (1881), and *Extravíos secretos del bello sexo* (1882). Despite overlapping viewpoints on the topic of male sexuality in Peratoner's *Fisiología de la noche de bodas* and Monlau's *Higiene del matrimonio*, the two authors had different credentials as well as notable stylistic differences. Monlau is careful to distance his work from the titillating tone of works like Peratoner's stating that his own book "es una obra seria, es una obra filosófica y médica, que se propone un fin moral, útil y saludable" (Monlau, 1853: vii-viii). Peratoner, by contrast, offers up provocative descriptions that would be equally at home in a passage of cheap erotica, and images that border on scandalous, including a plate of six explicit illustrations depicting female genitalia "en sus estados de virginidad y desfloración" (1892: 9). But whatever opinion one has as to the merits of his work there is no denying the popularity of *Fisiología de la noche de bodas* and his other publications, suggesting that the ideas expressed in his books accurately reflect attitudes about sexuality at the time (Díez Fernández, 2010: 304-05; Cerezo, 2001: 178).

Peratoner was arguably more extreme than Monlau in his warnings to men on the topic of overstimulation. "Fuérale mejor ponerse en guardia contra falaces deseos," he cautions, "y hacerse cargo de esta verdad: que por una débil eyaculación, antes bien dolorosa que placentera, compromete su salud y abrevia su vida" (Peratoner, 1892: 34). For the elderly the danger is especially great: "No son raros, por desgracia, los

ejemplos de ancianos muertos repentinamente o a consecuencia de coito extemporáneo" (1892: 35). Peratoner's advice echoes that of Monlau, Ferguson and other hygienists: "Moderación, mucha moderación, en los placeres del matrimonio. Huir del abuso, pues su abuso, enerva el cuerpo y perjudica a las facultades intelectuales" (Peratoner, 1892: 39). Peratoner does not tire of offering hyperbolic warnings about the hazards of sex, declaring that "Los trasportes de una imaginación erótica, deseos inmoderados de voluptuosidades sensuales son los más peligrosos enemigos de la virilidad" (1892: 40). Given the intertwining of sexuality and gender, his use of the term "virilidad" can be read not only in the context of sexuality, but as pertaining to manliness in general. In short, too much sex not only threatens to dampen a man's libido, it could just as easily render him unmanly in all senses of the word.

Such alarmist views were not based on outdated notions of religious respectability, these authors argued, but on the prevailing scientific knowledge, specifically the notion of a spermatic economy. The notion of a spermatic economy is part of a larger formula for health popular in the nineteenth century that was based on a proper balance of vital fluids. What is more, this formula operated on a fundamental law of the distribution of these vital powers, similar to a closed system, so that when vital energy increases in one part it is unavoidably diminished in another. Each ejaculation drains a bit of this precious stock leaving one physically and mentally diminished. This is why Monlau argues that "para transmitir la vida es preciso tener vida de sobra" (1853: 27). The excretion of semen required for conception gives life but also takes it away. The hygienists, it seems, took a literal view of the oft-cited phrase "totus homo

semen est." If these vital fluids are the body's currency then they must be subject to economic principles:

toda emisión seminal extenúa el cuerpo, ya a causa de la sustracción del líquido espermático, que es la quinta esencia de la sangre, elaborado con prolijidad por la naturaleza, ya también a causa del sacudimiento nervioso que acompaña a su eyaculación (1853: 131).

Unlike a bank account that can be replenished with the next paycheck, a man's supply of sperm was not so easily restored. Semen was such a valuable commodity that one should be hesitant to part with it, argues Monlau: "Nada, pues, cuesta tanto a nuestra economía como la fabricación del esperma y su emisión forzada, porque se ha calculado que la pérdida de una onza de aquel humor equivale a la pérdida de cuarenta onzas de sangre" (1853: 133). This argument would have carried particular weight with the ascending bourgeoisie for whom capitalism was the new gospel.

The fear of depletion and death prompted some physicians to issue detailed guidelines concerning the frequency with which men could safely engage in sex without running the risk of illness or death. Whereas Ferguson's recommendation of once per week was based on a man's profession, Peratoner bases his instructions on age. A man between the ages of twenty and thirty, he explains, "puede ejercer sus derechos de dos a cuatro veces por semana" but between thirty and forty he should limit himself to twice a week (1892: 34). In his forties he should consider having intercourse only once a week, while anyone between the ages of fifty and sixty should not engage in sexual activities more than twice a month. Beyond that coitus becomes a grave danger, which is why a man over sixty "sólo debe ir rarísimas veces a

presentar su mezquina ofrenda en el altar de venus" (1892: 34). Men above seventy are told to refrain from sex altogether.

Those that failed to heed the counsel found in *Fisiología de la noche de bodas* might find themselves suffering any number of ailments that accompany the loss of semen, including impotence, cancer, hemorrhaging, hysteria, mental illness, epilepsy, loss of vision and hearing, tuberculosis, asthma, incontinence, as well as "tantas y tantas otras dolencias cuyo catálogo espeluzna y cuya tendencia inevitable, inmediata, es una prematura y dolorosa muerte" (1892: 41). Not surprisingly, quack physicians looking to capitalize on the panic brought on by these warnings produced a variety of dubious remedies. One such product appears in *El Día*. "IMPORTANTÍSIMO—FLUIDO VITAL," screams the heading, "Remedio infalible para la curación de la *impotencia*, derrames seminales, y toda clase de desarreglo producido por *excesos sexuales*." The seller promises that the medicine can cure everything from "debilidad del sistema nervioso" to "falta de virilidad." For as little as five pesetas sufferers will find their vim and vigor restored and unwanted excitations diminished ("Importantísimo," 1888: 4). Such advertisements appeared regularly in many of the major papers.

Health and masculinity were so closely tied that a man could not have one without the other. In her discussion of the medical discourse of nineteenth-century Spain and its link to ideas of gender, Catherine Jagoe notes that, "El varón es la pauta del cuerpo sano, desde la cual se mide al sexo femenino" (1998: 307). A sickly body was an effeminate body. Pesetas may have been the currency of the market, but sexual health (and especially semen) was the currency of masculinity.

4.3. Masturbation and the danger of spermatorrhea

Peratoner's warnings about the dangers of too much sex may seem severe, but he reserves his harshest condemnation for those who engage in "la práctica criminal, absurda, infame de la masturbación" (1892: 42). Peratoner was not alone. The hygienists' fear of sex was only eclipsed by their fear of masturbation, which was so vehement and so ubiquitous in the discourse on sexuality in the nineteenth century that historians have described it as a "cruzada médica antimasturbatoria" (Vázquez García and Seoane Cegarra, 2011: 23).

Similar to their comments on venery, hygienists condemned masturbation because they believed it transgressed the body's natural design, leading to a variety of physiological disorders most of which mirrored the potential side effects of unregulated copulation cited above (impotence, sterility, blindness, mental illness, etc.). One doctor gives the following description of a young male patient whose health began to deteriorate after years of masturbation and sexual excess: "Fisonomía abatida y pálida, notable flacidez de carnes, enflaquecimiento de miembros, disminución de las fuerzas musculares" (Mon y Pardo, 1849:1). His enervated body is essentially the opposite of Monlau's previously cited description of the ideal male body, which is muscular and erect. Such symptoms were considered classic signs of spermatorrhea, the quintessential illness of the masturbator and an exclusively male malady that is at once its own condition as well as the potential root of a host of other illnesses. Indeed, spermatorrhea was a medical wastebasket into which doctors and moralists dumped all the conditions that bourgeois masculinity abjured: lassitude, insanity, impotence, sterility, genital atrophy, loss of muscle tone, and seminal incontinence. I shall return to the subject of spermatorrhea later.

In what is certainly the most influential treatise on the subject of masturbation, Tissot's *L'Onanisme* (1785), the author argues that heterosexual intercourse, in moderation, was put in place by nature as a means of perpetuating the species. Masturbation, by contrast, serves no such purpose and is therefore an unnatural act. What is more, masturbation produces a surplus of physical ills and social evils. Tissot's explanation would be cited time and again by medical practitioners throughout the nineteenth century (Perdiguero Gil and González de Pablo, 1990). Peratoner, for instance, contrasts "el coito en condiciones normales" with sex "en condiciones anormales," warning that too-frequent sexual activity or masturbation can leave abusers in an unnatural state so severe that "ni forma humana conservan" (1892: 42-43). Even the less hyperbolic Monlau argues that the best way, perhaps the only way, to avoid "quebranto en la salud" is to stay within the bounds of what is "lo natural y ordinario," by which he refers to infrequent, monogamous, heterosexual intercourse (1853: 126-127). By setting natural (i.e. heterosexual) desire against other forms of sexuality Monlau invokes a popular motif in the gender discourse of the period, which states that the differences between men and women—from the beards on men's faces to women's supposedly innate interest in religion—are rooted in biology.

Monlau and his contemporaries view sex as a natural bodily function, like thirst, hunger, or fatigue, and argue that one should only have sex when the body requires it, just as one should avoid overeating or oversleeping:

Así como nunca se debe comer sino cuando hay apetito, ni beber sin sed, ni dormir sino cuando sentimos sueño, así tampoco nunca debe el esposo entregarse a los placeres de la copulación, sino cuando natural y buenamente se sienta estimulado a ello. Así como el hambre es el gran

condimento de los manjares, una razonable continencia es también el condimento del placer genésico. (1853: 125-26)

By equating sex with other instinctual bodily functions Monlau ostensibly removes non-biological arguments (social norms, religious prohibitions, etc.) from the conversation. In other words, one should avoid sexual deviance not because religious leaders have warned against such behavior, but because nature demands it.

While this rationale seemingly ignores culturally-based arguments in favor of biological ones in the regulation of sexual behavior, social propriety, civic concern, and Catholic morality are always lurking below the surface. Religious discourse often penetrates the hygienists' antimasturbation campaign. Peratoner cites the biblical account of Onan in his discussion of masturbation and argues that a fear of fatherhood is the primary motive for adult masturbation, which he blasts as a "iblasfemia horrible!" (1892: 42). Although he highlights the health risks that accompany the "vicio solitario" Peratoner's discussion of masturbation takes on a decidedly judgmental tone that is lacking in his comments on excessive heterosexual intercourse: "Sea cual fuere la *meta* de las tales maniobras, no vacilamos un momento en calificarlas de culpables en sumo grado y en estigmatizarlas con vergonzoso anatema" (1892: 42). Peratoner does not bother to use biology as his authoritative soapbox, but instead invokes religious sentiment fused with notions of social propriety, resulting in a broad governmentality, in foucauldian terms, in which sexuality is regulated and masturbation is attacked on multiple levels from various discursive fields.

Even the more scientific-minded Monlau employs religious exhortations in his writing. Monlau cites the work of other medical experts extensively but he also borrows from Catholic authorities. In the opening paragraph of *La higiene del matrimonio* he argues that marriage is more than a civil contract, it is a biological instinct, yet rather than referencing a fellow doctor or scientist he cites Santa Teresa to make his point: "cuando santa Teresa dijo que *el infierno es un lugar donde no se ama*, proclamó una verdad fisiólogo-psicológica" (1853: 3). And in the same introduction he describes marriage as "el ejercicio natural y legítimo de la afeccionividad y del instinto genésico," but then immediately states that "el matrimonio es un sacramento" (1853: 3). This intertwining of medical theory and religious sentiment presents readers with an example of what Foucault refers to as "scientia sexualis." The medicalization of pre-existing social norms resulted in a scientific discourse "subordinated in the main to the imperatives of a morality whose divisions it reiterated under the guise of [medicine]" (Foucault, 1978: 53). By cloaking social norms in the language of science the medical discourse "grounded them in 'truth'" (1978: 54). The "truths" in this case are heterosexuality and marriage, resulting in the pathologization of sexual experiences that fall outside of this norm. In this sense the medical discourse on sexuality was not far removed from the theories of physiognomy and degeneration, which used "science" to institutionalize and legitimize racism, misogyny, and other forms of prejudice.

While the religious rhetoric used by popular authors like Peratoner, the hygienists, schoolteachers, and church authorities would have resonated with many Spaniards, ultimately the most effective argument against masturbation, like the argument against too much sex, was centered on the theory of a spermatic economy. If

maintaining an adequate store of semen was the cornerstone of a man's health, spermatorrhea was arguably his worst enemy. As the names suggests, spermatorrhea was defined as the excessive and involuntary discharge of sperm, typically brought on by unnatural sexual activity, especially masturbation. The disease has been discredited today but was overwhelmingly accepted by the scientific community at the time. A query of the Hemeroteca Digital of the Biblioteca Nacional de España reveals no instances of "espermatorrea" in Spanish newspapers before 1847, but between 1847 and 1899 the term appears more than two thousand times, primarily in medical newspapers like the *Gaceta Médica* or in the advertisement sections of mainstream newspapers as described above.

This "spermatorrhea panic," as Elen Rosenman describes it, was "imagined into existence to embody historically specific anxieties" (2003: 366). These anxieties were closely tied to the concept of essential differences. The literature on the subject typifies the medico-moral thread running through the nineteenth-century gender discourse that based its dichotomous definitions of masculinity and femininity on the body. The telltale sign of spermatorrhea, seminal incontinence, is highly symbolic. Because it occurs involuntary it contradicts the hegemonic ideal of male restraint. It also recalls the uncontrollable loss of blood experienced by women during menstruation. This loss of physical control was seen as a corollary of the inability to reign in the passions and imagination, which was believed to be the root cause of masturbation. If hegemonic masculinity possesses an impenetrable body—one that is self contained, hermetically sealed, and subject to self-discipline—then spermatorrhea embodies everything that one fears in the female body. The spermatorrheic body leaks and oozes like the menstrual body, is a slave to its desires like a lustful woman,

and is languid and difficult to regulate like the hysteric. Despite the fact that spermatorrhea is a strictly male malady, the patient's body is presented as more female than male.

Physicians encouraged sufferers of spermatorrhea to leave the feminizing environment of the city for the rejuvenating countryside. There they would find ready cures like a healthy diet, invigorating exercise, and hydrotherapy (Eichhorst, 1882: 751). Meanwhile quacks promised urbanites cheap and easy cures such as tonics and pills for a small fee. More serious-minded physicians prescribed painful and invasive treatments, some of which were hardly better than the supposed symptoms. Skin irritants were applied to the genitals in order to produce blisters. Some doctors even recommended cauterization of the urethra as per the instructions of French physician Claude-Francois Lallemand, credited for introducing the concept of spermatorrhea in his three-volume *Des pertes séminales involontaires* (1836-42). Such severe steps confirm the following observation by Rosenman: "Spermatorrhea cures seem shockingly invasive, even punitive. It is as if, in violating the fantasy of continence, the body has forfeited any claim to intactness; its fate is to give up its boundaries altogether to the doctor" (2003: 376). These reactions certainly seem to suggest a degree of contempt toward those bodies that fell outside the norm of phallic masculinity. Spermatorrhea produced panic precisely because it represents man's greatest fear, that he could degenerate into a woman.

4.4. Celibacy and the duty to procreate

In the face of so many dangers one might assume that men would choose to avoid sexual activity altogether. After all, if sex and masturbation deplete the body of its vital fluid it stands to reason that celibacy would build up a spermatic store that could lead to increased energy and health. Indeed, hygienists argue that periodic abstinence does offer some benefits. Monlau states that unspent semen can be reabsorbed by the body and mixed with the blood. This concoction "se transforma en bálsamo de la vida, o, mejor dicho, en uno de sus más suaves y poderosos estimulantes" (133). However, prolonged abstinence presented more disadvantages than benefits. In a period when masculinity was tied to both physical health and economic success, celibacy posed a threat on both fronts.

Despite the apparent advantage of avoiding sex, and thereby increasing semen levels, some argued that true celibacy exacted a high price for both the individual and society by perverting the natural order of things. Hygienists agreed that the continuous circulations of fluids within a city, such as sewage and water, had a direct bearing on the collective health of the community because noxious miasmas and putrefaction could be avoided. Doctors applied this same principle to the human body, insisting that the unimpeded flow of blood was healthy while blockages only led to trouble. They promoted certain foods, the use of emetics, and subjected patients to leeches and bloodletting, all in the name of healthy circulation. According to some medical experts the same held true for seminal fluid. Abstinence might lead to "spermatic fevers" while regular intercourse effectively cured a number of ailments (Comfort, 1967: 24). Some took this reasoning further, suggesting that any impediment to the healthy flow of seminal fluid could lead to an excess of male desire

that would place women in danger. Society was in need of an outlet, a way of draining away this surplus sexual energy, and prostitution was considered the most viable solution if properly regulated (Rivière Gómez, 1994)¹.

Another argument against celibacy was that it disturbed the mind-body equilibrium, thereby weakening the body and diminishing an individual's virility. Citing the link between sexual and mental activity, Peratoner warns that ignoring carnal instincts in favor of intellectual endeavors jeopardizes one's sexual health:

Los órganos genitales, condenados durante larga fecha a un completo reposo, pierden su aptitud funcional: así acontece a los sabios y a los hombres constantemente dedicados a serios trabajos intelectuales; toda su energía vital se concentra en su cerebro; olvídense de que son hombres, y dejan caer su virilidad en una atrofia completa (1892: 18-19).

While any damage to a man's wellbeing would have the unwanted side effect of weakening his manliness, this would be especially true of the penis, which throughout history has been synecdochically linked with masculinity. Peratoner's description of the celibates' atrophied genitalia, causing them to "olvidarse de que son hombres," suggests that regular sexual activity is more than just pleasurable, it is a necessary ingredient in the recipe for masculinity.

While Monlau's position on the subject of celibacy is informed mainly by social concerns, he also references the ever-present theme of "lo natural" in making his case

¹ The debate on whether to regulate or abolish prostitution was a key talking point for both hygienists and politicians. Those in favor of prostitution believed that it was a necessary evil that could prevent rape and pregnancy out of wedlock. Regulation, they argued, would also control the spread of venereal diseases (Castejón-Bolea, 2001: 62-65).

against complete abstinence. Monlau's chief argument against celibacy is that marriage and family allow man to achieve his full potential as a man and as a human being. A family lightens the burden of professional life and fills a man's free hours with joy, he says, but more importantly "la familia perfecciona y acabala la existencia del individuo" (1853: 6). As Mark Harpring explains in his examination of Ciro Bayo's *Higiene sexual del soltero* (1902), an unmarried man resides at the margins of society because he is unnatural, an "individuo incompleto en oposición a la imagen de plenitud-totalidad que el ideal masculino encarna" (Harpring, 2008: 167). For Bayo and the other hygienists "[el soltero] nunca llega a constituir la dualidad que hemos denominado *ser humano*, ni la triplicidad social que se dice familia" (Bayo, 1902: 11). At the core of this statement is the essential differences model in which man and woman form a symbiotic pair, what Monlau describes as an "armonía de oposición" (1853: 110). Just as man and woman are imperfect on their own, so too is the married couple incomplete without the addition of progeny. Nature demands procreation, and the man who ignores the call of nature cannot hope to achieve the status of man but will instead find himself caught in a web of perpetual boyhood.

The celibacy-vs-nature argument was commonplace in the gender discourse by the time Bayo published his *Higiene sexual del soltero* at the turn of the century. In a much earlier hygiene text, A. Devay's *Higiene y filosofía del matrimonio*, translated into Spanish and published in Barcelona in 1851, the author begins his discussion of celibacy by stating: "Las leyes de la naturaleza son inmutables, eternas" (1851: 123). In the following lines he continues with the familiar argument that nature demands procreation: "el hombre es una necesidad del globo, del mismo modo que sus funciones generatrices son una necesidad de la organización viva; querer sustraerse a

ellas es intentar lo imposible" (1851: 123). Furthering his thesis that celibacy undermines nature Devay eventually arrives at the following conclusion: "El celibato es pues un estado contra la naturaleza, una mentira" (1851: 124). In *Higiene y filosofía del matrimonio* Devay opts for a broad definition of celibacy. In addition to those who abstain from sex, the term celibacy also applies to those who choose not to marry or have children, regardless of whether or not they are sexually active (1851: 124). The adjectives he uses to describe the celibate—"degradado," "infame," "despreciable"—recall Peratoner's attitude toward the masturbator. According to Devay, those who are wise enough to understand that "la perfección humana necesitaba la reunión de los dos sexos por medio del amor, es decir, el matrimonio... miran al celibato con horror" (1851: 128).

For Devay celibacy is a sign of degeneracy and is primarily an urban problem, not unlike masturbation and sexual excess. He notes that in rural settings a man can breathe clean air, eat healthy meals, and get strong by working the land. Most importantly, inside his humble abode live his wife and children. The city dweller, by contrast:

*no respira sino aire viciado; su alimento insuficiente es las más veces de mala calidad; sus costumbres relajadas, su conducta irregular, las vigili-
as, fátigas y abusos de toda clase le hacen contraer un sin número de
enfermedades que le deterioran y bastardean. (1851: 128)*

In the city, he concludes, "una gran parte de sus hombres se halla enervada por la molicie" (1851: 128). This contrast between *campo* and city, between natural and artificial, between healthy and sickly, between productive and unproductive, between

masculine and effeminate, personifies the differences between the married man and the celibate man. If the celibate stands in opposition to nature, the married man embodies it. The city is a space that suits the celibate because it is corrupt and unnatural. Masculinity, by contrast, flourishes in a rural setting.

While the biology argument was trump for the hygienists it was not the only reason for rejecting celibacy. In *Higiene del matrimonio* Monlau makes a case for marriage and family based on social obligation, arguing that “la unión conyugal importa en gran manera a la duración y en la felicidad material y política de las sociedades humanas, así como el celibato contribuye en mucho a la decadencia y ruina de los imperios” (1853: 54). For this reason he describes voluntary celibacy as a “plaga social” (1853: 51)². Here we see the middle-class fingerprint on male sexuality. Social responsibility and productive spending are hallmarks of bourgeois ideology. Like masturbation, celibacy did not lead to pregnancy and was therefore unproductive and egocentric.

Here again the threads of sexuality, gender, and middle-class ideology form an interlocking lattice. Scholars have signalled the gender bias of middle-class economic theories, noting that the squandering of wealth on luxury was seen as a feminine vice, whereas avarice was resoundingly condemned amongst men because it stifled the healthy flow of currency in the marketplace (Aldaraca, 1991: 88-117). Male celibacy personifies this theory inasmuch as seminal avarice mirrors economic cupidity. In some cases the two are interconnected: “La cínica e infame soltería... de los avaros, o de los que rehuyen el matrimonio por no descender de su lujo y no abjurar lo que

² Monlau draws a distinction between “celibato voluntario” and “celibato necesario u obligatorio” (of priests and soldiers), which he sees as contributing to the overall wellbeing of society (1853: 43).

ellos tienen por independencia y comodidades, puede considerarse como una enfermedad social" (1853: 52). If greed is unbecoming of a man, then Monlau's criticism of the celibate is a dual attack on his masculinity and social commitment. An avaricious celibate could scarcely be further from the ideal of hegemonic masculinity.

At the heart of nineteenth-century bourgeois masculinity, both in Spain and abroad, is "a definition of manhood that derives its identity from participation in the marketplace" (Kimmel, 2001: 83). Just as the gender identity and social status of the middle-class gentleman is rooted in success in the marketplace and the accumulation of wealth, what Kimmel has dubbed "Marketplace Manhood," so too was his masculinity closely tied to spermatic wealth. Copulation may deplete stores of valuable semen, but ultimately it is circulatory rather than a unidirectional current if it results in offspring. The loss of semen through reproduction represents a wise investment when spent on future generations because middle-class masculinity in nineteenth-century Spain cannot be achieved without becoming both a husband and father.

5. Conclusions

The heteronormative gender discourse of the nineteenth century taught men the virtues of sex within marriage, but tempered those teachings with warnings about the dangers of seminal profligacy. Ciro Bayo describes the dual nature of male sexuality with the following analogy: "Los hombres no son ángeles... son mitad ángel, mitad bestia" (1902: 38). This balancing act meant that nineteenth century masculinity was built upon a contradiction—heterosexual conquest was a necessity to be considered masculine, but so too was asceticism. On the one hand sexual recreation was tolerated and even encouraged. Monlau indicates the acceptance of male promiscuity with the following observation:

La virginidad del varón no ha dado margen a tantas cavilosasidades como la de la mujer. Las causas de esa particularidad podrán ser varias, pero entiendo que la principal se deduce del siguiente sentencioso concepto de un moralista anónimo: El hombre quisiera ser siempre el primer amor de su mujer, y la mujer se contentaría con ser el último amor de su marido (1853: 119).

This attitude is reflected in the institutionalized tolerance of prostitution, which was viewed as a necessary evil that syphoned away excess male desire. On the other hand medical experts recommended extreme moderation or even long periods of abstinence in order to avoid the life-threatening risks of sexual activity. The consequences for failing to get the balance between indulgence and continence just right were severe. Illness and death were possibilities, but so too were loss of manhood and social marginalization.

Although not articulated as such, this Goldilocks model of masculinity was shaped by class difference. In so many ways being a middle class man meant attempting to find the middle ground between the upper and lower classes. The former was viewed as effete, unproductive, and lazy. The latter was seen as promiscuous, savage, and bestial. The middle class gentleman occupied a safe point in between these two problematic extremes and the gender discourse turned this hybrid model into the new norm.

The ideal of severe self-discipline that characterizes the discourse on male sexuality applied outside of the bedroom as well. In their appearance men were advised to adopt a style that was neither too elegant nor too disheveled (McKinney, 2012). The same could be said of attitudes toward violence. Conduct manuals like Mariano Rementería y Fica's *El hombre fino* taught men to shun violence in favor of refinement, but popular culture mocked those who came off as overly refined and instead celebrated symbolic violence and stylized roughness. The growing popularity of sport and leisure—particularly activities like fencing, hunting, and bullfighting—codified violence in a way that made it safe and respectable. A man had to be rough, but not too rough. He had to be civilized, but not too civilized. Move too far toward either extreme and one not only ran the risk of social embarrassment, he risked emasculation.

The hegemonic model of masculinity described in the medical literature and espoused by the middle class belies a fragility that traditional masculinity rejects. From the Middle Ages onward literary works, statuary, and paintings depict Spanish masculinity as rugged, unflappable, and fearful of nothing. Although this model faded during the eighteenth century it returned in the nineteenth via new fashions, sports,

and a discourse that celebrated bellicose heroism and bravado. But as this essay has revealed, the pattern of masculinity found in the nineteenth century can be vulnerable, tenuous, and even fearful when it comes to sex; a far cry from the *caballeros* and *donjuanes* idealized in Spain's social imaginary. By highlighting the discordant elements of Spanish masculinity, the study of male sexuality further demonstrates the fluid and often arbitrary nature of gender identity, reminding us that masculinity and femininity are plural, socially constructed, culturally specific identities rather than universal, natural, and fixed realities.

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