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Intro to WMST
Museum Exhibit Project

Where is the clitoris? Does the elusive Gräfenberg spot, aka the g-spot, exist? Is it okay for a woman to desire sex as much as, if not more than, a man does? Is sexuality fluid or fixed? Should western women be concerned with female genital mutilation and cutting, clitoridectomies, and the trafficking of women? These are all important questions that individuals concerned with women's sexuality and pleasure should be asking in today's global society. An important landmark in women's rights as well as equality rights that have extended and expanded over the years, the Seneca Falls Women's Rights National Park lacks an important exhibit that answers the aforementioned questions about women, women's bodies, and sexuality and pleasure. Set to open in the fall of 2014, the creative new exhibit entitled *Encountering the Clitoris: Women's "Pleasure" Through The Ages*, aims to bring the viewer on a journey that exposes her to all things related to pleasure and women. It will provide a satirical yet factual timeline that spans women's hysteria and how therapists and doctors thought women needed to be cured all the way to the creation of The Condomerie, Amsterdam's ode to all things related to safe sex, and even more. *Encountering the Clitoris* highlights big and small pleasurable triumphs throughout women's history. The detailed description below includes a handful of selections from the new exhibit; selections include: Motivation for Analyzing Pleasure, An Introduction to Desire, Matteo Realdo Colombo's Important "Discovery," Venus the Hottentot, Freud and Femininity, Hysteria and the World's First Vibrator, and "The Clitoral Complex." On behalf of the entire committee of curators at the Women's Rights National Park, we hope

that you enjoy *Encountering the Clitoris: Women's "Pleasure" Through The Ages* and, with our help, learn to fully appreciate the female genitalia.

Motivation for Analyzing Pleasure

An essential in a woman- and body-friendly museum and also our lives today, the clitoris and pleasure timeline answers the important question: where is the clitoris? A friend of mine asked me this question a few months ago and it has remained with me ever since. What if she couldn't find it when she looked, she wondered. Was it there? What if her hook-up couldn't find it, either? Could I point to it through my jeans so she knew where to look for her own clitoris? Could I tell her what to do with it once she found it? And, most importantly, could I do all of this while she covered her face with a pillow so I focused on something other than her embarrassment?

I understood my friend's curiosity. Growing up, my mother gave my sister and I a very vague sex talk that depicted my mother's important message that "Boys are bad. In college they will try to have sex with you. Don't do it!" did my mother's message to me and my sister stem from her own upbringing in a conservative, catholic household? Was my mother equally as unaware as my friend was about the clitoris and women's pleasure? My mother's message ignored the fact that sex could be something full of pleasure, excitement, and completely honest trust in myself and another individual. I did my own research to learn these things, and I want to share that research with my friend and the community at large. The timeline is for a friend, a sister, a mother, or even a brother who needs a little help learning about the clitoris.

An Introduction to Desire

The clitoris has locational importance inside the body, outside the body, in our history, in our science textbooks, and as the heart of our nerve-filled pleasure center. It has existed since the dawn of time and always longed for the attention it deserves. Throughout history, women and their bodies have gone unseen and their voices unheard, and it is high time to recognize that women's pleasure is strong and wild.

Many women are first introduced to modern sexuality through a typical "sex talk" delivered by a parent, guardian, or older sibling, or through their first sexual encounter—whether they are ready and sex-conscious or quite the contrary. Heather Corinna documents these phenomena in her short work entitled: "An Immodest Proposal." Corinna's piece begins with a quant story of a girl and a boy, both teenagers, young and in love. We hear about how they are waiting for the right moment to have sex, waiting so that it is special and meaningful. The story is ideal—something of a heterosexual, first-time fantasy. The girl is nervous and unsure, but when her boyfriend's parents leave town the two teens opt to spend the night in the empty house and have sex for the first time together. She loses her virginity the way the authors say everyone wishes their first time to be—she is young, in love, and hardly feels much pain. (Corinna)

The authors go on to shed light on the one major facet that is missing from the story. We are privy to the young man's desire; the boy wants sex and is just a regular guy with hormones, but the girl is nervous and wants to wait. While there is in fact consent and understood communication, the girl never once expresses the fact that she has a sense of desire nor does she feel any explicit pleasure from her first time. (Corinna) Sex should be about consent, pleasure, and so much hungry desire! The authors tell us that while sex

is often devoid of women's agency, it really need not be. And, there is no better way to learn about women and women's sexuality than through an encounter with the clitoris. It is with this that I give you, the viewer, *Encountering the Clitoris: Women's "Pleasure" Through The Ages*. It is my hope that through an analysis of the clitoris and pleasure timeline, you will further understand that the clitoris should never be forgotten.

1559: Matteo Realdo Colombo takes credit for discovering the clitoris

The clitoris has existed in female bodies since the dawn of time—where there are labia, there is most often a clitoris! Science hasn't always agreed, though, and many scientific representations of female genitalia have ignored the existence of the biggest pleasure point in a woman's nether-region.

There are many different accounts of who first found the clitoris in the medical and scientific world. There are accounts of Greek-born physician Galen referring to the clitoris—albeit not by name—in his book entitled, *On the Usefulness of the Parts*. Galen understood the clitoris “as an organ which gave protection to the vagina, and compared this with the protection that the uvula—the small, fleshy, finger-like flap of tissue which hangs down the back of the soft palate—gives to the throat.” (Blackledge, 126-127) Needless to say, the clitoris was quite misunderstood.

As the years went on, the clitoris began to receive the credit it deserved. Arabic physician Avicenna referred to the clitoris in his work sometime during his life—between the years 980-1037—and Greek physician Rufus wrote about the external genitalia in the first century. Rufus wrote: “The little piece of muscular flesh in [the middle of the external genital parts], called the nymphae, also the fruit of the myrtle, is the skin that is

also named the clitoris, and one says clitorising to express the lascivious touching of this part.” (Blackledge, 127) Others referred to the clitoris in essays, books, and medical journals. According to science, however, Matteo Realdo Colombo a “lecturer in surgery at the University of Padua, Italy,” discovered the clitoris in 1559. (“Clitoris”)

Although there are in fact accounts of male physicians describing the clitoris before he came on the scene, Colombo claimed that he was the first to truly “discover” the clitoris. Colombo referred to the clitoris in his writings as the “seat of a woman’s delight.” (Munier, 72) Gabrielle Fallopius argued against Colombo’s claims saying that it was he, not Colombo who found the clitoris. And, while all of these men were arguing about who discovered it, women all over the world had already found the clitoris for themselves and discovered how truly magical it could be!

1810: Saartjie Baartman aka Venus the “Hottentot,” Comes to London

The exploitation of women’s bodies spans the history of time and was around even before television and the media. With the exploitation of women and women’s bodies comes the exchange and gifting of women based on their sex and their bodies. This exposes women and devalues them, claiming that their worth is nothing more than what is between their legs. (Rubin) Saartjie Baartman, also known as the hottentot Venus, was gifted—in Rubin’s sense of the word—to the world due to her strange shape and the control of the men around her. (Elkins) (Parks)

In her play entitled Venus, Suzan-Lori Parks investigates the true story of a woman who was seemingly gifted to the world as a peculiar body and an object of science. A woman of strange stature and unique build, Venus was brought from South

Africa to Europe to become a “hottentot”—on display for all the world to see as part of a freak show of bodies. Venus suffered exploitation, humiliation, body objectification and commodification at the hands of the doctor who took her from her already detrimental life as a slave and put her on exhibition. (Parks) As a hottentot, Venus was valued for her body and appearance, not for her mind. She was objectified based on her sex in conjunction with her body, had no agency over herself or her sexuality. Today, some describe Venus as “a symbol of the alienation and degradations of colonization, lost children, exile, the expropriation of female labor and the sexual and economic exploitation of black women by men, white and black.” (Elkins) Depictions of Venus the hottentot narrate a patriarchal depiction of the female body that follows a trend—women’s bodies devoid of pleasure and agency. Stories of pleasure can exist without stories of women’s pleasure stolen from their own bodies only to be used for the scopophilia of others.

Early 1900s: Freud and Femininity

Sigmund Freud is a world-renowned psychologist famous for his wild theories on psychoanalysis. Freud’s work focused on stages of children’s psychosocial development and many associations with sexuality and aggression. While most of Freud’s theories revolved around boys and men, he did have few theories about girls, women, and femininity.

According to Freud, a woman’s psychosocial development is based around her lack of a penis. He says the three outcomes of female psychological development are sexual inhibition, masculinity complex, and “normal” femininity. Each of these three

outcomes are a result of a woman buying into castration complex—a result of sexual difference in which the female feels as though her lack of a penis has left her as a lesser sexual being. The first outcome, sexual inhibition, is classified by passivity repression, frigidity, subservience, and shame. The second outcome is masculinity complex. With this, the girl denies her castration complex and overcompensates by taking on masculine traits and tendencies in order to acquire power and control in her own life. The last of the three, “normal” femininity follows along the same lines as the first stage, but is more active. Normal femininity is characterized by reproduction and a sense of maternalism as the mother will have a baby to take the place of the penis that she is lacking. The mother then hopes that the baby will have a penis and the mother can live vicariously through the child. (Freud) In addition to Freud’s theories on femininity, he also had very strong theories and opinions on what came to be known as women’s hysteria.

Early 1900s: Hysteria and The Invention of the World’s First Vibrator

Women’s hysteria is so important to history of women’s pleasure and how we classify women’s needs and turn them into medical bodies—even when “treatment” means providing sexual pleasure. Michael Castleman’s ““Hysteria” and the Strange History of Vibrators: The Invention of the Vibrator Had Nothing to Do with Women’s Pleasure” begins with an important statistic about vibrators and women. He states: “An estimated one-third of adult American women now own at least one,” a staggering statistic that lends itself to the fact that vibrators are now commonplace—not medical. (Castleman) (Maines) Vibrators were invented as treatment devices for women’s hysteria: “a vaguely defined ailment easily recognizable today as sexual frustration,” classified as a medical ailment by Freud and other similar theorists. (Castleman) Women

were treated for their “hysteria” as if it were a medical or scientific problem, not just a lack of sexual pleasure. Hysterical women were treated by doctors in order to cure their hysteria and eventually, vibrators were created to allow doctors to rest their hands during “treatment” sessions and “hysterical women represented a large and lucrative market for physicians.” (Maines)

Physicians “believed that women were simply fleshy receptacles for male lust and that intercourse culminating in male ejaculation fulfilled women's erotic needs.”

(Castleman) Simply put, women did not possess sexual desire based on their own needs or individualized bodies. Doctors prescribed various things to cure hysteria such as “horseback riding, which, for some, provided enough clitoral stimulation to trigger orgasm.” Whether induced by a doctor or midwives’ massaging hands, a vibrator or “personal massager,” or even a horse, orgasms were termed paroxysms because “everyone knew that women were incapable of sexual feelings, so they could not possibly experience orgasm.” (castleman) Another therapy used to treat hysterical women, known as a clitoridectomy, was performed to prevent women from pleasuring themselves, quite contradictory to the pleasurable cures involving vibrators, as described above. (Maines)

2009: Pierre Foldes and Odile Buisson perform a ground-breaking G-spot study

“The Clitoral Complex: A Dynamic Sonographic Study” looks at women’s bodies in a research-oriented light in order to provide theories about orgasm. In this study, the authors ask the following research question: what does the clitoris (raphe, glans, and clitoral bodies) look like and how does it move during moments of pleasure and if there is a G-spot, how does it react in the same scenarios? The researchers used sonography to

detect their results while their experiment was performed on five healthy women. In performing their study, the researchers wanted to learn about both the clitoris and the controversial existence of the G-spot. They analyze the effects that occur within the body (including as it pertains to the hidden parts of the clitoris) during vaginal penetration and also during of the perineal contractions. (Foldes and Buisson)

The results of this study proved that: “The coronal planes during perineal contraction and finger penetration demonstrated a close relationship between the root of the clitoris and the anterior vaginal wall.” (Foldes and Buisson) In simpler terms, this means that “the special sensitivity of the lower anterior vaginal wall could be explained by pressure and movement of clitoris’ root during a vaginal penetration and subsequent perineal contraction. The G-spot could be explained by the richly innervated clitoris.” (Foldes and Buisson)

And so, according to this study, the existence of the G-spot is still up for debate. Maybe you have to feel it to believe it for yourself, or feel the pleasurable effects from it, that is. Studies such as this one are so interesting and they show that not only does women’s pleasure have a place in our daily lives, but also in the world of science due to its fascinating—and consistently inexplicable—nature.

In summation...

This timeline will is not exhaustive; as scientists, physicians, and women have all learned, the clitoris is bigger than once thought and the pleasure brought forth by it can be ongoing. In fact, the time line could potentially be thought of as a “time-circle” with no real start and no conclusive end. Other important, monumental findings and moments

in time in the world of the clitoris and women's pleasure that will be included in the full timeline to be unveiled in the upcoming months are: female genital mutilation and cutting, rape as a war tactic, the writing of Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*, Sarah Ruhl and *The Vibrator Play*, Alfred Kinsey and the sexual revolution, the 1987 grand opening of *The Condomerie* in Amsterdam, trans women and television, the modern vibrator, Slutwalk, the War on Women, access to safe and legal abortion and access to birth control. Each facet of the exhibit acknowledges the fact that throughout history, men have dictated our bodies and ourselves and it is time for us as women to pull back the clitoral hood and see what our bodies are all about. Things have changed over time and are continuing to change. The remaining pieces of *Encountering the Clitoris: Women's "Pleasure" Through The Ages* prove that progress is being made towards shattering the patriarchal lens through which women's bodies are viewed and with knowledge and passionate advocacy, we can only do better. Abigail Adams once said, "Remember the ladies." Well, to this we add, "Remember to remember the clitoris!"

Thank you for taking the time to view our exhibit and we hope that you have a pleasurable day.

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