

Selling Sanity

Gender and Health Rhetoric in Late-Nineteenth-Century Spanish Cultural Press Advertisements

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Abstract:

The paper examines engendered advertising mostly targeted at women's mental health in a collection of Spanish cultural magazines mainly from the late nineteenth century. During a period dominated by degeneration theories, which were adapted to national discourses about decline, the study focuses on the interaction between medical treatises and the content and strategies of medical-pharmaceutical advertising primarily aimed at women. First, the paper reviews the emergence of "master drugs" and reproductive manuals, reflecting on their links to popular beliefs about the organic and contagious nature of illnesses, as well as showing how the advertising of reproductive manuals created spaces for desire, using a language that blended mechanical-reproductive jargon with literary notes. It also analyzes medications marketed for regulating women's bodies and minds, considering their relationship with visual culture and highlighting how they revealed biases related to race, social class, and age. Finally, it addresses alcohol advertising, that contradicted medical advice, arguing that its gendered character combined with attributed magical-healing properties rhetoric, may have also played a role in shaping female desire.

Keywords: *Mental Health Advertising; Degeneration Theories; Medical-pharmaceutical Marketing; Gender and Economies of Desire; Nineteenth-Century Spain*

In his *Prozac on the Couch: Prescribing Gender in the Era of Wonder Drugs* (2003), Jonathan Metzl shows how the philosophy of "pills for everyday worries"—shaped by a clear bias rooted in Freudian gender categories as well as popular culture's gender roles—has mediated the relationships between doctors, patients, and the pharmaceutical industry from the 1950s in the United States. Through a joint reading of specialized psychiatric journals alongside advertisements in the mass media, Metzl explores the often uneasy—and at times surprisingly harmonious—marriage between popular gender representations and science when it comes to female psychology.

In the Spanish context, and tracing even further back in time, the medicalization of women's mental health had already become a recurring theme in late nineteenth-century pharmaceutical advertising. These ads offered a variety of treatments and remedies targeting what the Spanish physician Victoriano Garrido y Escuin then classified as "moral madness" and "impulsive or instinctive madness" (1888, p.164). If the doctors in the early plays of Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno express skepticism toward the promises of mental health diagnosis and its recovery for either sex—"There is no salvation" (1958, p. 311), declares Dr. Eusebio in *La Esfinge* regarding Ángel's neurasthenia; "The soul does not belong to my profession, [...] I do not believe in it nor its illnesses (1958, p. 460)," states Dr. Marcelo in response to Fedra's hysteria in the homonym work—contemporary psychopharmaceutical advertisements, by contrast, projected insistent promises of cure and organic *restoration* [*restauración*], inspired by widely circulated medical discourses (Urla and Terry, 1995, p.15), as well as the legitimizing authority of the

physician (Sosa-Velazco, 2010, p.3).

This paper examines advertising published in a collection of issues of Spanish cultural magazines at the end of the nineteenth century —*La vida literaria* (1899), *La vida galante* (1898-1905), *Vida nueva* (1898-1900), and *Hispania* (1899-1903)—in dialogue with prevailing medical theories on women's mental health. It addresses the research question of how identifications are constructed between the category of "woman" and advertising that promotes mental and bodily imbalance in the Spanish *fin-de-siècle* context. Drawing on Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, gender is understood here not as a biological identity but as a cultural construct produced through repetition and contingency within a dominant patriarchal and heterosexual system (Butler, 2002, pp. 175-176). This means that "femininity" is theatricalized through visual and discursive practices grounded in the sexual division of gender relations (Connell, 2005) and articulated by what Laura Mulvey has called "structured ways of seeing and pleasure in looking" (1999, p. 805). Posing woman as image and man as the bearer of the gaze, where active/male and passive/female organize a view in which the first one projects its fantasy onto the female figure, she is then consequently "styled" accordingly (1999, pp. 808-809). As the paper will explore, this representational logic intersects with health advertising strategies intertwined with "disease mongering" (Payer, 1992), whereby female subjectivity is framed as inherently unstable and in need of male-medical management. In this vein, the paper also invites reflections on medical imaginaries and audience within the dynamics between the *observed/medicalized subject* and the *observing/buying subject* in the late-nineteenth-century context in which the marketplace shifted from the mere "fulfillment

of needs” to a new model of consumption aimed at the limitless satisfaction of human desires (Ford, Keates, and Pulham, 2016, p. I-II).

“Situating” within the specific Spanish framework of the final two years of the nineteenth century and the first two of the twentieth, this chronological focus is motivated, first, by the significance of 1898—defined by the loss of Spain’s last colonies and the accompanying discourses of national decline—which offers a vantage point from which to examine the entanglement of medical gender narratives with discourses of national decay. Additionally, although theories of degeneration had nationally circulated since the second half of the nineteenth century, it has been argued that their diffusion to broader, non-specialist audiences occurred only in the late 1890s (Maristany, 1983; Vázquez, 2017), marking the moment when medical imaginaries became widespread in the press.

The analyzed advertisements appeared mainly in the last pages of the selected magazines comprising issues available in digital format from the National Library of Spain and the Prado Museum Library,¹² which, unlike specialized medical journals or purely entertaining magazines, were among the most culturally significant during the period.³⁴ This selection allows not only an assessment of the interference of what Lou Charnon-Deutsch terms “fictions of the feminine” in dialogue with health rhetoric in the cultural field, but also a transversal reading that could be encourage future comparisons between high and mass culture, and sheds new light on scholarly research into gendered health advertising, which has been largely focused on the popular or specialized press.⁵ Furthermore, their divergent editorial orientations and targeted audiences enrich the analysis, also encouraging upcoming inquiries. While *La vida literaria* adopted a distinctly aestheticist stance, distancing itself from politics and aligning with emerging *modernismo* and the ideal of *l’art*

pour l’art, *La vida galante* functioned as an illustrated magazine characterized by humor, deliberate exoticism, and erotic tones that challenged conservative bourgeois values while maintaining literary columns. *Vida nueva* combined literary production with political and social commentary, advocating an “independent” socialism that extended to both ideological plurality and aesthetics. Finally, *Hispania*, although presented as a literary magazine, exemplifies the close interdependence between the art market and the press in its promotion of Catalan modernist painting, since its owner, Hermenegildo Miralles, also ran a prominent lithography workshop in Barcelona. Moreover, with the exception of *Vida nueva*, these magazines brought together abundant visual material—illustrations, paintings, and photographs—thereby allowing comparisons with graphic advertising. When possible, the paper explores convergences and divergences between advertisements and the medical treatises that circulated at the *fin de siècle* Spain and devoted specific sections to the female psyche and body, such as works by José María Esquerdo, José María Escuder, Victoriano Garrido y Escuin, Joan Giné y Partagás, José Mestra and José Ingenieros, together with well-known references by degeneration representatives such as Bénédict Morel, Cesare Lombroso, and Max Nordau.⁶ Additionally, artistic paintings, posters, and illustrations by artists such as Ramón Casas, Francesc Masriera and Carlos Vázquez will be brought together when appropriate to discuss what it was a fertile period of medical but also artistic discourse marked by insistent biopolitical control over women’s minds and bodies within a shifting arena of sexual identity and subjectivity. The paper is organized as follows: the first section reviews contemporary medical theories on “innate” female imbalance, emphasizing the Spanish *fin de siècle* context, where degeneration theories intertwined with ideas of national decadence and home-grown atavistic backwardness. After briefly outlining pharmaceutical advertising guidelines—which became the main sponsor of the Spanish periodical press in the late nineteenth century—the third section analyzes two heavily promoted health products: the “master” drugs and the

1 In total, 141 issues were reviewed: the first 10 issues of *Vida Nueva* (06.1898–08.1898) and of *La vida galante* (11.1898–01.1899), 28 of the 29 issues of *La vida literaria* (01–07.1899), and the 93 issues of *Hispania* (01.1899–12.1902). Occasionally, issues from journals such as *La publicidad* or the specialized *Boletín del Colegio Oficial de Médicos de la Provincia de Barcelona* are also included for comparison.

2 The exception is *Vida Nueva*, in which advertisements appeared at the end of the second page.

3 Although there are occasional references to sending copies abroad, circulation was essentially national, with distribution of the four magazines possible throughout Spain.

4 They featured contributions from some of the most Spanish renowned writers of the nineteenth century (Pérez Galdós and Leopoldo Alas “Clarín”) as well as leading figures of the Modernist cultural renewal of the early twentieth century (Miguel de Unamuno, Pío Baroja, Ramiro de Maeztu, and Ramón del Valle-Inclán).

5 Although there has been growing interest in medical and pharmaceutical advertising in the nineteenth-century Spanish press (Poyatos, 2011; Luján, 2016; Montero, 2019; Platero, 2020; Robles Ávila, 2024), these studies have generally emphasized two aspects: first, the local context as a unifying factor (for example, the press circulating in cities such as Málaga, Valencia, or Bilbao); and second, the semiotic and linguistic discourse, often comparing of these with other contemporary medical periodicals. At the same time, with the exception of Poyatos (2011), they focus on popular newspapers or weeklies, overlooking the still rich and underexplored circuit of cultural magazines, which, as will be shown, also contain abundant medical advertising.

6 With the exception of the Argentine José Ingenieros (1877–1925)—philosopher, sociologist, and psychiatrist, holder of the chair of experimental psychology at the University of Buenos Aires and later director of the Observation Service for the Insane of the Argentine police, whose *Histeria y sugestión* was printed in Valencia in 1908 and distributed nationally—the remaining authors are Spanish and rank among the most influential medical figures of the *fin de siècle*: José María Esquerdo (1842–1912), author of *Locos que no lo parecen*, alienist and founder of a major mental asylum in Carabanchel (Madrid), followed the French tradition of Pinel and Esquirol in advocating a humanitarian approach to mental illness and introduced occupational therapy in Spain. His disciple, José María Escuder (1853–1921), an alienist and committed degeneration theorist, worked for six years at Carabanchel and his key works, *Quemas y crímenes* and *Locos y anómalos*, are also referenced here. Victoriano Garrido y Escuin, also an alienist at Carabanchel, distinguished himself through a criminal-anthropological approach to psychiatry and his most important work, *La cárcel o el manicomio*, also cited here, was prefaced by Esquerdo. Finally, Joan Giné y Partagás (1836–1903), founder of a psychiatric school and the *Instituto Médico* in Barcelona, promoted an organicist psychiatry informed by neurology and hypnotism and his writings, mostly compiled in the *Obras escogidas* referenced here, became foundational in the teaching of psychiatry to later generations in Catalonia.

“reproductive manuals”, focusing on their magical-miraculous and fictional undertones and the possibility of a mixed-gender audience. The fourth section centers on pharmaceutical products explicitly targeting female buyers and often resembling feminine representations in visual culture, that appealed to gender as a pharmaceutical niche, thus becoming powerful devices for gender reification and disease mongering. The final analytical section, focuses on alcohol advertising—another central topic in dominant degeneration theories—that similarly relies on visual female exhibition, where women are also looked at and displayed. Sometimes presented as a quasi-therapeutic remedy, alcohol advertising is here read as a counterexample to earlier pharmaceutical ads, as I argue it leaves room for imaginative autonomy and female desire.

International Degeneration and Hysteria Theories in Nineteenth-Century Spain

What is this?

I don't know, nor do I feel brave enough to try to explain it.

JUAN GINÉ Y PARTAGÁS, 1903: 452

In *Sexing the Mind: Nineteenth-Century Fictions on Hysteria*, Evelyne Ender argues that the nineteenth-century “epidemic” of medical treatises on that malady—the quintessential female illness—reflects how “women function as the blank pages of men’s texts, and where, moreover, sexual identity exists only as a parody or masquerade” (1995, p. 30). This entanglement between the desire to know the female mind and body and reaffirming masculinity, and the simultaneous, unsettling failure to do so, can also be read in “Hypnotism in the Clinic, 1887-88” [“Hipnotismo en la clínica, 1887-88”], by the Catalan alienist Joan Giné y Partagás who, faced with repeated visits from a female patient unresponsive to his treatment, ultimately utters the words that serve as the epigraph to this section and then orders the patient never to return. If the illusion of knowledge about their minds produced rivers of ink at the time, the confrontation with its unknowability here resulted in their obliteration. Although, as Sabine Arnaud has demonstrated, hysteria as a clinical category took shape as early as the eighteenth century (2015), its renegotiation as “Otherness” in the latter half of the nineteenth century cannot be understood without considering the theory of degeneration—a medical, but also political, social, and cultural paradigm. From Benedict Morel’s theory of degeneration—grounded in biological and environmental factors—to Cesare Lombroso’s criminal anthropology, which developed a hereditary model in *L'uomo delinquente* (1876), and Max Nordau’s *Entartung* (1892), which diagnosed mental several illnesses to the European artistic scene, a wide array of real and imagined symptoms were framed as signs of “human regression.” That backwardness implied a return to more “primitive” stages of development, believed to worsen with each generation until eventual

extinction. *Degenerate subjects* thus came to encompass a vast and ambiguous category of “social deviations” and women, Black people, the poor, the disabled, the mentally ill, or Jews were viewed as sharing certain pathological traits, morbid deviations from an evolved, “normal” type. It is sexuality that emerges as one of the defining degeneration elements in the second half of nineteenth century, marking “the precise point where the disciplinary and the regulatory, the body and the population, are articulated” (Foucault, 2003: 252). Following the premise that “society must be defended” in the name of a “normalization”, a complex system of control and regulation was established from the centers of power. Women’s desire and subjectivity frequently fitted in the category of “gender deviance”, being targets either of social exclusion or of their *adjustment* or *restoration* to “normality”.

For instance, Morel claimed that hallucinations and erotic disturbances were more frequent in women than in men, and even more so among unmarried women or those from lower social classes (2022, p. 225; 316-318). Lombroso, in his attempt to define the “criminal woman” (1893) in contrast to the “normal” one, ultimately admitted that the lack of specialized research led him to conclude that “it is impossible to determine where the normal state ends and the pathological begins” (2004, p. 9), suggesting that abnormality was constitutive of womanhood itself. Max Nordau, in turn, not only emphasized the inherent “erotic perversion” of women but also noted the physical symptoms that modern urban life had brought them (1993, p. 19).

It has been emphasized that French medical treatises exerted significant influence on nineteenth-century Spanish medicine. With marked nationalist sentiment, historian Lluís Comenge i Ferrer lamented as early as 1914 that French medical texts were translated into Spanish almost immediately, thereby turning the Spanish scientific arena into a “foreign stronghold” (1914, p. 413) —a critique of lack of originality in national science that has later been contested (Fernández-Medina, 2018: 2). It is true, however, that the French-influenced “alienist school,” led by national physician José María Esquerdo and his followers (Novella and Huertas, 2011), dominated the medical landscape until the 1890s, when the rising popularity of the Italian school of criminal anthropology (Maristany, 1983; Campos, Huertas García-Alejo, and Martínez Pérez, 2000) was established as the primary medical paradigm. This shift was embodied nationally by figures such as Rafael Salillas and Bernardo de Quirós, and it was evidenced by the successive Spanish translations of Lombroso’s treatises.⁷

Regarding female psychology, the ideas developed by Jean-Martin Charcot at the Hôpital de la Salpêtrière in the context of the Parisian school, as well as those

⁷ However, many of these treatises were initially read in their original language by the Spanish medical community, so the translations mainly reflect their notable popularity and the desire for wider dissemination. Some early examples of Lombroso’s works translated into Spanish include *Los anarquistas*, translated and annotated by Julio Campo and Gabriel Ricardo España (1894), and *Los criminales*, translated by Centro Editorial Presa (1911).

of Hippolyte Bernheim and his followers in Nancy, were frequently referenced, discussed, and sometimes challenged by the Spanish-speaking community. Based on the differentiation of the sexes, hysteria and its Spanish-speaking variants—“histeria” and “histerismo,” along with “neurastenia,” “astasia,” “hemiplegia,” “abulia,” “psicastenia,” or “apercepción”—were commonly used to diagnose female mental disorders. Women who broke traditional roles were frequently pathologized, while men who deviated from heteronormative roles were also labeled “hysterical,” “degenerate,” or “depraved.” These treatises often drew on the French school as textbooks, serving as the somatic and etiological framework to categorize patients, as illustrated by the medical treatise by José Ingenieros, printed in Valencia (1908). French theories were also used to legitimize new treatment techniques like hypnotism, contrasting them with the psychopharmaceutical approaches dominant locally as seen in the works of Giné y Partagás (1903, p. 412) and José Mestra (1889, p. 5–6). Alongside the patriarchal state and the medico-biological establishment, female intellectuals also participated in the system of control over women’s desire and subjectivity—within a country where feminism would not gain traction until the twentieth century.

It is impossible to understand gender representations and medical policies on femininity without considering how degeneration theories intertwined with discourses of national decline and decay, shaping the unique social, political, and economic landscape of Restoration-era Spain. From the supposed ethnic inferiority of Mediterranean Europe compared to the Anglo-Saxon “race”—popularized by Edmond Demolins’ *À quoi tient la supériorité des Anglo-Saxons* (1898) (Litvak, 1980)—to narratives on “the ills of the nation” [“los males de la patria”], pessimistic diagnoses of the “psychology of the Spanish people,” and the modern urban city as a source of endemic violence, “wrongdoing” (Sinclair and Llano, 2017), and “the bad life” [“mala vida”] (Cleminson and Fuentes Peris, 2009), these anxieties frequently became entangled with medical imaginaries. The so-called “Disaster of ’98” [“Desastre del 98”]—marking the loss of Spain’s last colonies and imperial status—further intensified national decline through medical metaphors, ranging from the nation as a “sick body” (Sosa-Velasco, 2010) to the *pathologization* of its people (Tsuchiya, 2011; Vázquez, 2017; Murphy, 2017).

Within this context, representations of women and gender deviance played a central role. In overcrowded cities like Madrid, poor sanitary conditions intensified narratives about the “dark side of progress” (Chamberlin and Gilman, 1985), sparking both real and imagined anxieties around epidemics and contagion linked to the working class. Venereal diseases and female prostitution were perceived as aspects of the nation’s physical and psychological decay—as physician José Viñeta Bellaserra’s 1886 treatise on syphilis and degeneration illustrated—and as feminine-engendered—as shown in an advertising for a Barcelona sanatorium titled “Syphilis” painted by Ramón Casas (1900). National low birth rates and high infant mortality

compared to other European countries further fueled both state-led initiatives and widespread social anxieties about reproduction and sexual control (Vázquez, 2017, p. 131): If the final stage of a degenerated race was extinction, the country’s low survival rates were read not only as symptoms of national decline but also as an urgent issue in which women occupied a central role in the Darwinian continuity of the species: from their reproductive health itself to the “fecundity” of their marriage. In this regard, the female body became an inherent part of her mind, since, ultimately, both were perceived as inseparable parts of a “gendered identity” (Ender, 1995, p. 29).

Symbolically, the identification between the social organism and the bodies of its citizens also encouraged visual representations of the nation as female—the “Motherland”, as Charnon-Deutsch has explored through José Triadó’s painting *A los héroes de Cavite* (2000: 86–88). National debates on the so-called “lack of will” (*falta de voluntad*) were also engendered: The “weakness” of the Spanish character was framed as feminine, while the “will” was masculinized. Such associations additionally mirrored anxieties about sexual ambiguity and “gender inversion”, encouraging images of “masculinized” women and “feminized” men in the visual culture that I will discuss further in another following section. These representations, shaped by a conservative Catholic society, ultimately circled back to concerns about reproduction, as individuals who deviated from binary gender roles were presumed to be sterile, leading to the extinction feared in degenerationist theories.

Reproductive and psychiatric discourses were intertwined with broader domestic anxieties about women’s education and emancipation, as female literacy grew significantly in the second half of the century (Trueba, 2002, p. 8). Attempts to curb this progress had already been articulated in French treatises from earlier decades, since as early as 1847, Jean Louis Brachet warned that one must “avoid leading her [the woman] astray into the deep study of the sciences, the dark maze of metaphysics, or the dusty shelves of erudition” (1847, p. 502). As illustrated in the following passage from *Burnings and Crimes* [*Quemas y crímenes*] by alienist José María Escuder, female “vice” for reading became not only a visual trope (Tsuchiya, 2011, p. 74–94) but also a source of spectacular mythologies in the medical landscape:

[The patient Concha] read books with her eyes closed; she did the same while blindfolded; and she also read them when the letters on the pages were covered with a wooden board or a metal tray — her sight pierced through opaque bodies. If the book was turned upside down, she would notice immediately, and likewise if more than one page was turned at once. (1881, p. 334)

Serving simultaneously as a source of desire from the male gaze and as a mirror of anxieties about that solitary and immersive activity in women, the call for non-reading as a form of prophylaxis against female maladies laid the groundwork for understanding the double function that

advertising could acquire among women: on one hand, as a prescriptive guide on what to do and what to avoid; on the other, as a glimpse into what the emerging consumer society could offer them. Just as reading condemned in another early French treatise for filling the mind with illusions and ideas *contrary to the real state of society* (Virey, 1823, p. 137), advertising, while prescribing behavior, could also open new frameworks for imagining alternative models of womanhood—those that might belong to a possible “future” *state of society*.

Targeting Gender in Late-Nineteenth-Century Press Advertising

The regulation of the medical profession was a major issue in the second half of nineteenth-century Spain. The coexistence of unlicensed practitioners alongside credentialed physicians led to several attempts—in 1874, 1894, and 1898—to legalize their practice, though with unsatisfactory results (Stannard, 2015). Several articles in the examined issues of *Vida nueva* address what was then called *intrusismo* [professional intrusion or unlicensed practice], referring to those practicing medicine without legal or formal qualifications. The column titled “The Compulsory Licensing of Physicians” [“La colegiación forzada de los médicos”] became a forum for discussion among members of the medical class, where such practitioners were often labeled *curanderos* and *charlatanes* [folk healers and charlatans] in contrast to the “virtue” and “good practice” by those with formal training (Madinaveitia, 1898).

However, the reality was more complex. As some contributors noted, these “folk healers” tended to be more popular in rural areas, competing for clientele. Although less openly acknowledged, licensed physicians themselves also often resorted to miraculous remedies to attract patients accustomed to fantastical cures. This coexistence of *secretistas*, doctors trained in outdated systems, and folk healers combining spiritualism with animal magnetism, frequently pushed licensed physicians to marketing themselves in the periodical press and to endorse questionable pharmaceutical products in order to secure patients and pharmacy commissions.

The Spanish pharmaceutical industry—already the target of criticism in a Eudaldo Codinach’s 1854 treatise—was inseparable from the advertising that appeared in the press (Checa Godoy, 2017). In fact, health-related advertising became the most prevalent form of publicity in the final fifteen years of the nineteenth century in Spain (Laguna Platero, 2020), promoting a mutually beneficial relationship—in which those advertisements became the main source of sponsorship for newspapers, just as the press became the principal channel for promoting pharmaceutical businesses. There the persuasive tone of advertising merged with a sensationalism that not only echoed the earlier rhetoric of charlatans, according to Antonio Laguna Platero (2018), but also, I would add, replicate the hyperbolic tone found in many other articles—ranging from reports on criminal cases to those

on national politics—published in the same periodicals. Those promises of healing targeted a wide demographic: from the lower classes—often afflicted by untreated illnesses due to lack of access to medical care—to the upper classes, drawn both to instant remedies for every ailment, as seen in the proliferation of “master drugs” (Robles Ávila, 2024: 88), and to a range of luxurious beauty products that claimed to guarantee attractiveness to any purchaser. If, to paraphrase the protagonist of H. Rider Haggard’s 1887 Victorian bestseller, woman’s beauty can (ever) be bought with gold (1998, p.182), one can assert that these products reflect the two dominant logics of nineteenth-century consumer culture: the earlier model, centered on fulfilling basic needs, offering solutions for healing to both the popular and upper classes, and a more modern logic of consumption—one that created desire for imagined needs.

Whether sick or healthy, *fin-de-siècle* pharmaceutical advertising reveals the coexistence of augured cures and embellishment—often false, as suggested by the persistent emphasis on “authenticity” in the ads—and the manufacturing of new desires in a society shaken by decades of diseases and served by a semi-professionalized and distrusted medical class. Under the regulatory structure of Restoration-Spain, advertising functioned as a form of escape for a growing bourgeoisie, drawn to the unrestrained flow of appetites of the expanding consumer market. The role of female subjects—both as consumers and as intended targets of these advertisements—will be explored in the following.

On “Master” Solutions and Reproductive Manuals: The Medical-Fictional Discourse

The wide range of ailments treated by the “Benedict solution”, advertised in issue 16 of *La vida literaria*, places it squarely among the above-mentioned “master drugs”:

Benedict solution of calcium glycerophosphate with Creosote

The most rational preparation for curing tuberculosis, bronchitis, chronic grippe, influenza infections, wasting diseases, loss of appetite, general weakness, nervous exhaustion, neurasthenia, impotence, mental illness, tooth decay, rickets, scrofula, etc. Bottle: 2.50 pesetas. Available at: Dr. Benedicto’s Pharmacy, San Bernaldo 41, Madrid, and at leading pharmacies (1899, p. 272).

The Benedict solution targeted a wide array of conditions, both physical and mental—contagious and non-contagious, with visible and invisible symptoms. It blurred the lines between infectious respiratory diseases like tuberculosis, influenza, chronic bronchitis, and scrofula, and metabolic disorders such as rickets, as well as mental health conditions like nervous exhaustion, neurasthenia, and even impotence.

These disparate diseases might have been perceived as interconnected by a popular audience. Largely unfamiliar with the latest medical advances, the existence of a “solely cure” that treated the prevailing disorders of the period could not only seem plausible, but also align with the dominant alienist school, which emphasized the underlying organic cause of both bodily and mental illnesses. What Joanna Moncrieff (2008) has described as the “disease-centered model” in psychiatry—where it is assumed that all mental imbalances have a neurochemical origin that can be reversed through other chemical substances—could appear even more credible in the Spanish context. If it was believed that there was only a major cause of national decay—namely, the historical, home-grown *fatum*—then a unique solution also could be perceived as “logical”. In fact, the idea of a strong nutritional agent as remedy had already been proposed in some of the most sensationalist medical treatises, such as the one by Garrido y Escuin, who had attributed the etiology of mental imbalance to a “lack of organic nutrition” (1888, p. 163), even recounting the cure of a hysterical woman through a “nutritious diet” (1888, p. 186).

In addition to a shared organic basis, contagion also seems to unify the diseases treated by the Benedict solution. Not only could be sexually transmitted diseases, respiratory infections, and the pathogen behind Spain’s major nineteenth-century epidemics—cholera—grouped together by the popular belief, but mental illnesses were also viewed as “contagious” in both popular and medical imagination. In particular, female disorders were considered infectious, and if the “hysteria epidemic” had already been suggested by the French physician Pierre Briquet—who claimed that one in four women was affected (Ender, 1995, p. 26)—treatises published in Spain often prescribed isolation for female mental imbalance to prevent both its aggravation and spread: When speaking of monastic life, Ingenieros, for instance, wrote that “[...] the nuns of those troubled times became neurotic [*se neuroseaban*] more easily due to their communal living, infecting each other” (1908: 24). Giné y Partagás insisted on the removal of women from their female social circles (1903, p. 284). Meanwhile, Escuder would comment on the “contagion” affecting the cousin of a hysterical patient, wondering whether “their nerves vibrated in unison” and whether it was a case of “imitation or resonance” (1881, p. 235).

The inclusion of “impotence” among the conditions listed suggests that the ad targeted a mixed-gender audience. For women, the product promised to address both physical weakness and psychological instability—ailments viewed as impairing their ability to fulfill expected domestic roles as mothers, wives, and daughters. For men, it offered a solution to a perceived lack of virility, a concern closely linked to anxieties regarding *the lack of will* connected to reproduction and the race decay.

Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that medical treatises that addressed *fin-de-siècle* fatigue or weakness tended to frame it in explicitly gendered terms. The French physician Charles Féré, for instance, had already drawn a connection

between the involuntary movements of hysterical patients and the fatigue in healthy individuals, thereby establishing a somatic parallel with female disorders (Nordau, 1993, p. 58). In this regard, a similar advertisement for the same glycerophosphate product, published in a contemporary medical journal in Barcelona, the *Boletín del Colegio Oficial de Médicos de la Provincia de Barcelona*, does reinforce this gendered framing (1897, p.9): Not only does it restrict the remedy to the nervous system, but it also explicitly links its ailments to the female sex, since, together with disorders such as nervous depression, convalescence or ataxia, nervous asthenia and chlorosis are listed—two conditions exclusively attributed to the “biology” of women. Impotence is here no longer included, reinforcing the gender-specific targeting.

A first glance at the differences between the glycerophosphate advertisements published in *La vida literaria* and in the specialized journal reveals distinct marketing strategies tied to their respective audiences. While the product promoted in the literary magazine grouped “female” nervous disorders with a vague and wide category of contagious, physical and mental illnesses, the advertisement aimed to the Catalan medical community positioned glycerophosphate as a specific treatment, explicitly targeted at women and their *inherent* mental conditions. Whereas the former framed such disorders as part of a broader, nonspecific set of contemporary ailments—thus relativizing or even “normalizing” mental imbalance—the latter emphasized the psychological singularity of the female mind. In contrast to the generalist portrayal of mental disorders, the advertisement in *Boletín del Colegio Oficial de Médicos de la Provincia de Barcelona* insisted on their specificity, reinforcing the premise of a unity between body and mind in the case of women. Unlike the literary magazine advertisement, which omitted any reference to the product’s composition—thus relying on marketing strategies akin to the language of magical remedies—the specialized ad included a precise list of ingredients (chalk, soda, potash, iron and magnesia) invoking the notion of chemical-nutritional deficiency.

Despite these differences, both advertisements shared an organicist understanding of mental illness—an approach increasingly contested at the time, underscoring that even the more “specialized” medical ads diverged from the therapeutic approaches advocated by contemporary physicians such as Mestra, Giné y Partagás and Ingenieros. As we will see, these figures explicitly favored non-pharmacological interventions, which stood in direct opposition to the commercial logic of the pharmaceutical market that the advertisement represented.

Another medically oriented advertisement, also published in *La vida literaria*, invites us to reflect on the intended audience of this kind of publicity (see Figure 1). It concerns the promotion of a “marital happiness” manual attributed to “Dr. Tosmar,” whose tripartite title—before, in, and after—suggests an orienting and medicalized view of sex framed through a reproductive logic. The advertisement also intertwines mind and body, stressing both physiological compatibility and psychological

Preparación la más racional para curar la tuberculosis, o
consuntivas, inapetencia, debilidad general, postración nerviosa,
tismo, esclerosis, etc. FRASCO, 2,50 pesetas. DEPÓS:
Madrid, y p incipales farmacias.

Nueva edición corregida y aumentada, por el DR. TOSMAE.
ANTES, en el
LECHO CONYUGAL
y DESPUES

Condiciones que han de reunir el hombre y la mujer para
considerarse aptos para la relación sexual (órganos genitales,
estructura, dimensiones, defectos que imposibilitan, etc.). Con-
sejos que deben tenerse en cuenta en la relación sexual para
que ésta se verifique en forma fisiológica (placer, duración,
posiciones femeninas y masculinas, etc.). Precauciones que de-
ben adoptarse para que los abusos no debiliten, perturben o
anulen el poder genital, conservando siempre la virilidad de
la juventud más robusta. Es, pues, este libro una verdadera
guía del hombre y la mujer que quieran conocer los secretos
más íntimos y sublimes de la relación sexual.
A 3 pesetas en las buenas librerías y va por correo, en-
viándolas en libranza o sellos a LA AVISPA, Alcalá, 23, Madrid.
En Madrid se vende librerías de P. Car. S. Jerónimo; San Mar-

Figure 1: Before, in the Marital Bed, and After. *La vida literaria* (5, p. 123)

readiness, and reinforces the topic of the *will*, warning about its “preservation against abuses” that might *weaken* reproductive potency. Interestingly, “virility” is not restricted to men here; rather, both sexes are framed as agents in the national reproductive task assigned to the “robust youth”—a message underlined through visual cues such as the wavy bedframe line and the reciprocal gestures of the hands. In doing so, the advertisement departs from dominant representations of virility typically associated only with men, in which the female subject, when masculinized, used to be depicted in a mocking or caricatured tone, as two illustrations published in *La vida literaria* and *La vida galante* show: the first image (see fig 2.), sarcastically titled “Progress of Feminism: The Don Juan of 1899”, deconstructs the national archetype of the womanizer through feminization, while the second image (see Figure 3), in turn, mirrors anxieties surrounding sexual ambiguity.

Not only the non-gendered “virility”, but some of the lexical choices in the advertisement allow us to question whether it might have been aimed at both sexes, rather than the usual male reader—as expected in an aesthetic, elitist magazine like *La vida literaria*. In this sense, the ad combines the initial biological-mechanical jargon with allusions to the “intimate secrets” and the “sublimity” of the act, thus connecting with a linguistic register that recalls erotic fiction and literary narratives more than the impersonal and supposedly objective tone of reproductive manuals. Similarly, the advertisement for another manual on marital happiness by Pablo Mantegazza appeared in *La vida literaria*, translated into Spanish as *The Art of Choosing a Woman* (see Figure 4), also suggests ambiguity regarding its readership. Such indeterminacy is encouraged by a previous book by Mantegazza, *La fisiología del piacere* (1880), used as a promotional hook and previously published in Spain but then translated as *The Physiology of Love* (*La fisiología del amor*). In this regard, not only could the translator’s choice of replacing the original “pleasure” with the more inoffensive and more novelistic “love” suggest the existence of a female reader, but the later history of female psychology



♦Chocolate JUNCOSA♦
FERNANDO VII. NÚM. 10.—BARCELONA
→ Exportación a provincias y Ultramar ←

Enfermedades secretas y herpes
Su curación es pronta, segura y radical por
crónicas que sea la enfermedad, con un tratamien-
to inofensivo y eficaz.
Dirigirse: Aribau, 12, farmacia. Barcelona.

♦ PEDID EL CATÁLOGO DE NUESTROS LIBROS FESTIVOS ♦

Figure 2: “Progress of Feminism”, *La vida galante*, 1898 (9, p.108)



Figure 3: “Duda”, *La vida literaria*, 1899 (5, p.82)



Figure 6: Front Cover, *La vida galante*, 1898 (5, p.49)



Figure 7: *Letras catalanas. La vida literaria*, 1899 (1, p.25)

for a similar one such as “Cerebrino Mandri” (see Figure 9), appeared in *La publicidad* (1896) explicitly linked to neurological disorders. Here is the association between the reproductive and nervous systems made explicit from the very name of the remedy itself, since “Cerebrino” is a neologism derived from *cerebro*, *brain* in Spanish. Moreover, the ad specifies that the remedy battles headaches, neuralgia, nervous and rheumatic pains, and painful menstrual periods in women, thus becoming another “master drug”, though exclusively targeted at the female gender. And although it was sold as a painkiller, the small print at the bottom of the advertisement—“Cerebrino Mandri never causes harm”— suggests that



Figure 8: *Untitled*, by Carlos Vazquez. *Hispania*, 1901 (60, p.10)

Cerebrino MANDRI



Producto nacional único que con ínfima cantidad de substancia activa, produce máximo efecto.

Contra el dolor de CABEZA. NEURALGIAS. LUMBAGO. CIÁTICA. DOLORES NERVIOSOS Y REUMÁTICOS Y LOS PERÍODOS DOLOROSOS DE LA MUJER

Recetad

CEREBRINO MANDRI

NUNCA PERJUDICA

Figure 9: Brand Identity of Cerebrino Mandri, available in *Prensa Mèdica Catalana* website

it was designed for continuous use, being consumed uninterruptedly without consequences.

Even though both products target the female consumer, the marketing visuality accompanying each differs notably. In contrast to the pleasant and attractive image of Apiolina Chapoteaut—feminized even in its name and encouraging female self-identification (albeit from a male gaze)—Cerebrino Mandri, painted by the Catalan illustrator Gaietà Cornet, shows, by contrast, an authoritarian little man, dressed in an elegant black suit, who, with an overtly commanding gesture, imposes discipline. In this regard, the figure doubly references the medication: the man holds in his left hand the product itself—Cerebrino Mandri—while simultaneously the he himself may be embodying the drug. This dual semantic play could refer, on one hand, to the female brain—the *cerebrino*—engaging in self-discipline, or, alternatively, to an external male agent—a physician, a husband—tasked with disciplining it. That semantic ambiguity places the regulation of the female body and mind in a symbolic in-betweenness: Should the male subject regulate the ontologically deviant female minds? Or should women themselves take charge of (self-)control, that is, of (self-)medicating their deviant, imbalanced subjectivity, as many female intellectuals also claimed?

The feminized and foreign Apiolina Chapoteaut, and the masculine and “truly Spanish” Cerebrino Mandri—the national origin is explicitly emphasized in more than one advertisement—raise two further issues I would like to comment. The first concerns the model of pharmacological treatment that both products promote, as they insist on the organic basis of female mental disorder and draw connections between women’s psyche and reproductive health. The chemical components of these remedies, more or less specified depending on the context, point toward a pharmacological restoration of gendered imbalance, a *reversal* of its abnormality. Other similar products take a comparable approach, as another remedy advertised a few years later in *El Cuento Semanal* and masculinized under the name “Antinervioso Howard” shows, claiming that “there is no neurasthenia that can resist its power” (1911, p. 56). However, by the final decade of the nineteenth century this was no longer the main recommended model of treatment in the medical community, where the pharmacological approach was viewed as outdated and short-term, compared to other suggestive models, among which hypnotism held a central place. For instance, Giné y Partagás repeatedly emphasizes how hypnotic suggestion had cured patients of ailments for which “the pharmacological medications prescribed to them had proven powerless” (1903, p. 438), and would later affirm what he called “suggestive medicine” as a much more effective method for treating neuralgias and muscular pain (1903, p. 450). Mestra’s praise of the wonders of hypnotism supports the same stance (1889: 4), while Ingenieros, after concluding—contrary to the uterine theory—that the cause of hysteria is “cerebral dulling”, proposes as a treatment its “awakening” through hypnotic methods as well (1908, p. 41).

This contrast reveals a rift between science and pharmaceutical industry. Focused on the prosperity of its business model, medical advertisements targeting the female nervous system thus promoted a model of (self-)medication and psychopharmaceutical treatment challenging scientific recommendations, contributing to the popular construction of a psychopharmaceutical need as both a medical category and a gender niche, while at the same time presenting women’s nervous constitution as something that was paradoxically curable, but *chronic*—ensuring the continued consuming of these remedies and the imaginary of the woman as perpetually ill from *her* maladies.

Additionally, the advertisements for Apiolina Chapoteaut and Cerebrino Mandri invite reflections on their intended audience. These figures refer to an upper-middle-class audience—evident in the clothing of both characters, as well as in their literacy—⁸ and, as I previously discussed in the case of Apiolina Chapoteaut, the association between beauty and health aligns with an ideal of Caucasian beauty, in which social class, whiteness, and youth compensated the underlying “otherness” of the female gender. While there is little doubt about who the medicalized subject was, questions arise regarding the buyer: *the observing subject*. Were these ads directed at male readers, customers of medications designed to calm or discipline their daughters and wives? Or did they also, as I suggested earlier, invite self-medication for a female observer?

While the advertisement for Cerebrino Mandri conveys an almost caricatural authoritarianism also present in medical treatises, the similarities between Apiolina Chapoteaut’s illustration and the popular imagery may have successfully appealed to a female audience. In this sense, the ambivalence produced by these representations—where the feminine becomes both mysterious, passive object source of desire, “looked and displayed” (Mulvey, 1999) through a male gaze, while also functioning as model of femininity—mirrors a system of exclusion that rested on their cure. It is no coincidence that the word “restoration” recurs both within the medical and popular imaginaries regarding female disorder, to the point that other pills also oriented to her mind and its reproductive cycle were called “Formiguera Restorers” [Restauradoras Formigueras] (1895, p. 45). Here “restoration” has a manifold meaning, that also refers to the Spanish political context of monarchical *Restoration* and even though to the nationally counter-discourse to degenerationism: the *regenerationism*.

Semantically, female pharmacological “restoration” functioned as a commercial hook. But it might be also interpreted as social filter—distinguishing between those who could be restored and those who could not. As illustrated in some satirical caricatures from the magazines examined, race and age were among the most common segregation boundaries, in dialogue with

⁸ Historically, Spain has trailed behind other Western European nations in terms of literacy. By 1870, roughly 80% of adults in Germany and the United Kingdom were literate, whereas in Spain the figure was closer to 30%.

some of the dominant models in the national visual culture (Charnon-Deutsch, 2000; Vázquez, 2017). An erotic illustration from issue 23 of *La vida galante* (see Figure 10), for instance, portrays a nude, racialized, and aged subject who yields to male desire “because she was crazy,” without invoking any of the “restorative” mechanisms. Other images featuring older women (see Figure 11) or working-class women (see Figure 12) reiterate a caricatural tone in the representation of female “otherness”, distancing themselves from the dominant moral or hygienist intent prevalent both in visual culture and advertising. Considering the “miraculous” irreversibility of gender deviance promised by the latter, it is worth asking whether promises of returning to “normality” were equally extended to last ones.

As Tsuchiya has argued, inflections by race and class added additional “layers” to the Spanish gendered embodiment of “deviance” (2011, p. 38). Tied to nationalist discourse in the context of imperial decline and the so-called “second wave of nation-building”—when colonial projects in Africa sought to compensate for the loss of the Americas (Martín-Márquez, 2008,

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La senté en mis piernas,
la besé en la boca... y... ha olvidado todo lo que pasó luego,
porque estaba loca.

Figure 10: Because she was crazy. *La vida galante*, 1898 (23, p. 308)

pp. 17–18)—contradictory racial discourses emerged, in which race functioned simultaneously as a marker of social segregation and as a means of legitimizing Spain’s still-asserted colonial power, which, in the case of female subjects, was additionally linked to deviant sexuality embodied in prostitution.⁹ At the same time, consumption—here accompanied with alignment with feminist ideas—was perceived as an attempt at social mobility and therefore as threats to the dominant classes (Tsuchiya, 2011, p. 138). In this vein, the combined absence of these “other” women from medical advertising, together with their appearance as objects of parody and derision, suggests the implicit negotiation that publicity established with structures of class, ethnicity, and age in sustaining forms of gender performativity within both the medical marketplace and knowledge.

⁹ In this vein, Casas’s “Syphilis” portrays sexually transmitted disease not only as a prostitute but also as an aged, Andalusian-racialized female figure.



J. BORRELL — VIEJA DE ANTAÑO, COQUETA DE HOGAÑO

Figure 11: An Old Lady of Yesteryear, a Coquette of Today, J. Borrell, *Hispania*, 1901, no. 58, p. 4



Figure 12: Feminism, *Hispania*, 1899, no. 43, p. 6

Between the Glass and the Mirror: Alcohol as a Pharmakon of Desire

This final section is dedicated to another advertising in turn-of-the-century print media often tied to gendered representations: the promotion of alcoholic beverages. Aguardiente de Ojén, cognacs and liqueurs from the Málaga-based Adolfo de Torres y Hermano wineries, and the Anís del Mono are just a few of the drinks that populate the advertising sections of the periodicals examined, frequently accompanied by female faces and bodies as part of a brand identity. Considering that alcohol consumption was a central concern in dominant medical theories of the second half of the nineteenth century, and that alcohol was sometimes presented in these advertisements as a “pseudo-remedy,” I read these as sometimes a kind of counterexample to the patriarchal regulatory discourse of the ads previously analyzed.

Alcohol consumption became a medical category in the second half of the nineteenth century in Spain, shifting from a morally tinged notion—alcohol as a source of “social disturbance”—to a pathological one (Campos Marín, 1999), increasingly associated with the lower classes and criminality. It was a topic of wide discussion in both international and Spanish medical literature linked to degeneration and numerous passages from Morel and Lombroso, for example, discuss its effects as a root cause of degenerate generations, identifying it either as a trigger for deviation or as one of its consequences—directly entangled with the continuity (or disruption) of the human species. The connection between alcohol regulation and reproduction became so prominent that not only excessive consumption, but reproduction under the influence of alcohol became highly punishable. These premises were reiterated in the Spanish context, and José María Esquerdo, for instance, commenting on the famous medico-legal case of serial killer Juan Díaz de Garayo, traced the origins of his hereditary degeneration in the criminal’s family to paternal alcoholism (1881, p. 22-23). In addition, the practice of using alcohol as an ingredient employed in medical treatments—or even as a medicine itself—became the target of repeated prohibitions in late-century medical documents, such as Giné y Partagás’ therapeutic decalogue, who firmly rejected substances like alcohol and hashish (1903, p. 288).

In a way similar to what I noted regarding the psychopharmaceutical approach as a solution to mental disorders, alcohol advertising reveals another point of divergence from prevailing medico-social regulatory policies, since alcohol was among the most heavily promoted products. The feminization of alcohol-related imagery is there striking: women appear ornamentally alongside the beverage, or more frequently, depicted as the ones consuming it. For instance, Aguardiente de Ojén, advertised across several issues of *La vida literaria*, was typically accompanied by illustrations of natural settings where a young and attractive woman attempts to flee with the prized liquid in her arms, evading the disciplinary grasp of her mother. Cognacs from Bodegas Jiménez y Lamothe, regularly featured in *Hispania*, depict a young

wife with an angelic face just about to open a bottle (see Figure 13). Anís del Mono, meanwhile, promoted in the



Figure 13: Jiménez y Lamothe Cognac. *Hispania*, 1899 (vol. 5, p.31)

pages of *La vida galante*, was accompanied by a now-iconic image: a 1898 poster by Ramón Casas, where a woman, dressed in traditional Andalusian flamenco attire with features essentialistically associated with southern Spain, walks, with Darwinian connotations, alongside a monkey while sipping from a glass of the anisette.

Commonly associated with the upper social classes, the image of the “inebriated woman” at times strikingly recalls that of the passively languid, eroticized, and ill figure found in Apiolina Chapoteaut advertisements, as exemplified by Francesc Masriera’s painting “The Last Glass” in *Hispania* (see Figure 14). However, sometimes alcohol ads offer a less constrained image of “woman” since, although mainly centered on the *desired woman*—that is, on being the object of desire, as in another of Casas’ posters for Codorníu champagne, *Amber and Foam* (1898)—the dominant hedonism sometimes also portrays *desiring female subjects*, either in the act of enjoying alcohol or anticipating the pleasures it promises. Unlike portrayals of the women doubly feminized through passiveness and weakness, these female “drinkers” combine beauty with a decisively “healthy” and “energetic” demeanor, in stark contrast to lethargic and needed figures of pharmaceutical advertising.



Figure 14: *The last glass*, *Hispania*, 1899 (23, 4)

One of the texts accompanying the ad appeared in *La vida literaria* for Aguardiente de Ojén even questions whether the consumer of this product was exclusively male:

Grand Aguardiente de Ojén
Superfine and hygienic liqueur. Considered the finest of all aniseed spirits. To aid digestion. To take on an empty stomach. With tea. For refreshments. And to enjoy a pleasant and refined liqueur. Barceló y Torres, Málaga. 40 Prize Medals. Official Suppliers to the Royal Household (1899, p. 176).

On the one hand, the advertisement appeals to the signifier of medical-curative power, describing the drink as “hygienic” and claiming that it aids digestion, thus connecting with the popular imaginary that, despite dominant medical discourse, continued to attribute curative and prophylactic properties to alcohol. It also mobilizes signifiers of pleasure, with a recurring leitmotif in the characterization of the drink as “fine” (*fino*), a term that in Spanish carries a double meaning: it denotes a light substance of easy absorption while simultaneously connoting elegance, fragility, and delicacy. This latter framing may be associated with a “gender pose” of ornamental beauty and weakness that operates through what Mulvey describes as the “fabric of society” that reinforces femininity as object, reassuring the male viewer of his privilege as bearer of the objectifying gaze (1999, p. 810). Additionally, the consumption settings invoked (tea time, refreshments) evoke bourgeois domestic spaces as well as gatherings in salons and cafés, suggesting a gender-mixed consumer base, in contrast to other male-restricted venues such as taverns, political clubs, and casinos.

Without intending to deny the dominance of a male gaze in the portrayal of these female subjects, I argue that not only the listed consumption spaces but also their advertising rhetoric could also have been places for the female eye, another possible observer of these other realities imagined in the ads. Portrayed as decisive, active subjects, but simultaneously drawing on a familiar gender-oriented pharmaceutical discourse of “health” and “good/beauty physical condition”, these ads—which also appeared as posters outside pharmacies and shops—

could have been offering a window to another imagined, alternative woman, healthy though not medicalized: an agent of her sociability and desires.

Final Remarks

If the dominant trend regarding gender was the biopolitics of “deviant” bodies and mind as a counterbalance to the growing emancipation of women, pharmacy marketing played a crucial role in consolidating the identification between womanhood and mental imbalance. By functioning as an example of what Payer baptized as “disease mongering”, where the “invention” of a disease and the need for its treatment serve marketing purposes, “selling sanity” to women contributed both to popular portraying them as naturally “unbalanced” and to creating the need for a cure. First pathologized, women were then medicalized.

This comparative reading between Spanish medical treatises and advertising has shown that, while both contributed to these imaginaries by connecting with dominant medical degeneration theories alongside home-grown ideas of national decadence, organic lack of will, the sterile propensity of the Spanish race as well as anxieties about contagion, they sometimes also diverged. Driven by more “catchy” and marketable popular gender imaginaries or stickily based on commercial interests, the persistent psychopharmacological approach that contradicted much of the fin-de-siècle medical theories, for example, or the promotion of hedonistic and even “healthy” imaginaries around alcohol consumption, shed light on the opposing paths sometimes taken by scientific and pharmaceutical advertising.

Popular views and (pseudo)scientific publicity were also visually intertwined, as shown in the formulaic images of the “weak” and “will-less” feminine, which reinforced familiar imaginaries cementing gender roles shaped by a male gaze. This framework oscillated between inscribing femininity within well-behaved, passive narratives of particular “gender performativity”—thereby reinforcing masculinity—and exposing social anxieties surrounding the female mind and body during a crucial moment in European history in terms of gender roles.

Without denying the dominant masculine observer/reader that aligned with those “structured ways of seeing and pleasure in looking” (Mulvey, 1999, p. 805) through with gender has been historically displayed in visual and communication culture, this paper suggested that the expanding reach of the advertising market and the evolving arena of female literacy could also encourage a female spectator that, alongside the variety of regulation policies targeting her body and mind, and the evident sex divisions that sustained his imaginative passivity and reification, she could also sometimes find in those advertising spaces to expand her then growing subjectivity, as my readings of the Apiolina Chapoteaut emmenagogue ads, the “eroticized” reproductive manuals, and alcohol advertising has proposed. In the latter case, where occasionally women emerged as desiring subjects rather

than desired ones, these advertisements may have subtly whispered of their future, latent potential. Although over 140 issues of magazines were reviewed, limited access and incomplete runs—such as only the first ten issues of *Vida nueva* being available—along with a narrow time frame and a limited corpus of Spanish medical treatises, mean this study offers a starting point rather than definitive conclusions. Future research could expand the temporal scope (e.g., to the early twentieth century) and include more magazines, considering both

their profiles and audiences. While subtle differences between *La vida galante* and *La vida literaria* were noted, a fuller understanding of targeted audiences requires comparison with popular newspapers or weeklies. Lastly, transnational comparisons with the French context that influenced Spanish theories or closely related ones like the Portuguese could illuminate similarities or unique aspects of national gender, medical theory, and advertising nexus at the fin de siècle.

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