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Capitalizing on Affect: Viagra (in)Action

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Recent cultural criticisms of Viagra's advertisements and promotional materials have argued that rhetorical constructions of Viagra users reestablish a hegemonic masculinity premised on heterosexual standards of traditional gender norms (Baglia, 2005; Bordo, 2000; Loe, 2004). Cultural critics have also noted that Viagra's promotional materials allow "for alternative readings by potential users who do not fall into the category of the 'traditional/ideal' Viagra user" including women and homosexual men (Mamo & Fishman, 2001, p. 14). What most criticisms fail to take into account is that Viagra, like other lifestyle drugs, does not only reestablish cultural constructs of the contemporary gendered body and its subversions, but that Viagra's advertisements also provide a rhetorical site in which to investigate the cultural body's relationship to contemporary capitalism.

In an economy based on the circulation of intimate and personal relationships, the manner in which our affect is appropriated and circulated is important to the study of contemporary forms of subjectivity.¹ The importance of interpersonal relationships in the contemporary workplace relies on "communicative labor" (Greene, 2004), the work of building and sustaining personal relationships for the sake of business. As Martin (1995) explained, the contemporary worker must be "innovative, flexible, whole in mind and body, nimbly managing a multitude of relationships and circumstances to maintain a vigorous state of health" (p. 225).² The contemporary worker needs to manage not only his or her physical body to meet the desired standards of health, but with the advent of lifestyle drugs, he or she must also manage the affects of the body in order to induce the proper communicative responses necessary for the management of "a multitude of relationships and circumstances." Therefore, contemporary workers must not only be flexible and competent but also likeable and confident. Prescription drugs, along with their attendant advertisements, have altered our cultural understanding of "illness" and the definition of a medicinal "cure" by suggesting that ailments such as depression, anxiety, and even impotence are aberrations within the physical body and not effects caused by social factors outside the body. With the use of lifestyle drugs, we are told, any person may now attain likeability and confidence.

In this age of lifestyle drugs, in which drugs are consumed not for the purpose of keeping the body alive but rather to attain a particular lifestyle, pharmaceutical advertisements provide an important site in which to explore the currents of contemporary capitalism, medicine, and subjectivity.³ The advent of direct-to-consumer advertising in the United States allowed for pharmaceutical companies to market the qualities deemed desirable in today's precarious and competitive labor force directly to consumers.⁴ These advertisements sell the "good life." This is described by Jhally (1990/2003) as "personal autonomy and control over one's life, self-esteem, a happy family life, loving relations, a relaxed, tension-free leisure time, and good friendships" (p. 251). The advertisements for lifestyle drugs promise an altered affect. By alleviating our depression, shyness, anxiety, and impotence, and revealing our "true selves," it will be possible to "regain" a self that is desirable, confident, likeable, and potent. Advertisements have always been a form of "social communication" that reaches into "the domain of interpersonal relations, a domain of nonmaterial goods" (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1986, p. 252). The advertising of lifestyle drugs to consumers takes this beyond persuasion and into the physical body. Advertisements for lifestyle drugs mark a qualitative difference because the commodity being sold is capable of altering the makeup of the physical body for the purpose of attaining the affective qualities that are requirements for the good

life. As Elliott (2003) explained, “The vision of the good life suggests the ways in which a consumer’s own life does not measure up, and which could be remedied by the consumer product” (p. 119). As consumers are encouraged to be the agents of their own health care needs, pharmaceutical marketers use this direct access to sell symptoms as illness and medicine as cure (Gardner, 2003) and the good life to all of us.⁵

The theoretical underpinning of this essay resides in Spinoza’s understanding of “affect,” Karl Marx’s concept of circulation, and Jacques Lacan’s conceptualization of phallic *jouissance*.⁶ Spinoza formulated a theory of affect that includes both the material and the immaterial alterations that occur when two bodies come into contact. For example, Pfizer’s advertisements claim that Viagra positively affects the material and immaterial body of its user because it produces more than an erection; it produces the confidence that stems from sexual prowess. In addition, Marxist thought is employed for the purpose of understanding how these advertisements rely on the rhetoric of capital, and, in particular, on the relationship between circulation and the “health” of capital: That is to say, just as “money” becomes capital only when it is circulated, the body becomes “healthy” only when it too is in circulation. An examination of Viagra’s promotional materials reveals the manner in which social capital and affective health are garnered through the circulation of the body. Moreover, as Viagra is a drug premised on a heteronormative standard of sex as penetration, its advertisements open themselves up for a Lacanian analysis of phallic *jouissance* (pleasure). Lacan’s conceptualization of phallic *jouissance* illuminates the fact that desire is never fully satisfied, even when one attains that which is desired. Because Viagra’s promotional material relies on both the rise and the fall of desire, the concept of *jouissance* is particularly useful for this analysis. Throughout this essay, I join together theoretical formulations borrowed from Spinoza, Marx, and Lacan, in order to argue that media representations of lifestyle drugs express the manner in which social potency, or cultural capital, is garnered through the circulation of bodies in an analogous relationship to the circulation of capital.

This essay proceeds in the following manner. I begin with a discussion of Viagra’s emergence in the United States. I then analyze the Viagra commercials “Bob” and “Joe,” as each commercial reveals the role of affect in late capitalism. I argue that affective potency is required for success in both personal and professional life and that Viagra’s promotional materials reveal that a body must continually be in circulation in order to remain potent. The “success” of Viagra, then, is premised on a prior recognition of one’s own impotency and the loss of social potency. Only when a consumer recognizes that he is impotent, is he then able to momentarily suspend his impotency by consuming Viagra. To conclude, I suggest that media representations of the power of affective relationships in the social and economic realm can be explored in order to offer insight into how affective potency could be deployed to produce actual political and social power.

Viagra

Viagra, the first pharmaceutical remedy for impotence available in pill form, was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 1998 and introduced to television viewers in 1999 when Pfizer aired a commercial that featured the former presidential candidate, Bob Dole, who spoke openly about his prostate cancer and his subsequent erectile dysfunction (ED) (Loe, 2004, p. 56). Dole urged his fellow Americans to speak to their doctors about their concerns with their sexual

performance.⁷ Although Viagra was never named in the advertisement, Pfizer's name did appear in the bottom right hand corner of the television screen. After the initial Dole advertisement, Viagra commercials featured younger and more masculine men including NASCAR driver Mark Martin in 2001 and the professional baseball player Rafael Palmeiro the following year (see Baglia, 2005; Loe, 2004).⁸

Examining Viagra's advertisements illuminates a biopolitical strategy—the manipulation of the biological body for political and social ends—through which it is revealed that men must govern their material and immaterial bodies for the purpose of sustaining their potency as contemporary capitalist subjects. The concept of potency has long been linked with social and political power. For example, John Milton employed the concept of impotency in 1674 when he wrote, “Any rich man who through age or other impotence is unable to serve the Public” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). Lexically, impotence entered common parlance as the description for the modern male subject's relationship to his (aged) body, to his ability to “serve the Public,” and in relation to his material wealth. Here, three forms of potency are articulated to the male body: virility, agency, and wealth. These three disparate modes of being propel the male body into affective circulation. Pfizer's Viagra commercials successfully link Milton's traditional enlightenment concepts of masculine potency to contemporary symbols of masculinity including youth, wealth, upward mobility, and social power.

In the commercial “Bob” (analyzed below), the protagonist, arrives at a cocktail party and proceeds to circulate through the crowd. Each person he encounters inquires if he has altered his appearance. In each instance, Bob replies “No.” In another commercial, the protagonist named “Joe” has a similar experience except, unlike Bob, Joe is at work. At the conclusion of both commercials, the viewer is informed that each man has recently spoken to his doctor about Viagra. To be clear, neither Bob nor Joe has used Viagra; they have simply spoken to their doctor about obtaining a free sample. Taken together, these commercials illuminate that a particular form of affect operates similarly at work and outside of work. This suggests that work and life become almost indistinguishable as the affect necessary for personal fulfillment is conflated with the affect necessary for professional advancement. Masculinity, money, and power are necessary for success in all areas of life. The potential for masculine sexual performance, and its articulation to material wealth and social power, is the affective quality that Pfizer is proffering in pill form.

Pfizer's “Bob” commercial

The doorbell rings; Bob, White, handsome, and forty-something, enters a cosmopolitan party and hands the attractive Black hostess a gift-wrapped package. She asks, “Hey Bob, did you get a hair cut?” He replies “No.” The camera follows Bob as he moves through the crowd and is approached by a handsome Asian man, “Hey Bob, did you lose weight?” Bob responds, “No.” Finally, Bob reaches his destination, an attractive White, forty-something, woman who inquires, “Did you just talk to the doctor?” Bob responds, “Yup.” Then Bob and the woman place their foreheads together in an intimate moment. The male voiceover poses the rhetorical question and its answer: “What's different? He finally asked his doctor about Viagra. Find out if a free sample is right for you.” At the conclusion of the commercial the voice-over, once again, states, “Ask your doctor if Viagra is right for you.” Text appears on the screen: “Ask your doctor. See the difference,” while the voiceover reiterates, “Ask your doctor and see the difference.”

This Viagra commercial offers a sophisticated glimpse into adult sexuality—along with its many ironies—at the beginning of the new millennium. On the surface, this commercial sells sex without

any explicit reference to sexual intercourse. The upper-middle class, forty-something adults are attractive and the multicultural aspect of the advertisement implies a sense of cosmopolitanism without crossing cultural boundaries such as interracial or same-sex partnering. At first glance, Bob's marital status is ambivalent, but upon closer inspection Bob is, indeed, wearing a wedding ring, informing the viewer that Bob's companion is his wife and that heteronormative standards of intimacy are intact.

The inquiries into Bob's appearance as he circulates through the room imply that Bob *appears* different, better even—more independent, confident, fit, and better looking—yet, this alteration eludes his peers' ability to pinpoint *what exactly* is different with Bob. They can see the difference, but they are unable to pinpoint what *is* different. Only when Bob arrives at his destination and his wife inquires if he has spoken with his doctor and Bob replies in the affirmative, do we learn what is different: Bob had a conversation with his doctor regarding his ED and, as implied by the voiceover, he obtained a sample of Viagra. This difference lacks any outward material quality. Bob had a conversation and received medication for his dysfunction, but he has not yet taken Viagra. Therefore, he physically remains the same. What has altered is his affect: He enters the party with the confidence of a person who is able to act; he no longer appears impotent even though he has not yet taken his medication, nor has he had sex. This Viagra commercial sells the potential to act, to be confident. Affective change is difficult to pinpoint; it escapes our ability to grasp it *exactly*; the best we can do is to circle around it. How is it then that we are to speak about that which escapes definition: How do we discuss affect?

Spinoza and Affect

Althusser (1971a) argued that the only means by which to understand the unconscious is through its "effects" (pp. 204–205). Affect, like the unconscious, cannot be known directly because it does not operate within the linguistic register; therefore, the only means in which to analyze its expression is to point to its effects. The 17th century philosopher Spinoza described *affect* as "The idea of any mode, by which the human body is affected by external bodies, must involve the nature of the human body and at the same time the nature of the external body" (II, prop. 16). Spinoza's notion of affect contains a double meaning: *affectio* refers to the body as affected by an external body and *affectus* refers to the transition in the body from one state to another (Deleuze, 1988, p. 49). Affect refers to an external cause that combines with another body to either increase or decrease the body's power of acting. Spinoza referred to an increase in a body's power of acting as joy, and conversely, a decrease in a body's power of acting as sadness.⁹ For example, in the case of Viagra, if one were to take Viagra, he would be affected in such a way as to have an erection. His erection will carry within it the external cause, the drug sildenafil citrate, and the man will attribute his erection to the external cause (under the brand name Viagra). His power of acting, to perform sexual intercourse, would then be said to have increased and not diminished, and this would create a sense of joy. Therefore, *affectio* refers to the material effect of one body on another body and *affectus* refers to the immaterial affect (joy/sadness) of one body on another body. Although both forms of affect are expressed in the Viagra advertisements, I focus primarily on the immaterial affects (*affectus*) including those of confidence and charisma. Therefore, I argue that our contemporary form of capitalism subsumes and circulates not just material bodies, but bodies'

immaterial affects as well. Although capitalism has always subsumed immaterial qualities, what is intensified in this particular historical and cultural moment is the prevalence of pharmaceutical corporations that promote the chemical inscription of the body into capitalist circulation from the inside out. Although this subsumption may result in pleasure, the experience of pleasure often constitutes a misrecognition of agency and the deployment of actual affective power.

Pleasure and power bring to the forefront the relationship between the penis and the phallus, and subsequently, Jacques Lacan's notion of *jouissance*. For Lacan, the phallus is not the biological penis, but rather the signifier for power in a given economy of desire. Phallic *jouissance* is an experience of pleasure that, in the last instance, does not live up to its anticipated desire for the sole reason that the pleasure has been attained and experienced. Once pleasure is experienced, desire is reignited. Phallic *jouissance* is, therefore, not as pleasurable, in the last instance, as was hoped. Although phallic *jouissance* may eventually end in disappointment, it is important to note that phallic *jouissance* is, nevertheless, the experience of pleasure in real life. On the other hand, there is another form of pleasure, "Jouissance of the Other," which is an idealized form of pleasure expressed often via film, television, and fiction, through representations of sex and desire and the narrativized identification with an other. Jouissance of the Other operates through the perpetuation of desire: it is the idealized *jouissance* that can be attained only by the *next* thing; the thing that, by definition, is always just out of reach. "Were there another *jouissance* than phallic *jouissance*," lamented Lacan (1998), "it shouldn't be/could never fail to be that one" (p. 59). All we can actually experience is phallic *jouissance*—the sex we have in real life—and that experience often fails in comparison to the sex desired; to the idealized sexual encounter experienced by the Other.

Phallic *jouissance* cannot help but be fallible as it is structurally dependent on both a rise and a let down.¹⁰ This is what Spinoza would refer to as an immanent structure because it contains that which causes its rise as well as its decline. Pfizer's Viagra commercials and promotional materials articulate this phallic desire to an Other *jouissance*, to a nostalgic desire (and nostalgia by definition is always a desire for something that never was), or to a future desire of how sex could be. There is a disconnection between what Bob desires and the signification of his desire as it is displaced onto Viagra. Viagra cannot fully satisfy Bob's desire for actual potency as it is structurally limited to a real process that will always let him down and keep the fulfillment of his desire directed toward the future. Lifestyle medicine works in precisely this way: it is not a cure but must be continually consumed over and again. "This satisfaction . . . *fails* to fulfill me—it always leaves something more to be desired," wrote Fink (2004, p. 160). This is the definition of phallic *jouissance*: "Phallic *jouissance* lets one down, comes up short" (p. 160). Pfizer's advertisement, like most advertisements, refers to phallic *jouissance*, the desire for a pleasure that can be experienced, but links it to *jouissance* of the other, whether in a form of nostalgia or a future desire.

Yet, in Pfizer's Viagra advertisement *jouissance* operates on another level of *jouissance*, a *jouissance* that operates beyond phallic *jouissance*. Lacan described this as "an existence that stands apart, which insists as it were from the outside, something, not included on the inside" (Fink, 2004, p. 22 n24).¹¹ The *jouissance* that exists outside—prior to consuming Viagra—is, for the purpose of this essay, an affective potency in the form of confidence, joy, pleasure, and charisma. But this affective potency is never felt enough; it is a potency that once obtained by the

subject becomes immediately phallic again, that is to say, it is fallible and, like the penis itself, will always eventually fail. Thus, this self-confidence that exists beyond and before Viagra is always precarious and uncertain. The Viagra commercial illuminates a surplus pleasure that exists in the form of an affective potency. This ad presents the viewer with an image of surplus jouissance, an affective potency, even prior to the phallic jouissance: *it is an anticipation of affective pleasure before the actual pleasure lets you down*. And this anticipation of potency is precisely how Viagra works to induce affective desire. As Fink (2004) explained in regards to the phallus, “It is not what is physically present that is of value, at this level, but, rather, something more abstract, something that is not accessible to sight or touch” (p. 137). This is the definition of affective potency, and affective potency is, therefore, intimately connected to the logics of contemporary capitalism. In the following, I analyze how circulation is essential to the functioning of capitalism in order to argue that affect, like capital, gains its power through circulation, and how a potential gain in power/potency is what is really offered by Pfizer’s Viagra advertisements.

Circulation

Viagra works materially in the body through the process of circulation. According to Viagra’s Web site (Viagra.com), “ED occurs when there is a lack of blood flow to the penis. This means that a man can have trouble getting and keeping an erection long enough to have sex. It may happen only once in awhile, or more often.”¹² The cause of ED, then, is a lack of blood circulation directed toward the penis. Pfizer does not articulate ED as a lack of sexual desire but rather as a problem of physical circulation.¹³ Under the heading “How Sex Affects the Body” in Pfizer’s pamphlet “What Every Man (and Woman) Should Know about Erectile Dysfunction,” which accompanies their video of the same name, is the following:

When a man is sexually excited, the penis rapidly fills with more blood than usual. The penis then expands and hardens. This is called an erection. After the man is done having sex, this extra blood flows out of the penis back into the body. The erection goes away. If an erection lasts for a long time (more than 6 hours), it can permanently damage your penis. You should call a doctor immediately if you ever have a prolonged erection that lasts more than 4 hours. (Pfizer U.S. Pharmaceuticals, 1999, p. 17)

The medicalization of intercourse demands that during an erection, the penis is disembodied from its person. Blood fills the penis, causing it to expand. We are not informed of any naturally produced chemicals in the brain that may cause one to become sexually aroused. We are informed only about sexual arousal through the direct flow of blood to the penis, designating the penis as a purely mechanical and a nonsensual entity. We are then informed that “after the man is done having sex, this extra blood flows out of the penis back into the body.” In this passage, the penis is a separate, mechanical instrument that is alienated from the individual. In this description of ED, the relationship between a man and his penis corresponds to the functional structure of alienated labor. Not only is man alienated from his labor as his object of production is no longer his own; now he is also alienated from his body as the penis is no longer his own.¹⁴

In Pfizer’s explanation of “how sex affects the body,” there is not any discussion of semen. There is no ejaculation and the penis is not referred to as potent in the material production of semen.¹⁵ The release of the erection is not explicitly a result of ejaculation of semen but of the blood in the penis flowing out of the disembodied penis back to the body. “The erection goes away,” we are

told, “after the man is *done* having sex” (emphasis added). The erection subsides upon completion of sex, but any discourse about natural ejaculation of semen is completely absent. After the third person discussion about “a man” and “a penis,” the penis is personalized: “If an erection lasts for a long time (more than 6 hours), it can permanently damage *your* penis.” This now-damaged penis belongs to someone, *to you*. The passage ends by imploring “you” that if “you” have a “prolonged erection” for more than 6 hours you must immediately seek medical attention.

The functioning of a healthy erection is premised on its capacity as a medium for circulation. In this passage, the only time a person is directly linked to the penis is when it is damaged. A damaged penis is defined by its relationship to the circulation of blood: Either blood does not circulate into the penis and an erection does not occur or blood does not circulate out of the penis in which case permanent impotency may occur. These two forms of dysfunction result in the same condition. Thus, it is the circulation of blood that is of primary importance as it fills the penis, causing it to expand, and then leaves the penis resulting in its flaccidity.¹⁶ The discourse surrounding potency, health, and sex literally and symbolically *circulates* around the concept of circulation. Both the body and the capital can only be known through difference because the only means in which to understand the operation of one sphere (the body) is to compare it to another (capital) as each is part of a larger structure knowable only through relations of difference.¹⁷ In the *Gundrisse*, Marx (1993) contended, “The circulation of capital is at the same time its becoming, its growth, its vital process. If anything needed to be compared with the circulation of the blood, it was not the formal circulation of money, but the content-filled circulation of capital” (p. 517). Capital is creative and generative, and just as blood flows through the body, continually creating and sustaining life through the mere process of life affirming and “content-filled” circulation, capital also requires circulation for its growth and expansion. As Negri (1991) explained, “circulation is, above all, the expansion of the potency of capital” (emphasis original, p. 112).¹⁸

As the logics of postmodern capital have shifted emphasis from production to circulation, media representations seek to capture our desires for affective potency by directing us to incorporate our bodies into circulation. To manifest a material sexual function, an ED sufferer has to insert himself into the economy of pharmaceutical drugs. As the “patient summary of information” notes, “Viagra does not cure erectile dysfunction. It is a treatment for erectile dysfunction” (Pfizer Inc, 1999). The continual cycle of treatment is a mandate for men to maintain their capital and their affective potency.

Affective potency

In their book, *Financial Derivatives and the Globalization of Risk*, LiPuma and Lee (2004) argued that circulation is the “cutting edge of capitalism” because, historically, surplus value resulting from production has decreased, whereas surplus value resulting from circulation has increased (p. 9). One means in which derivatives make money is through the process of arbitrage or the buying of currency in one market and the selling of that same currency in another market for a higher profit. As the shift in capital has produced new forms of business and labor, it has also affected how we live. As LiPuma and Lee contended, “these circulation systems are leading to a transformation in the habitus of culture itself” (p. 10). We are directed to circulate our physical bodies and affective selves as a means in which to contend with the economic and social anxieties

that pervade daily life. Marx recognized the importance of circulation for economic and capital growth, and LiPuma and Lee examined the rise of “postmodern” circulation. I focus on the rise of personal strategies of living where one’s social, and increasingly economic and political, capital is dependent upon the continual circulation of abstract or immaterial qualities like confidence, personality, and charisma. For instance, the affective potency offered by the Viagra advertisement takes the form of confidence and charisma that exists in the *potential* for an erection.¹⁹

The affective potency of the male protagonist in the Viagra commercial is produced in each nodal contact that he has with another person. The praise derived from others exceeds the material (exchange) value of Viagra and delivers surplus value experienced as a bodily or affective sensation that occurs *prior to the consumption* of the pharmaceutical. Affective potency is not produced through sex.²⁰ Viagra’s value, as depicted in this commercial, resides in the surplus value of an affective potency that is prior to the actual phallic jouissance. This affective potency is produced through circulation and by coming into contact with other bodies as “affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced only as an effect of its circulation” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 120). Bob basks in his affective potency. Ownership of the “little blue pill” affectively alters Bob prior to consuming his medication and experiencing its actual chemical alteration. The sample packet of Viagra, like money in the pocket, is enough to alter the affect of those who possess it. Possessing the material object offers symbolic pleasure that is manifested in a representation of the power to act, whereas Bob’s affective potency (surplus value) is generated through circulation. In the following section, another Viagra ad is analyzed to further illuminate the relations between impotency and circulation.

(Im)potency

The following is a description of Pfizer’s 2002 Viagra commercial “Joe,” described by Baglia (2005) in his book *The Viagra AdVenture*:

A tall, handsome black man is seen emerging from the office of the ‘Medical Group.’ He wears a smile... “Joe” is a White-collar professional and appears to be in his late thirties to early forties. Dressed in an expensive suit, we see him enter and cross the vast lobby of a high-rise office building and go into an elevator. In the elevator he encounters a coworker who takes notice of Joe and, presumably, Joe’s quiet confidence. This coworker—a White man, wearing spectacles, and much shorter than Joe—asks, “Hey Joe, did you get a haircut?” Joe replies simply, “No.”... Once the elevator arrives on the floor of their workplace and they disembark, Joe encounters more questions—“Did you just get back from vacation?”... “Did you shave your mustache?” “Is that a new suit?” “Are those new shoes?” To all these questions Joe answers, “No.” He does not engage any of his inquisitive colleagues any further. But even sequestered in his office, Joe fields more questions: “Did you get a promotion?” his male sidekick asks. “No,” Joe replies. “Did I?” the coworker inquires. “No,” responds Joe yet again. Still answering questions, Joe leaves the office and walks confidently through the parking lot, presumably on his way to his car. His cellular telephone rings, whereupon, after a laugh, Joe remarks to the mystery caller, “Yes.” (p. 80)

Baglia argued that Joe’s power resides in his status as the boss, and we “know this because he is not beholden to any of his colleagues, he occupies a large office, and he comes and goes as he pleases” (p. 80). I want to offer an alternative reading to suggest that Joe’s position as the boss is not certain and regardless, it is the *affect* of the boss that is of importance in Viagra’s advertisement. Joe hosts a multiplicity of inquiries about his altered appearance, but his cohorts are unable to pinpoint what is different about Joe as there appears to be no material change. He did

not get a haircut; he did not have a vacation; he did not shave his mustache; he is not wearing new clothes. His physical presence remains unchanged, but his affect has altered. His affective change and newfound confidence are not due to his actually achieving upward mobility within the capitalist marketplace, but relies on an affective alteration that *suggests* that he is upwardly mobile, and that he possesses the *potential* for economic advancement. What has changed is that Joe has the *affect* of the boss; not that he is necessarily the boss. With the depiction of Joe's new affective potency, the advertisement suggests that Joe is not only socially but also economically mobile. Thus, there appears to be a correlation between the bedroom and the boardroom as Joe's not-yet-chemically-induced-erection is circulated as affective potency in his professional life.

Baglia (2005) argued that in this representation of a successful African American man, "Pfizer reveals its expectations: Black men can be sexual and successful as long as they are modeling hypersexuality for White men and only if this sexuality and success is not practiced with White women" (p. 81). I want to argue that there is something else going on in this representation. Joe is depicted as successful in business and in life, but the logic of the commercial reveals that this power stems from his admission of his own impotency. His affective potency is not articulated to a masculine dominance of virile stereotypes of African American men. Rather, Joe is potentially potent in the social and economic registers because of the presentation of his upward mobility and not because of physical strength and hypersexuality; his potential potency is premised on his actual impotency. Although the social context for the Bob advertisement is a cocktail party and the context for the Joe advertisement is the corporate workplace, both commercials cite the same form of affective potency as the mark of social and economic advancement. Here then, the affect required for success takes the same form in both work and outside of work.

As both commercials demonstrate, Viagra promises the *appearance* of social and economic success, but not its actual attainment. Viagra *simulates* affective potency in order to mask what it cannot deliver: material physical health and the social and economic potency that is related to it. Viagra offers a simulation of potency that, nevertheless, works in the same way as contemporary capitalism. Baudrillard (1994) wrote on the subject of simulation, "To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have. One implies a presence, the other an absence" (p. 3). Both Bob and Joe simulate the affect of social potency via the indexing of their own lack. Their simulated social potency does not produce any actual power on its own. Baudrillard further explained that "pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: The difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false,' the 'real' and the 'imaginary'" (p. 3). Affective potency suggests the *appearance* of power—so much so that Joe and Bob's upward economic and social mobility appears real to those they encounter. Bob and Joe rely on their affective potency, the appearance of power, as if they were participating in arbitrage—in the hope that this appearance of potency can garner actual potency in a different realm.

On the one hand, Viagra offers a semblance of power or, more specifically, a misrecognition of one's affective potency as power. Both Bob and Joe are recognized for appearing different, and they misrecognize the simulation of power or affective potency as real, material power. In actuality, both men remain impotent. Moreover, they have yet to demonstrate that they can

overcome their dysfunction even with the aid of Viagra; regardless, their dysfunction will remain even if they momentarily overcome their impotence. As a result, their desire for potency as well as the immaterial power they gain in both work and social settings become structurally *dependent* upon their impotency rather than on actual potency. On the other hand, they do possess the appearance of power in the form of affective potency. With each nodal contact, both Bob and Joe receive affirmation from others for their affective change. Unfortunately, the potentials inherent in affective potency, including friendship, connection, and collectivity, are not fully actualized. Neither Bob nor Joe capitalizes on these nodal encounters to combine with external bodies to generate and expand their affective power. Thus, although both are affected, neither of them lives up to the potential of his power, and so it remains in the realm of potential. In Lacan's terminology, their affective *jouissance*, in the end, is merely phallic *jouissance*. Although affective *jouissance* operates via circulation just as capital does, there is no material action that occurs. The moments of possibility are foreclosed on as both miss the chance nodal contacts that are necessary for the creation and expansion of new forms of becoming. The acute capitalist seeks the "expansion of value" through the "appropriation of ever more and more wealth" (Marx, 1954, pp. 150–151). Bob and Joe fail to produce surplus out of their affective potency because they are unable to combine with those along the way to appropriate and create more power, more capital. Like misers, they harness their affect as they repeatedly say "No." The form of potential illustrated by Bob and Joe is only virtual and, thus, left unrealized. The potential that *is* actualized here is capital's potential, in that consumers are continually circulated into the grips of the pharmaceutical company. Bob and Joe will remain stuck in a cycle of desire without attaining surplus because even their medically aided sex reverts back to phallic *jouissance*. In every respect, they remain, in the last instance, impotent.

This begs the question: Who has the power to act in these texts? The answer is the sexual partner.²¹ Although this text clearly attempts to reestablish patriarchal order, the sexual partner or feminine other is the external body that acts on his body, inducing him to "call the doctor," and likewise this other has the power to accept or reject his (non)erection. His only actual power in this text is to please the other, and we never know to what extent he is able to exert this power. The moment when each man says "Yes" to his partner is the event through which he valorizes himself, and we can only remain hopeful that this valorization and connection will lead to actual affective potency in the form of collectivity and connection. Viagra's ads proffer an affective potency that is circulated in the semblance of actual social and economic power. This desire for affective potency is produced and reproduced via the medium of circulation. It is in the nodal moments when Bob and Joe come into contact with other bodies that their affect is affirmed. This cycle maintains the subject in a cycle of impotent production. Only through the continual recognition of his impotency is the desire for potency induced. Affective potency is acquired through circulation and to circulate is to recognize that to not circulate is to remain impotent.

Pillow talk by way of conclusion

If someone has done something which, he imagines, affects others with pleasure, he will be affected with pleasure accompanied with the idea of himself as cause, or, he will regard himself with pleasure.

(Spinoza, *Ethics*, III, prop. 30)

In the final image, Bob and his wife press their heads together in a moment of intimacy and affirmation. She affirms Bob's actions and in return, he is affected by her in the realm of pleasure—the pleasure he experiences is pleasure for being the cause of her pleasure. If there is affective power in this text, it takes this form of affirmation. As cultural scholars in the age of global capital, we must conceive of a rhetorical agency in the form of connectivity and collectivity that operates through the processes of affective and “communicative labor” (Greene, 2004). Although communicative labor can, indeed, be “life-affirming,” the life that we affirm is, nonetheless, one subsumed within the relations of capital, whether understood through the function of language, desire, or sex. This must be recognized and radicalized or else we may misrecognize capital's power for our actual affective power. Affective potency carries with it the potential to actualize new ways of being through the power of circulation. These moments of human contact must be captured and expanded upon and once again thrown back into circulation in order to accumulate a collective mode of affective power. To think about Viagra without linking it to the cultural and economic anxieties embedded in potency, as well as the logics of capitalism, fails to *capitalize* on the potentials inherent in affective potency.

This project is just a beginning. More work is necessary to understand the manner in which we govern and circulate ourselves and to what ends. Lifestyle drugs penetrate further into “the domain of interpersonal relations” as they offer the appearance of affective power without its reality. This analysis of Viagra and its advertisements reveals personal and professional anxieties within late capitalism. Although this study focuses on Viagra, the proliferation of lifestyle medication and direct-to-consumer advertisements provides cultural critics with a rich source of material that remains to be examined. By definition, these drugs treat both physical and psychological symptoms; therefore, they remain a fertile site for the analysis of a wide range of contemporary issues. This project is a step in this direction. Future work will benefit from illuminating the manner in which advertisers employ contemporary anxieties in order to market their products. Viagra emerged at a particular historical moment in which the financial concerns of aging baby boomers were heightened by anxiety over the Social Security system in the United States. Combined with anxieties regarding age, youth, and potency that were brought to the forefront in 1998, when the then 77-year-old former astronaut, John H. Glenn, returned to space, Viagra's emergence could not have been timelier. Finally, more examination of affective and communicative potency surrounding the marketing of lifestyle drugs will assist in explicating how we can further the potential of our collective relationships as well as understand how lifestyle medication has come to define many aspects of our lives.

For cultural scholars, explicating affective potency paves the way for critics to illuminate the nodal intersections of bodies and the potentials present in affective relationships. Illuminating the potentials of affective pleasures is a beginning toward a political project that, although bound in capitalist circulation, may expand through collective power and could actualize into potent political activity. As Foucault (1978) aptly warned, “We must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power” (p. 157). On the contrary, by saying yes to sex via Viagra, we are saying yes to a stylized and mediated life. Although this implicates us further into the logics of capitalism, it also reveals the power of affective potency. And the potential of affective potency remains to be realized.

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Notes

1. Italian Marxist theorists have explored the relationship between affect, immaterial labor, and contemporary capitalism (see e.g., Hardt, 1999; Hardt & Negri, 2001, 2004; Lazzarato, 1996; Virno, 1996, 2004).
2. For more on the body and its necessity to remain flexible see Martin (1994, 2000).
3. The United States is one of two countries to allow direct-to-consumer advertising for pharmaceuticals. The growth of lifestyle medication coincided with the relaxation of direct-to-consumer broadcast advertising regulations in August 1997. New Zealand is the other country to allow direct-to-consumer advertising; although, New Zealand has had a voluntary ban on direct-to-consumer advertising since December 2004 (“New Zealand to ban DTC advertising by ’06,” 2005).
4. For scholarly work on DTC advertising, see the *Journal of Health Communication’s* (Rabin, 2004, v. 9) special issue.
5. Lears (1983) referred to the selling of self-actualization as a “therapeutic ethos stressing self-realization in this world—an ethos characterized by an almost obsessive concern with psychic and physical health” (p. 4).
6. This formulation is not new. Althusser combined Marx, Spinoza, and Lacan in his writings. For instance, in his essay “Ideology and ideological state apparatuses (notes towards an investigation), Althusser (1971b) developed his theory of “ideological state apparatuses” on the theoretical foundation of the “Marxist ‘theory’ of the State” (p. 138). In his definition of ideology, he employed Lacan’s notion of “imaginary” and “real” as he stated, “ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (p. 163). Moreover, he employed Marx and Spinoza to describe the immanent formulation of ideology: “As is well known, the accusation of being in ideology only applies to others, never to oneself (unless one is really a Spinozist or a Marxist, which, in this matter, is to be exactly the same thing)” (p. 175).
7. According to Baglia (2005), Pfizer contacted Dole to be a spokesperson for ED after Dole’s appearance on Larry King Live, in which “Bob Dole asserted that Viagra is ‘a great drug’ in response to King’s questions about prostate cancer and impotence” (p. 60). In addition, Loe (2004) explained that “Pfizer’s first print and television ads for Viagra did not appear until 9 months after the debut, in early 1999, featuring presidential candidate Bob Dole selling ED” (p. 56). Loe described the ad as Dole appearing “formally and patriotically dressed in a blue suit, red tie, and white shirt ... urging men to speak to their doctors about ED ... in relationship to prostate cancer” (p. 56). Bob Dole’s sexual prowess was again highlighted in 2001 during a Pepsi advertisement campaign that aired during the Academy Awards. The commercial featured Britney Spears in a sexually provocative performance. The commercial pans out from Britney’s performance to those watching her performance from their television sets. The advertisement concluded with a shot of Bob Dole watching the television commercial as he sat in his overstuffed chair with his dog by his side. His dog barked; Dole responded “easy, boy.”
8. The popular press was fascinated with Viagra’s timely emergence on the brink of the new millennium especially as baby boomers were dominating headlines along with social security concerns, the fear of Y2k, and the Clinton–Lewinsky scandal (see, e.g., Horvitz, 1997a, 1997b; Leland, 1998; Leland & Murr, 1997).
9. Spinoza (2000) stated, “By emotion [affect] I understand the affections of the body by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, helped or hindered, and at the same time the ideas of these affections” (part III, def. 3).

10. Fink (2004) placed the phallic back into jouissance: “‘phallic’ as ‘fallible,’ we try to hear the ‘fallibility’ in the ‘phallus.’ Phallic jouissance is the jouissance that fails us, that disappoints us” (p. 159). This formulation is important. It is an immanent structure in a Spinozist sense in that both its rise and its decline occur without an external cause.

11. Rather than being intimate, it is ‘extimate.’ Lacan, discussing the absurdities that are spoken in analysis to enter into “the unconscious” wrote: “From that emerges a speaking (*dire*) that does not always go so far as to be able to ‘exist’ with respect to the words spoken [*ex-sister au dit*]” (as cited in Fink, 2004, p. 22). In a footnote, Fink noted that “Lacan used [this formulation] to talk about an existence that stands apart, which insists as it were from the outside, something, not included on the inside. Rather than being intimate, it is ‘extimate’” (see Fink, 2004, p. 22 n24).

12. Retrieved on May 11, 2006 at <http://viagra.com/ed/theRealIssue.asp>

13. According to Miller (1998) “impotence” had displaced “frigidity” by the ’70s with the assistance of Caverject, “a self-administered injection of prostaglandin to relax penile tissue and heighten blood flow,” approved by the U.S. government in 1966 (pp. 124–125). The term “erectile dysfunction” emerged from the U.S. National Institute of Health Consensus Development Conference on Impotence in 1992. The change in name signifies a change in the definition of the cause of impotence in men. Impotence had been defined as a problem caused by external or psychological events, whereas ED has organic not psychogenic causes (For recent work on the shift of terminology from impotence to ED and the engendering of Viagra see Baglia, 2005, pp.66–71; Loe, 2004, pp. 29–61).

14. In a discussion on alienated labor, Marx (1964) explained that “alienated labour takes away the object of production from man, it also takes away his species-life, his real objectivity as a *species-being*, and changes his advantage over animals into a disadvantage in so far as his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him” (p. 128). Marx continued, “Just as alienated labour transforms free and self-directed activity into a means, so it transforms the species-life of man into a physical existence” (p. 128).

15. In order to be clear that the blood in the penis is not ejaculated, as this would feminize the penis, the reader is informed that this “extra blood flows out of the penis back into the body.” (For a history of male ejaculation in philosophy, art, and literature see Aydemir, 2007.)

16. In reading Viagra’s materials, I have yet to come across any discussion of using Viagra as a fertility treatment. In the “patient summary of information” (Pfizer Inc., 1999), there is a disclosure that states “Viagra does not protect you or your partner from getting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV—the virus that causes AIDS” (rev. 4).

17. Another way in which to understand this is through the concept of a homology. As Kordela (2007) explained, The homology between economic and semantic [somatic] value as two of the domains of differential substance precludes the classical Marxist assumption that the “base” (economy) determines the “superstructure” (sign), as well as its idealist bourgeois inverse. Both are directly caused or determined to exist in this way by the differential substance whose modes they are. (p. 40) Or as Lacan (1977) stated: There are thoughts in this field of the beyond consciousness, and it is impossible to represent these thoughts other than in the same homology of determination in which the subject of the *I think* finds himself in relation to the articulation of the *I doubt*.” (emphasis original, p. 44) Following the Spinozist differential structure employed by both Lacan and herself, Kordela (2007) continued, [...] and since knowledge is knowledge of causes, neither capital nor the sign can be known if examined in isolation, as separate fields, since they are both caused by one and the same substance. The analysis of capitalist economy, therefore, must be included among the sciences whose object is a mode of the differential substance, such as the analysis of all fields that involve the examination of language. (p. 41)

18. The complete sentence reads: “Therefore *circulation* is, above all, *the expansion of the potency of capital*; and for the same reason it entails the *appropriation* of all the social conditions and their placement in *valorization*” (Negri, 1991, p. 112).

19. In *Écrits*, Lacan (2006) explained, “It is thus that the erectile organ—not as itself, or even as an image, but as a part that is missing in the desired image—comes to symbolize the place of jouissance” (passage 822).

20. This is not to say that there is not a surplus jouissance derived from sex, only that in the Viagra commercial we have no indication of this.

21. In the commercial “Joe,” we do not know whether the person that he is speaking to is male or female. This ambiguity has been pointed out by others including Baglia (2005) and Mamo and Fishman (2001). I thank Jay Baglia for pointing this out to me.

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