

# About the Cover Image

Andrea Waling and Jennifer Power



Part of male anti-masturbation apparatus, probably late nineteenth or early twentieth century Apparatus photographed on blue jeans.

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<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/yc56wkz9>

It was difficult to determine the right cover for this special issue. The purpose of the issue was to encourage new ways of thinking about the phallus, and the aim was to find an image that did just this—ask people to wonder what the image is telling us. What does it represent? What is the story? It is perhaps ironic that the image we found most appealing is a device designed to prevent a penis from functioning. In the late nineteenth century,



masturbation was believed to cause mental illness, and solo ejaculation was considered a form of sexual dysfunction, and this is one example of many, often brutal, devices created to physically prevent erections and masturbation. Sitting over modern blue jeans, however, the image is erotic and evokes BDSM or kink culture. The old and the new, repression and eroticism, are one and the same.

The image is remarkably anonymous and enables the viewer to visualize themselves, or someone else wearing the apparatus, regardless of gender, body, and assigned-sex-at-birth.

It is a highly erotic image, speaking to deep carnal desires involving chastity, prolonged arousal, and orgasm denial. It is a powerful image, the presence of metal and the harsh material of jeans illustrating a quiet strength, stability, and discipline. It is an image of softness and vulnerability, evident in the curved appearance of the apparatus and its capacity to prevent potential erection and touch.

It is an image that demonstrates both control and lack thereof, speaking to expectations about masculine bodies and sexualities—the notion that sexuality is something outside of control yet must be contained and managed in appropriate ways.

These different ways of interpreting the image speak strongly to our special issue, which explores a variety of approaches to thinking about and understanding the phallus.