

Rubbing One Out: Defining Metasexual Violence of Objectification Through Nonconsensual Masturbation

Abstract

The psychological harms attendant to the sexual objectification of women are well-documented throughout the theoretical and empirical literature, but to date there is very little discussion on whether and when these harms and the routine behaviors that create them constitute a form of violence against women. By drawing upon empirical studies of psychological harms of objectification, especially through depersonalization, and exploring several veins of theoretical literature on nonphysical forms of sexual violence, this article seeks to situate non-consensual male autoerotic fantasizing about women as a form of metasexual violence that depersonalizes her, injures her being on an affective level, contributes to consequent harms of objectification and rape culture, and can appropriate her identity for the purpose of male sexual gratification. It concludes that this commonplace male behavior is a site of poorly studied sexual violence against women that demands greater scholarly attention.

Keywords: Masturbation; sexual violence; metasexual violence; consent; rape culture

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Sexual violence can take many forms, both physical and nonphysical. Under the heading of physical sexual violence are sexual assault and rape, which have proven to be persistent problems that have escaped remediation despite several decades of legal, social, and scholarly progress. Nonphysical sexual violence, while less conspicuous, is also harmful, persistent, and prevalent, if not ubiquitous. In fact, although the nonphysical forms of sexual violence seem less *acutely* damaging than physical sexual violence like assault and rape, many of its manifestations are in some ways *chronically* worse because their harms are not easily identified, contribute to and aggravate the degradation of women, are tacitly accepted by society, and are self-reinforcing. Among these are sexual objectification, the male/objectifying gaze, sexual harassment, lad/locker-room talk, and especially rape culture.

Rape culture and the psychological states of men (and some women) who generate and perpetuate it constitute a pernicious issue of concern to researchers of sexual violence, not least because these can generate and condone physical sexual assaults, make sexual assault more difficult to prosecute, and re-injure victims (Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth 1993; Perry 2014). Rape culture is, ultimately, a cultural attitude rooted in the intersection of power and sexual objectification, and as such, it reflects the psychological states and attitudes of the people who, often tacitly, support it. Those psychological states can be understood as a form of routine reproductions of what is and is not tolerable, acceptable, and normal within society (Baker 2015). Men who routinely reproduce the objectification of women, for example, can be seen as cultivating a psychological disposition (within themselves) that condones sexual objectification and socializes them to be objectifiers. Therefore, due to its implication in these problems and their routine production (as in rape culture) and by following Calvin Colarusso's (2012) discovery of a profound link between male masturbation fantasy and male aggression, I argue for a deeper consideration of non-consensual male masturbatory fantasies that target

a specific woman, or a generic fantasy of “women,” than is currently available in the scholarly literature.

One possible way to look more deeply at this problem is through a consideration of the applicability of its constitutive elements as a form of nonphysical violence. Nonphysical violence has received much attention in the scholarly literature at least since the 1960s when Johan Galtung (1969) published a seminal piece, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” dedicated to the topic of *structural violence*. Galtung describes structural violence poignantly, conveying both its subtlety and harm, when he writes, “when one husband beats his wife there is a clear case of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence” (1969:171). In the intervening decades, theories and data on nonphysical forms of violence, including sexual violence, have emerged and matured, and presently there are several applicable categories of nonphysical sexual violence that can apply to non-consensual male autoeroticism that targets women. These, however, are also only partially germane and inadequate to fully characterizing the problem. By drawing on a multitude of sources spanning several domains of thought and numerous empirical studies, in this article I discuss symbolic violence, discursive violence, and gender violence as they arise within the sexual realm and indicate how they are useful but insufficient to describe the sexual violence implicitly making women objects of their masturbatory fantasies.

Women, rather than other common targets of male fantasy (such as homosexual men fantasized about by other homosexual men), are the primary group of interest in this paper because of the inherent power imbalance within patriarchal society. Moreover—and even without appealing to power dynamics, male discourses of objectification, and patriarchal dominance—female masturbation may represent a distinct category of behavior as compared with male masturbation while fantasizing about women. For instance, Colarusso (2012) cogently explained that the “central masturbation fantasy in heterosexual males” depends directly upon male aggression, though this is not generally the case with

female sexual fantasies. That is, male sexual fantasies about women tend to *objectify* their targets while female fantasies tend to humanize and preserve subjectivity. Moreover, Rudman and Heppen (2003) found that women's implicit but not explicit *romantic* erotic fantasies negatively predict their interest in obtaining personal power whereas no such relationship between romantic fantasies and the will to power exists in men. Further, as a final point of contrast, though there were once negative associations in some college-aged males (Durham and Grossnickle 1982), female masturbation and fantasy is now generally viewed by men and especially women as sexually empowering (Bowman 2014). These factors suggestively indicate that female autoeroticism may be likely to decrease, not increase, structural harms against women, though the reverse does not generally hold.

Thus, non-consensual male fantasizing about women and corollary autoeroticism forms an underappreciated and understudied form of sexual violence against women that occurs specifically through objectification and by producing other forms of nonphysical violence. In addition to harming women directly, within men it acts to perpetuate rape culture (Fox et al. 2015), thus evoking Ann Murphy's observation, which follow the arguments of Catherine MacKinnon (1989b), that "discursive violence and material violence intersect radically" (Murphy 2009:66). Indeed, as Murphy later makes clear, the connections between "concrete, material and symbolic violence" are intrinsic, and while segregating them may be "analytically useful," doing so leaves much to be desired in the study of violence (2012:22). She writes,

[O]ne cannot coherently claim that material violence is more "real," more "concrete," than the violence of subjection. To do so would be to presuppose a naïve relation between matter and the symbolic and likewise fail to acknowledge the manner in which cultural matrices of intelligibility delineate in a very real sense the contours of the flesh ... For these reasons, an easy parsing of symbolic and concrete violence is not only theoretically unjustified; it is a practical impossibility. (Murphy 2012:22)

Thus, the issue of non-consensual male masturbation may constitute a unique form of structurally embedded sexual violence routinely perpetrated against women that, since no one is able to directly control the contents of men's fantasies, goes without any effective avenues for remediation. It thus requires its own attention, scholarly and otherwise, to initiate a new cultural awareness about the harms present in this behavior. To begin this endeavor, after detailing how various forms of symbolic violence, discursive violence, and gender violence account for only part of the violence of non-consensual male masturbation routinely perpetrated against women, I will fill in the necessary gap by introducing the concept of *metasexual* violence, which operates primarily through specific aspects of depersonalization as mediated by objectification.

Sexual Injury, Objectification, and Rape Culture

Sexual objectification has been a persistent problem throughout history that, despite progress in other related arenas, like discrimination and rape law, has seen little remediation through the present day. Furthermore, in contemporary society many routinely excused male behaviors objectify women, and objectification of women carries attendant harms. These include, for example, harmful masculine discursive tropes that orient women as potential or actual sex objects for male enjoyment (e.g., employment in *sexually objectifying environments* [Szymanski and Feltman 2014, 2015; Szymanski and Mikorski 2017]), subjecting women to the objectifying/male gaze (Gervais, Vescio, and Allen 2011), pornography abuse (Attwood 2004; Tylka and Kroon Van Diest 2015), the neoliberalization and commodification of the female body (Griffith et al. 2012; Rottenberg 2017), creating sexual pressure for women in relationships (Ramsey and Hoyt 2015), and disrupting a woman's social activism (Calogero 2013). Psychologically, these behaviors and their concomitant impacts are frequently interpreted through Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) framework called "objectification theory."

Objectification theory aims to "understand the experiential effects of living in a culture that sexually objectifies women's bodies" and are applied to explaining the prevalence of some mental

health concerns common in women (Szymanski and Feltman 2015:390). As described by Szymanski and Feltman (2015:390),

Sexual objectification occurs any time a woman's body is visually evaluated based on sexual desirability and regarded as a separate entity from the woman herself. In other words, objectification takes place when a woman's body, body parts, or sexual functions are evaluated apart from her as a holistic individual, thus allowing her to be viewed and treated as a sexual object. The sexual objectification of women's bodies is a ubiquitous practice in any patriarchal culture (Western culture included) and serves as one of the critical methods employed to disempower women.

Going further, Eileen Ray (1996:321) points out that women subjected to sexual objectification are made into "objects, rather than thinking, feeling human beings," and then she remarks that "MacKinnon (1989b) argued that objectification is unique to women and is the 'fundamental motive force' (p. 130) in the construction of sexuality as a system of patriarchal domination." MacKinnon does not go too far in implicating patriarchal domination, for the ubiquity of objectification constitutes a form of structural violence (Galtung 1969). To appreciate the depth of this structural violence, Ray (1996) immediately adds depth that supports several of the above harms, "Objectification allows researchers to more easily quantify the experiences of sexually harassed individuals, *rather than listening to their stories*" (321, emphasis added).

This is only the tip of the objectification iceberg, however. As MacKinnon (1989b:140) summarizes, and to which I shall subsequently return,

To be sexually objectified means having a social meaning imposed on your being that defines you as to be sexually used, according to your desired uses, and then using you that way. Doing this is sex in the male system ... If sex is a social construct of sexism, men have sex with their image of a woman. Pornography creates an accessible sexual

object, the possession and consumption of which is male sexuality, to be possessed and consumed is female sexuality.

Ultimately, MacKinnon and Ray are both hinting at the aspect of sexual objectification that Rae Langton (2009) calls “autonomy-denial” (223) and elaborates upon in considerable detail (esp. 223–239). Particularly, Langton introduces the necessity to explore sexual objectification categorically by explaining, “when object-hood is projected onto women, women not only seem more object-like, but are made to become more object-like” (12). This, she observes, is how “objectification in the epistemological sense might hook up with objectification in the moral sense” (12). By treating sexual objectification this way, Langton’s analysis adds depth to Martha Nussbaum’s (1995) paradigmatic seven-point cluster-concept characterization of objectification as instrumentality, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, ownership, and denial of subjectivity (Langton 2009:225–226) by considering not only “what an ‘object’ is, but on what ‘treating as’ amounts to” (226, emphasis original). Thus, to Nussbaum’s seven criteria, Langton (2009) usefully adds three more: “reduction to body” (228), “reduction to appearance,” and “silencing” (229). Among these, though all ten criteria are in ways useful to an analysis of objectification through male fantasy for the purpose of non-consensual autoeroticism, Langton’s reduction-to-body is of particular significance.

Setting theory aside, the direct and associated harms of sexual objectification for women are myriad and well-developed throughout the empirical scholarly literature. These include specific problems with the objectifying gaze (Gervais, Vescio, and Allen 2011), insidious trauma (Miles-McLean et al. 2015), diminished relationship satisfaction (Ramsey, Marotta, and Hoyt 2017) which may contribute to otherwise unnecessary relationship failures, “body surveillance and body shame through internalization” (Tylka and Kroon Van Diest 2015:67), a decreased perception of victim suffering and associated rape blame (Loughnan et al. 2013) along with a corollary perpetuation of rape culture and the discourses that support it, and a demonstrable increase in the rates of verbal sexual

harassment (Davidson, Gervais, and Sherd 2015). Among the established harms of objectification—and of critical importance to the characterization of non-consensual male masturbation as a form of sexual violence against women—is social psychologists Loughnan’s et al. (2010) in-depth empirical analysis of how sexual objectification of women leads to *depersonalization*, that is, “the denial of mind and moral concern to objectified others” (Loughnan et al. 2010:709). Put more simply, Loughnan’s et al. empirical studies underscore perennial claims in feminist literature (e.g., Dworkin 1985) that objectified people “are denied personhood” (Loughnan et al. 2010:709).

Taking inspiration from a broad range of philosophical literature and some social psychological work by Heflick and Goldenberg (2009), whose limited “study is the first to demonstrate that objectification leads to a reduction in perceived humanity” (Loughnan et al. 2010:710), Loughnan et al. “predicted that when people are presented in an objectified manner they would be depersonalized, and specifically denied mental states (dementalized) and moral status” (710) and confirmed this empirically via two studies. Though one of these studies indicated (for reasons possibly rooted in sexism [715]) that males lose more moral status through objectification than women, the authors conclude, “the current research demonstrates a causal link between objectification and depersonalization. Objectification leads to people being viewed as lacking mental states and being less deserving of moral status. As the opening quote by Andrea Dworkin states, when objectification occurs, the person is depersonalized” (716). That is, “As objectification increased, mind attribution decreased and moral status was withdrawn” (716), the latter of these being characterized as “a particularly worrying original finding of this research is that objectification diminishes a second aspect of personhood” (716). Phrased differently, male autoerotic fantasy both literally and figuratively “rubs one out”: Literally in the sense of the slang term for (male) masturbation and figuratively in the sense of erasing the person of the targeted woman. For the purposes of this paper, these empirical results are indispensable for

understanding the ways in which non-consensual male fantasy and autoeroticism constitute sexual violence against targeted women.

Male Masturbation as Symbolic, Discursive, and Gender Violence

To understand non-consensual male masturbation as a unique form of sexual violence against women, it must be considered against relevant developed forms of nonphysical (sexual) violence; furthermore, while all of these partially capture the nature of the problem, they are also all insufficient to the task. The three most relevant types of nonphysical violence against women are *symbolic violence* in two forms (per Pierre Bourdieu and George Gerbner), *discursive violence* as it applies to the sexual realm, and Judith Butler's notion of *gender violence*, which arguably originated in *Gender Trouble* (Butler 1990) and has been developed considerably since.

Symbolic Violence

The notion of *symbolic violence* is twofold, owing to fundamentally different uses of the term by Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and George Gerbner et al. (1982), and both are relevant yet insufficient to characterizing the sexual violence against a woman or women that occurs under non-consensual male masturbation. Turning first to Bourdieu, in *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1986), he initially described his notion of symbolic violence as the internalized acceptance of subordinating or oppressing social circumstances. For Bourdieu, symbolic violence occurs as a potential harm of unequal symbolic power within social space, and as he elaborates in "Social Space and Symbolic Power,"

Symbolic power, whose form par excellence is the power to make groups (groups that are already established and have to be consecrated or groups that have yet to be constituted such as the Marxian proletariat), rests on two conditions. Firstly, as any form of performative discourse, symbolic power has to be based on the possession of symbolic capital. The power to impose upon other minds a vision, old or new, of social divisions depends on the social authority acquired in previous struggles. Symbolic

capital is a credit; it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition ... Secondly, symbolic efficacy depends on the degree to which the vision proposed is founded in reality ... Symbolic power is the power to make things with words. It is only if it is true, that is, adequate to things, that description makes things. In this sense, *symbolic power is a power of consecration or revelation*, the power to consecrate or to reveal things that are already there. (Bourdieu 1989:23, emphasis original)

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence can thus be understood as a corruption of the application of symbolic power (cf. Bourdieu 1979; Bourdieu and Wacquant 2013). That is, Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence occurs when the power of words (or actions) are used against groups to *desecrate* or *hide*.

In this way, Bourdieu's conception of symbolic violence can be applied to the problem of non-consensual male autoerotic fantasy, but to apply it in a straightforward way requires being unjustifiably contrived. Particularly, the symbolic desecration of women is a direct consequence of depersonalization, which Loughnan et al. (2010) demonstrated occurs through sexual objectification, which in turn is a central part of the application of a masturbatory fantasy about a non-consenting woman (that is, a woman who did not grant her permission for him to masturbate while thinking of her)—this fantasy turns the very notion of such a woman into an object of fantasy and autoerotic gratification. (This immediately brings to mind Langton's [2009] "reduction to body," "reduction to appearance," and "silencing".) Bourdieu, as conveyed in Emirbayer and Johnson (2008), characterizes symbolic violence even more explicitly as a form of a subordinate internalizing the discourses of those dominant over them such that "the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural" (31). In this sense, because many women take for granted that the non-consensual use of her form, body, or being as a (potential) object for male fantasy is acceptable and

even natural behavior in males, a man non-consensually masturbating to thoughts or images of a woman perpetuates a form of symbolic sexual violence by reinforcing and reproducing the subordination of women as sex objects that exist for male sexual gratification (Krais 1993). This is, not incidentally, a central performative hallmark of rape culture (Fox et al. 2015).

To understand how Bourdieu's symbolic violence partially characterizes this problem in a less contrived way, a subtler approach is necessary. It is because this production of male sexual dominance is perpetually entailed in the social allowance of men masturbating to fantasies of whichever women they like, so long as they do not force them on the woman in question, that leads one toward seeing autoerotic fantasizing as a form of structural symbolic violence like Bourdieu (1989) described (cf. Krais 1993). Women tacitly accept this behavior, and it is (typically) rare in mainstream society for men to *inform* targets of their fantasies that they are using some part of their being as a kind of personal pornography. Notably, this occurs despite the ethical questions about producing this sort of private pornography non-consensually, mirroring the legal and ethical prohibitions on making material pornography without its subjects' consent (Burriss 2014; cf. Fineman 2010; Najdowski 2017; Stroud 2014; Waldman 2015). Thus, it is only subtly that the acceptance of this ubiquitous male behavior can be considered to reinforce and naturalize discourses that position men as the natural users of females as sexual objects. Furthermore, and crucially, this concept of symbolic violence seems to miss the essence of the violence contained in the non-consensual masturbatory fantasy and act. Indeed, a man masturbating while thinking of a woman is only sometimes an intentional act of power that seeks to legitimize and naturalize dominance of men. It is also an erotic act, and in this light, it does not make sense to talk about masturbating without consent to the images of thoughts of a woman in terms of symbolic violence. Nevertheless, men masturbating to the thought of specific women reinforces the social structure that women exist for male pleasure and are ultimately depersonalized sexual objects

who are limited in their sexual agency, as men are free to masturbate to them whenever they desire and without consent.

Moreover, it is not only that men can masturbate while thinking about women *whenever* they want; they can also do so *however* they want, including making the targeted women objects of rape fantasies, recipients of physical violence, and non-agential willing or enthusiastic participants in the man's erotic pleasure. Thus, the concern is not only that a man can fantasize about a woman without her consent while gratifying himself through a physical autoerotic sex act; it is that in so doing he also allows his mind to wander to myriad conceptions of what "he will do to her" in the process. This is inherently demeaning and degrading in that it removes the targeted woman's agency, and because it is often literally demeaning and degrading in content, it often directly reproduces Bourdieu's (1986) structural circumstances by which men dominate and subjugate women through the expression of their sexuality (cf. MacKinnon 1989b). In this way, Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence applies, but is woefully insufficient to describe the sexual violence represented by non-consensual use of thoughts of a woman during male masturbation.

George Gerbner's conception of symbolic violence—which is violence produced symbolically through depictions in media, especially on television (cf. Bourdieu 2001; Frison et al. 2015; Gerbner 1988; Gerbner and Gross 1976; Gerbner et al. 1982; cf. McRobbie 2004; cf. ter Bogt 2010)—likewise grazes the issue of sexual violence through non-consensual male autoerotic fantasy but fails the task. For Gerbner, the particular issue at the center of symbolic violence is as a socializing force that reproduces within the culture a sense of "who can get away with what against whom" (Gerbner et al. 1982). Seen in this way, non-consensual male masturbation while fantasizing about women *nearly* constitutes a form of symbolic violence in that the act combines mental imagery—not unlike a (essentially pornographic) film playing in the mind—with physical autoerotic performance that behaviorally reinforces that a man can get away with objectifying a woman (and imagine doing

anything he wants to her) fully outside of her consent and awareness. It is, in some sense, the unlicensed production of a mental “pornographic film” through which the male socializes himself to believe he can objectify women for his own autoerotic gratification by which Gerbner’s notion of symbolic violence (here: sexual and against women) can best frame non-consensual male masturbatory fantasies. Indeed, theoretically pornography can be traced through the literature to being a form of symbolic violence in itself: Tyler (2015) argues persuasively that pornography can be understood as a form of prostitution, or at least as a glamorous portrayal of such, and Coy, Wakeling, and Garner (2011) clearly explain how such glamorized representations of prostitution constitute symbolic violence against women. Despite these connections, however, as with Bourdieu’s conception of symbolic violence, Gerbner’s also falls short.

The most obvious point of departure between the sexual violence of non-consensual male fantasy and masturbation and Gerbner’s notion of symbolic violence is that these sexual micro-assaults are taking place privately, not being produced and reproduced publicly. This, however, tells only part of the story, for what, other than (mostly male) fantasies portrayed upon the screen, is pornography? Further, what can be said of the ubiquity of pornography use among men (James 2011) and the ways in which it surely informs their masturbatory fantasies? That is, the gulf between pornographic media and mental (re)productions of such, if for the purpose of male fantasy and autoeroticism, may not be so wide as it at first appears (cf. McRobbie 2004). A more significant point of departure, then, is a subtler one of greater consequence: that Gerbner’s conception of symbolic violence nevertheless misses the crucial harms of objectification present in the fantasy-masturbatory act. Finally, the manners in which symbolic violence encapsulate some but not all of the ways in which non-consensual male fantasy and masturbation represent a form of sexual violence against their targets, illustrate that it is, indeed, an as of yet unclassified form of sexual violence that cannot be fully described under the rubric of symbolic violence in either of its primary theoretical formulations.

Discursive Violence

According to feminist geographers Jones, Nast, and Roberts (1997:394), discursivity is defined “as those processes and practices through which statements are made, recorded, and legitimated through institutional and other means of linguistic circulation. Discursive violence, then, involves using these processes and practices to script groups or persons ... in ways that counter how they would define themselves.” At first glance, this understanding of discursive violence seems inapplicable to the harms associated with objectification that arises from male autoeroticism and fantasy, even when connected to a subordinate target; for what *linguistic circulation* is involved in mere fantasizing? A deeper reading, however, indicates several ways in which this behavior is closely related to, and often becomes, discursive violence against its female masturbatory targets. First, Jones, Nast, and Roberts (1997) are careful to distinguish that what is ultimately relevant to discursivity, thus to discursive violence, are the *processes and practices through which* discourses are produced and legitimated. Yet, are male masturbatory fantasies about female sex objects not the very process and practices by which and for which pornographic media are produced? Second, there is no reason to discount pornographic media and the discourses typifying it from being “means of linguistic circulation” (394). And what, other than neoliberal commodification of male fantasies about women, is heterosexual pornography? In this sense, pornography is produced and recorded in such a way that it legitimates, fecundates, and circulates male fantasies in a media-based discursive form. Moreover, when it “scripts groups or persons... in ways that counter how they would define themselves,” say, women as objects of male fantasy and autoerotic gratification who need not give consent to be objectified and used, it is clear that discursive violence against women is being produced. In that sense, male fantasies that both precede and yet are informed by the extant body of pornographic material and related discourses themselves represent a form of discursive violence against women that has not yet been reified discursively. That is, male autoerotic fantasies about non-consenting women constitute a form of *proto-discursive* violence against women.

Pornography often is or contains explicit sexual discursive violence against women. Ultimately, pornography arises from, commodifies, and legitimates male sexual fantasies, particularly those that objectify women, and reciprocally, male sexual fantasies draw upon pornography for input(s), including explicitly discursive content (such as “dirty talk”), which are then applied to the target of the male fantasy and objectify her accordingly (Barker 2014). Of course, whether pornography is problematic in and of itself is a topic of much heated feminist debate with a long history (see, e.g., Ciclitira 2004; Dworkin 1980, 1985; Henderson 1991; Lottes, Weinberg, and Weller 1993; MacKinnon 1985, 1989a, 1989b; MacKinnon and Dworkin 1997; Smith and Attwood 2014), and this essay makes no attempt to evaluate, adjudicate, or position itself within those specific debates. Instead, it draws only upon the well-established corpus of evidence demonstrating that pornography often objectifies women, makes them into caricatured objects of male fantasies, is frequently cishetero-male in orientation, and carries the attendant harms of objectification in its wake. There is much scholarship indicating harmful themes in pornography related to objectification and depersonalization, such as that it degrades women (Bridges et al. 2010; Cowan and Dunn 1994; Shaw 1999), exerts negative forces on the family (Manning 2006), can cultivate attitudes of male aggression and female degradation (Bridges et al. 2010; Malamuth, Addison, and Koss 2000) (including in males who support feminist beliefs) even when it is nonviolent in nature (Glascok 2005), discursively conveys themes of male dominance and aggression toward women (Bridges et al. 2010; Sun, Ezzell, and Kendall 2017), can cultivate sexual callousness (Zillmann and Bryant 1982), callousness toward sexual assault (Foubert and Bridges 2017), and sexist attitudes among men (Shaw 1999), can lead to the questioning of female agency (Corsianos 2007), lower relationship satisfaction (Leonhardt and Willoughby 2017; Shaw 1999), and directly contribute to female objectification (Fritz and Bryant 2017), body shame, body surveillance, internalization, eating disorder symptomology, increased relationship anxiety, lowered self-esteem, and produced negative affect (Stewart and Szymanski 2012; Tylka and Kroon Van Diest 2015).

Of note, due to their production in pornography, the violence in these themes is, indeed, discursively produced, rendering it a mode of what Stef Shuster (2017) has called *discursive aggression*, “a term for the communicative acts used in social interaction to hold people accountable to social- and cultural-based expectations, and subsequently to reinforce inequality in everyday life” (483) that “explicitly placing power at the center of understanding micro-inequalities in everyday life” (484). It is therefore also consistent with discursive violence as described by Jones, Nast, and Roberts (1997), and Bridges et al. (2016). They found these discursive productions reliably reproduced by consumers of pornography, with men more likely than women to enact them. Furthermore, and underscoring this robust body of literature, Shaw (1999:197) writes,

[W]omen's reactions to pornography, especially to violent pornography, were consistently negative. Pornography elicited fear reactions, had a negative effect on women's identities and on their relationships with men, and was seen to reinforce sexist attitudes among men. Despite this, many of the women felt that their opinions were not “legitimate”, [sic] and overt resistance to pornography was often muted.

This, in fact, creates a direct causal connection on more than one level between pornography—thus male sexual fantasy that emulates it and leads to its production (Barker 2014)—and discursive violence against women, in the form of these attendant harms. Indeed, as Shuster (2017) observes, “While here I emphasized the importance of ‘talk’ in maintaining inequality in interaction, discursive aggression might be imported into communicative methods beyond talk” (496). For Shuster, then, it is less the method of “discursive” production that matters than that “*Discursive aggression* that continues to be enacted by the same people reflects how encounters are wrapped into the gender system and gender expectations that shape communication patterns” (491, italics added).

Despite these significant connections between male autoerotic fantasy, pornography, objectification, and (proto)-discursive violence against women, and though almost certainly co-

constituted with these connections, something critical about the violence perpetrated by this routine male behavior is still missed by attempting to classify male masturbation as a form of discursive violence when it targets non-consenting women. First, some will object that male fantasy may *contribute to* and *be informed by* and even *reproduce* discursive violence against women in sexual settings, and yet it *is not itself* a form of discursive sexual violence. Second, some may object to the comparison of fantasy and pornography due to the fact that while women can opt into becoming pornographic objects by their own agency, or thus choose not to, they can do nothing to stop a man using her being as a source of autoerotic fantasy. These concerns carry weight. The type of harm perpetrated by non-consensual male autoerotic gratification that utilizes and objectified image of a woman or women still falls largely outside of the explanatory reach even of *proto*-discursive violence.

Because the objects of male fantasies suffer depersonalization through his targeted autoeroticism, something more and something different is absent in this characterization. It is not just that male masturbatory fantasy creates these injuries in a way similar to what pornographic films might, or even that these injuries are a chronic problem for essentially every woman whether she participates in pornographic productions or not; it's that the male fantasy depersonalizes a woman by routinely creating and recreating a "social meaning imposed on [her] being," which is what MacKinnon (1989b:140) was so adamant about including under the motif of sexual objectification.

Gender Violence

Judith Butler's concept of gender violence arose in *Gender Trouble* (Butler 1990), in a chapter dedicated to her analysis of Monique Wittig's explications of violence (cf. Karhu 2016:6–9), to evince understanding that violence is often gendered and serves to maintain structural inequalities that disadvantage and oppress women. Though Butler admits all types of violence that prop up gendered oppression under the heading of "gender violence," the concept originally had much to do specifically with discursive violence applied structurally. Butler understands gender violence as a kind of normative

violence—that violence which is done by making normative that which marginalizes or oppresses—though she never directly construed it as a kind of structural violence (cf. Boesten 2010:9) or cultural violence like developed and discussed by Johan Galtung (1969, 1990). Nevertheless, Sanna Karhu (2016) clarifies these underlying connections between Butler’s gender violence as normative violence and the structural violence it contains. Karhu points out that the roots of the concept lie in Wittig’s interest in the influence language has over social reality: “She [Butler] starts the chapter [of *Gender Trouble*] with an epigraph, a quotation from Wittig: ‘Language casts sheaves of reality upon the social body.’ Later on in the text, she repeats the statement, adding the remaining part: ‘stamping it and violently shaping it’ (Butler 1990/1999:147)” (Karhu, 2016:6). Gender violence is, for Butler, ultimately a “violence of categorization,” creating an intersection between its discursive elements and Bourdieu’s structuralist symbolic elements (Krais 1993), though she also recognizes, as did Murphy (2009:66) that there are profound intersections between physical violence and various forms of nonphysical violence. As Karhu explains,

Furthermore, Butler adds in a footnote that both physical violence and the violence of categorization can be understood as aspects of the gendering violence through which the discourse of heterosexuality operates: “[Wittig’s] theory might account for the violence enacted against sexed subjects—women, lesbians, gay men, to name a few—as *the violent enforcement of a category violently constructed...* Because discourse is not restricted to writing or speaking, but is also social action, even violent social action” (212, n. 26). (Karhu 2016:6, [Karhu’s] emphasis)

Thus, since male fantasy categorizes women as suitable to be objectified for autoerotic gratification, and that objectification carries attendant injuries to the woman/women, following from the preceding section and subsections it is immediately clear that non-consensual male autoerotic fantasy constitutes a form of gender violence as Butler imagines it. The problem, however, is that this identification covers

none of the distance to the specific *kind* of gender violence it represents or how it perpetrates its harm, which I have already argued extends beyond the reach of both symbolic and discursive conceptualizations. That is, the routine enactment by men of non-consensual sexual fantasy and autoerotic gratification certainly constitutes some kind of violence; that violence is *gender* violence that maintains structural inequalities favoring male dominance and male sexuality over women, and yet the concept of gender violence only opens the door to exploring the relevant mechanisms and full scope of this underappreciated form of routine sexual violence against women.

Metasexual Violence

As the previous section indicates, that non-consensual male fantasy and autoerotic gratification constitutes a form of nonphysical sexual violence against women is easily established; it is a form of gender violence that can be partially characterized as symbolic and discursive, though none of these adequately addresses the full scope of the injury represented by this problem. To fill this gap, I propose that non-consensual male fantasy, especially with autoerotic gratification, is a type of *metasexual violence*, which draws upon a layer of erotic experience that can be described as *metasexual*, though very little literature (and no scholarly literature) exists as of yet to describe this concept. Briefly, the *metasexual* describes those many and valued aspects of erotic experience that rest affectively atop and beside the mere physical sexual act, including partnership, intimacy, interaction, connection, trust, warmth, mutuality, reciprocity, and affection (cf. “Positive Mitch” 2011). These factors are ultimately rooted in personhood, subjectivity, embodiment, and thus vulnerability and the appreciation of the “vulnerable subject” (Fineman 2008:9; cf. Murphy 2012). These are what objectification strips away from a targeted woman.

To elaborate, for a man to masturbate to thoughts of a woman ultimately and intrinsically depends upon him objectifying her, which depersonalizes her (Loughnan et al. 2010) and robs her of her subjectivity, which in turn does violence to the woman in a more profound and specific way than

can be captured by symbolic, discursive, and gender violence. In depersonalizing the female object of his fantasies while engaging in a physical (autoerotic) sexual act with some aspect of her being, if only in his own mind, a man essentially removes the affective aspects of consensual partnered sex and reduces the woman to a mental representation of her body (cf. Langton 2009:228), doing so either without her consent or against her will, entirely for his own pleasure. That is, although no woman's being or image exists specifically *for a man's orgasm*, by autoerotically fantasizing about her, he strips the woman about whom he fantasizes of her person, embodiment, and subjectivity for nothing more than the purpose of his fantasy and his orgasm, and as a sexual act this leaves it completely without the affective interplay of situations and perspectives that make up a fully consensual, reciprocating, partnered setting. This missing layer of erotic activity is what is described as metasexual, and a person's capacity for metasexuality is what makes them a sexual *person* who can be metasexually depersonalized through objectification (per Loughnan et al. 2010). Metasexual erasure is therefore likely to be the most cogent explanation for Ramsey, Marotta, and Hoyt's (2017) observation that objectification, even within ongoing romantic relationships, routinely leads to diminished relationship satisfaction, among other similar injuries. That is, it is in the sense of *metasexual injury* that the masturbating man perpetrates the harms associated with objectification and depersonalization upon the object of his fantasies, and thus the sexual violence represented by this act is best understood as being metasexual in nature.

The metasexual violence of male masturbation need not only be characterized by its status as theft of the affective, embodied, and relational aspects of sex; it can also serve as a kind of theft of a woman's sexual identity. This can apply both to asexual women, who are disinterested in sexual advances and already suffer strain from living within a sexual culture (Scherrer 2008; Vares 2017), and to lesbians, in particular. Consider the popularity of lesbian pornography, thus male fantasies about lesbian women, among heterosexual men. When a man does metasexual injury to lesbian women

through his own autoerotic gratification, he isn't merely objectifying and depersonalizing her; he is also re-appropriating her sexual identity for his own pleasure, which effectively requires its erasure. In fact, lesbian pornography that unrealistically satisfies the *male fantasy* by being made *by men, for men*—typically featuring performers who appeal specifically to heterosexual male fantasies while recentring their faux-lesbian performances upon the arousal of men—is problematically indicative of the genre (Camp 2014). This pornography, and thus these male fantasies, directly appropriate and objectify lesbian identities (cf. Cruz 2016; Smith and Luykx 2017), bringing them under the dominion of male sexual utility, and therefore depersonalize lesbian women both as their targets and as “collateral damage.” This considerably expands the potential scope of metasexual violence that routinely occurs through non-consensual male autoeroticism.

Thus, when a man masturbates unbidden to a woman, even when that woman has produced and published erotic or sexual media of herself (e.g., nude, erotic, or pornographic “selfies,” usually in this case *for* herself, in contrast to commercially produced pornography), he perpetrates an act of metasexual violence against her by fully objectifying her, removing all metasexual elements of the sexual act that he privately imagines between them, and making his pornographic projection of her being, reduced to mere body, into an object of his own sexual arousal and orgasm. When this is done without her consent—particularly without her knowledge—it can be recognized as constituting a form of *metasexual rape* and, as it is routinely produced and tacitly sanctioned culturally, thus becoming yet another means by which rape culture is reproduced, legitimized, and perpetuated by non-consensual male autoeroticism. As male masturbation is an incredibly commonplace occurrence (Jones and Barlow 1990), this behavior becomes a routine pattern of metasexual violence that repeatedly depersonalizes the objects of his fantasies, thus leading him to think of the targets of his fantasies in an objectified and depersonalized way (perhaps even more with each occurrence). This, coupled with feigned ignorance and even tacit acceptance of the behavior, including as codified in privacy law, recalls Gerbner's et al.

(1982) injunction that symbolic violence reaffirms who can get away with what against whom, thus compounding the metasexual violence inherent in non-consensual male masturbation about women. It also indirectly recalls Jones, Nast, and Roberts' (1997:394) description of discursive violence in that it is reproduced and legitimated through routine male behavior, thus, as Butler (1990:147) phrased it, "stamping [the female social body] and violently shaping it" as a form of gender violence (cf. Kraus 1993).

Concluding Remarks

Men masturbate to the privately objectified image of women constantly and frequently non-consensually, thus producing an under-studied form of sexual violence against women. Unlike most forms of sexual violence against women, the act of non-consensual male autoeroticism against female targets escapes classification and remediation, however. As argued here, it cannot satisfactorily be categorized as symbolic violence, either as conceived of by Bourdieu (1986, 1989) or by Gerbner et al. (1982), or as (proto)-discursive violence, and although Butler's (1990; cf. Karhu 2016) notion of gender violence clearly applies, it does so without capturing the specific essence of gender violence that occurs. That violence is ultimately a violence of routine objectification and depersonalization (Loughnan et al. 2010), and it is best described as being metasexual in nature.

Because it seems that the realm of private fantasy is (and should be) just that—private—little has been done to study this routine male act of sexual violence against women, though the attendant harms as documented throughout this paper should not ethically continue to be ignored and go without remedy. If, indeed, the personal is political (cf. Ryan 2007), every act of metasexual violence perpetrated against women by men who masturbate to some private objectification of their being is itself a political act of domination. More than that, though, it is also an injurious act that repeatedly exposes women to the myriad harms of objectification through depersonalization for little more than the momentary satisfaction of the male (autoerotic) sexual urge. At this stage, as legislation regulating

the private is unlikely to be feasible, a remedy is to properly label this common form of male sexual violence, accurately characterize and study it through continued feminist scholarship, and raise awareness of its many problematic features through educational and activist campaigns.

In conclusion, sexual violence against women is a serious, persistent problem. Its remediation may depend upon understanding and raising awareness about even its subtlest manifestations and the influences those have on more overt forms of sexual violence, like propping up and encouraging rape culture. Among these influences, perhaps the most common and least considered is the metasexual violence contained within non-consensual male autoerotic fantasy that targets, objectifies, and depersonalizes women. If we are to address sexual violence against women in all its forms, this problem must be seriously considered, then directly and honestly engaged.

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