

Sexual Fantasy and the Eroticization of Evil*

Richard Kimberly Heck

Department of Philosophy, Brown University

Abstract

Many people have sexual fantasies about being forced to have sex, or forcing someone to have sex. Several authors have argued that it is wrong to enjoy such fantasies: They lead to harm, or reinforce oppressive social structures, are liable to corrupt our character, or, mostly interestingly, are wrong in themselves, because they involve the eroticization of things that are wrong. I argue here that all such arguments fail properly to distinguish between fantasy and desire (despite authors' acknowledgement of that distinction), and between objects of desire and sources of arousal. The broader significance of this point is also discussed.

The message isn't in the plot—the old hackneyed rape story—but in the emotions that story releases.

Nancy Friday, *My Secret Garden*, p. 109

Most people indulge in sexual fantasy from time to time, as an idle daydream, during masturbation, or during partnered sex (Sue, 1979; Knafo and Jaffe, 1984). The content of these fantasies is extremely various. Many consist of memories of previous sexual experiences: One's first time with one's partner, or some special time. But some people's fantasies are more adventurous. Nancy Friday's classic study of women's sexual fantasies, *My Secret Garden*, reproduces fantasies concerning sex with strangers, being watched by others, children, incest, bestiality, and masochism, among other things (Friday, 1973). Her study of men's fantasies added anal sex, watersports, and group sex to the mix (Friday, 1980). Most striking, however, are what Friday terms 'rape' fantasies

*Draft of December 3, 2023

and what, following much of the empirical literature, I'll here call 'force' fantasies.¹ These are fantasies in which some form of coercion is used against the person to force them to have sex. In one recent study, 62% of 355 women undergraduates reported having had such a fantasy, with about one in seven saying they had such fantasies at least once a week (Bivona and Critelli, 2009). Many men also have force fantasies, though most studies find that more women than men do (Sue, 1979, p. 303; Leitenberg and Henning, 1995, p. 482).² Such fantasies are at first sight puzzling. Why would someone fantasize about, and be sexually aroused by the thought of, something that would be so horrible, so traumatic, if it were done to them in real life? It's not as if people who have such fantasies are unaware of how awful sexual assault really is.³

More obviously troubling, from a moral point of view, are what we might call 'forcing' fantasies, in which the fantasizer forces someone to have sex with them. Both men and women (and, I would suppose, people of other gender identities) have such fantasies, though men tend to have more of this sort than women do (Leitenberg and Henning, 1995, p. 483). In such a fantasy, one is imagining doing something morally wrong, indeed, profoundly wrong. Many fantasies involving children and incest will be similar in this regard⁴ and, depending upon one's other moral views, so may fantasies involving bestiality and group sex. But forcing fantasies seem especially concerning. We live in a world in which men's forcing women to have sex with them is not only not rare but is a sufficiently real danger that the prospect of sexual violence structures the lives of all women, even those who are not so violated themselves. One might well suspect that (some) men's fantasizing about forcing women to have sex with them contributes, in some way, to the scourge of sexual violence. Other authors have argued that having such a sexual fantasy is wrong in itself, whether or not it has bad consequences, because fantasizing about anything that is wrong is itself wrong. That would presumably include sex outside one's current monogamous relationship, which is another extremely common fantasy.

¹ I do so in order to avoid unnecessary use of the word "rape", though sometimes using that word is necessary.

² Person et al. (1989) found no significant difference between men and women.

³ Indeed, women who have been victims of sexual assault seem no less likely than women who have not to have force fantasies. See the discussion in Shulman and Horne (2006, p. 369) and references cited therein.

⁴ I say "many" because a fantasy involving one's own childhood sexual experiments might be an exception, and not everyone would regard consensual sex between adult siblings as necessarily wrong.

My main goal here is to argue against these positions. My view is that fantasizing about something is never wrong in itself, so long as it is ‘just a fantasy’. Much of the work we do here will involve explaining what that means and arguing, against skeptics, that fantasy not only can be but routinely is wholly divorced from desire and other ‘pro-attitudes’, in the way that my argument requires.

There are three reasons, besides its intrinsic interest, to be interested in whether ‘naughty’ fantasies, as John Corvino (2002) calls them, are morally benign. First, as Sandra Lee Bartky famously noted, many people who have such fantasies experience significant inner conflict as a result. Women who have feminist attitudes are no less likely to have force fantasies than women who do not have such attitudes (Shulman and Horne, 2006, p. 372).⁵ But shouldn’t they be? How can a woman who is committed to eradicating sexual violence take pleasure in imagining being sexually violated? Bartky (1984, p. 327) famously suggests that such a woman is “entitled to her shame”, not in the sense that she ought to feel shame but in the sense that there is an adequate basis for it: “Her desires are not worthy of her. . .”.⁶ In response, Lynne Segal (1992, p. 71) suggests that “such a woman is ‘entitled’ neither to shame nor to guilt, but rather to the lowering of ignorance about the nature of fantasy. . .”. Our discussion will reinforce Segal’s response to Bartky by explaining what confusion about “the nature of fantasy” underlies Bartky’s discussion.

Second, questions about the morality of fantasy are obviously relevant to the debate over the morality of dominant–submissive roleplay and BDSM more generally (Linden et al., 1982; Hopkins, 1994; Vadas, 1995; Stear, 2009). Such roleplay is often described as ‘acting out a fantasy’. If dominant or submissive fantasies are already wrong, then acting them out—for example, roleplaying a ‘scene’ in which one person is sexually

⁵ Shulman and Horne say in the text that “there were not any statistically significant indirect relationships found in this model between feminist beliefs and forceful sexual fantasy”. But the chart on that same page (372) indicates a significant ($p < .05$) though extremely weak ($r = 0.12$) *positive* correlation between having feminist attitudes and having force fantasies.

⁶ It’s worth noting that women who have force fantasies tend to have *less* sexual guilt and to be *more* ‘erotophilic’ (roughly, more sexual) than women who do not. This leads Strassberg and Lockerd (1998, pp. 413) to suggest that women who have such fantasies are simply sexual omnivores and that these fantasies are “just one more expression of a generally open, positive, unrestrictive, and relatively guilt-free expression of one’s sexuality”. See also Meeker et al. (2020), which reviews literature concerning women who practice BDSM but also identify as feminists.

violated by another—is presumably also wrong. Indeed, many of the arguments against BDSM apply just as well to purely private fantasies as to roleplays (e.g., Hein, 1982; Morgan, 1982), and I’ll draw on some of this literature below. Showing that such fantasies are benign is a necessary first step towards defending the moral neutrality of BDSM, though only a first step, since there are other concerns one might have, such as whether it is really possible to consent to, say, being caned.⁷

A third connection is to the debate over pornography. Although non-consensual sex is not a particularly common theme in cinematic pornography,⁸ it is a *very* common theme in written pornography. On the popular website Literotica, where (mostly pseudonymous) authors self-publish erotic fiction,⁹ the category “NonConsent/Reluctance” contains over 35,000 stories as of this writing, making it the fourth most populated category. Such themes are also common in the genre known as “dark romance”, most of which is written by women and for women (Vargas-Cooper, 2015). For example, the erotic novel *Asking For It*, by Lilah Pace (2015), concerns a young woman who has recently broken up with a man who was deeply disturbed by her force fantasies and was most certainly not willing to act them out with her. Early in the book, she meets a man who has *forcing* fantasies that he’s never been able to act out, and the book tells their story.¹⁰ This book was published by an imprint of Penguin Random House. Virgin Books—think Virgin Airlines—has an entire series, Black Lace, devoted to such themes, with over 250 titles having been published so far (according to Wikipedia).

The second most populated category on Literotica is “Incest/Taboo”, with over 63,000 stories, and the ten most read stories on the site are all from this category. And there are lots of pornographic movies that

⁷ That said, not all BDSM involves the intentional infliction of pain, so what’s argued here may suffice to establish the acceptability of some forms of BDSM.

⁸ See Heck (2023) for discussion and references. I also argue there that the infamous “Dirty Pool” pictorial (published in *Hustler* magazine in January 1983) should be understood as presenting a *fantasy* about non-consensual sex. If I’m right, that pictorial raises the issues we’ll be discussing here.

⁹ I count such fiction as pornography, using that term in a broad sense to encompass (roughly) any sexually explicit media produced with a primary intention that it be sexually arousing to its audience. Many authors (e.g. Steinem, 1983) have wanted to distinguish pornography from ‘erotica’, but such a distinction has proven elusive. Ellen Willis (1983, p. 463) famously quipped that “What turns me on is erotic; what turns you on is pornographic”.

¹⁰ Jonah is clear about the line between fantasy and reality: “I would never force a woman against her will. Never. If someone held a gun to my head, I’d tell him to shoot” (Pace, 2015, p. 31).

feature incest—or, at least, ‘fauxcest’: sex between step relations. Indeed, ‘taboo’ porn takes its name from the 1980 film *Taboo*, directed by Kirby Stevens, which is all about the sexual attraction between a recently divorced mother and her son. The two of them have sex twice in the film. *Taboo* was followed by nearly two dozen sequels and several imitators, but fauxcest porn went mainstream following the success of Nica Noelle’s 2009 film *The Stepmother* and its sequels, which led several major studios to release their own lines of ‘taboo’ porn.¹¹ Many of these stories and films involve relationships in which there are significant power differentials and sometimes outright coercion.¹²

Here again, one might wonder about the ethics of producing such films (Whisnant, 2016, p. 7). One common defense, from the producers themselves, is that such films are ‘just fantasy’ and should not be taken to endorse or encourage real-life incest. Indeed, it is common for ‘taboo’ porn to include a disclaimer to that effect.¹³ But if indulging in the fantasy the film presents is itself wrong, then this ‘fantasy defense’ must fail. And Susan Dwyer has argued explicitly that¹⁴

some pornography is morally problematic *because* it provides the raw material for and helps to nurture a class of morally bad actions—namely, sexual fantasizing about a variety of

¹¹ For example, the Tabu Tales series from New Sensations/Digital Sin, which began in 2012 with *Father Figure*, directed by the self-described feminist pornographer Jacky St James.

¹² For example, in *Keep It in the Family* (2014, directed by Jacky St James), Nicole ties her step-brother to a chair in order to force him to have sex with her.

¹³ For example, the following appears at the beginning of the Tabu Tales films:

Sexual activity between step-parents and step-children is a crime in some jurisdictions. This film is a *fantasy* and just like all our movies—it isn’t reality. It is certainly not advocating that the viewers re-enact anything depicted. The real life performers are not related in any way. They aren’t related as steps or otherwise. The sex they are having is a consensual performance that is being acted out solely as a *fantasy* for the viewer. (emphasis added)

Other studios have the performers themselves present the disclaimer, out of character, again emphasizing that they are not actually related.

¹⁴ As Liao and Protasi (2013, p. 105) note, the ‘sensible anti-porn’ argument developed by Eaton (2007) makes crucial reference to the role of imagination in the experience of pornography. In that sense, Eaton’s argument is similar to Dwyer’s. But it is not obvious to me that Eaton’s argument applies to private fantasy, as opposed to pornographic representations. Part of the reason is that Eaton tends to be focused (rightly, to my mind) on what she elsewhere calls our ‘collective’ erotic tastes (Eaton, 2016)—that is, on socio-sexual norms—not on individual erotic preferences.

harms to oneself and/or to others. (Dwyer, 2005, p. 70, emphasis added)

For Dwyer, then, it is the wrongness of fantasizing about such harms that is primary. Pornography is blameworthy in so far as it encourages such wrongful fantasizing. A subsidiary aim here, then, is to undermine Dwyer's argument by showing that *privately* fantasizing about incest, or about non-consensual sex, need not be morally problematic. One might have other reasons to worry about public presentations of such fantasies, as in pornography. But the argument here will show that the mere fact that some pornographic films and stories encourage 'naughty' fantasizing does not by itself make them morally objectionable.

As I've just intimated, the claims I am defending here are officially limited to 'private' fantasizing.¹⁵ However, there is significant overlap between the literature on sexual fantasy and the literature on BDSM, and some overlap with the literature on pornography, as well, so I will draw on these, especially in section 3. I'll also restrict attention, for the most part, to solitary fantasizing, since the use of fantasy in the context of partnered sex, common though it may be,¹⁶ raises additional issues. Some people have no problem with their partners' fantasizing during sex; other people, infamously one of Nancy Friday's partners, feel differently (see Friday, 1973, ch. 1).¹⁷ For the same reason, I'll mostly restrict attention to 'anonymous' fantasies, as opposed to fantasies about specific individuals. At least according to one study, most people think it "acceptable and non-violating" for others to have romantic or sexual fantasies about them (Busch, 2019, p. 852), but perhaps they would feel differently if the fantasies were of the sorts we are discussing here (Neu, 2002, p. 143).

¹⁵ Zheng and Stear (2023) make a similar distinction. Their discussion, however, is almost opposite mine: focused entirely on public performance.

¹⁶ In ten of the twelve studies reviewed by Leitenberg and Henning (1995, p. 471), more than half of women reported sometimes fantasizing during intercourse; this was true in six of seven studies that asked men the same question. In most of these studies, it is well over half the men and women who sometimes fantasize during intercourse. (The numbers would probably be even higher if subjects were asked about partnered sex more generally.) In four of the six studies that had both men and women as subjects, there was little if any difference between men and women in this regard. In the other two, there was a difference, but it was a different difference (i.e., reversed).

¹⁷ See note 26 for bits of this story.

1 What Is Sexual Fantasy?

1.1 Fantasy, Arousal, and Pleasure

We should begin, of course, by discussing exactly what will be meant here by a ‘sexual fantasy’. The term seems to be used with a variety of meanings. Some authors, such as Jenny Bivona and Joseph Critelli (2009, p. 33), use it in a broad sense, as “refer[ring] to almost any conscious mental imagery or daydream that includes sexual activity or is sexually arousing”. They credit this definition to Harold Leitenberg and Kris Henning, but those two actually use a different definition: “almost any mental imagery that is *sexually arousing or erotic* to the individual” (Leitenberg and Henning, 1995, p. 470, emphasis added). The difference is that Bivona and Critelli would count as a ‘sexual fantasy’ even an occurrent memory of an unpleasant sexual experience or, importantly, a woman’s imagining what might have happened to her had she not been able to get away from a man who was following her. Such a fantasy would be an example of what Bivona and Critelli call an ‘aversive’ force fantasy: one that causes negative emotions like fear and anxiety rather than positive responses like arousal and pleasure.

My sense is that most researchers do not use the term “sexual fantasy” as Bivona and Critelli do but in a way closer to how Leitenberg and Henning use it. In any event, here is how I will use it: Sexual fantasies are imaginative episodes—let me not try to say what I mean by ‘imagination’—undertaken in an effort to initiate, sustain, or heighten one’s own sexual arousal.¹⁸ Typically, though not necessarily, these will be sexually explicit. Note that, on my usage, “mental imagery” is not required. That would needlessly privilege visual imagination. Sexual fantasies can, it seems to me, be purely narrative.¹⁹ Note also that I am thinking of sexual fantasies as *intentional* imaginings, so I am not including random thoughts that just pop into one’s head. Meeting an attractive person, one might find oneself struck with arousing thoughts about them. The mere having of such fleeting thoughts is not, it seems to me, morally evaluable. But one can choose to linger on such thoughts, or not, and if one does choose to do so, then at that point one is *doing*

¹⁸ This definition is to some extent inspired by Jacobsen (1993). The definition could be expanded to include stories two people construct together. But we are focusing here on ‘private’ sexual fantasy.

¹⁹ Moreover, requiring visual imagination would make it impossible for many people to have sexual fantasies: congenitally blind people and sighted people with aphantasia (the inability to form mental imagery).

something. As Dwyer (2005, pp. 73–4) emphasizes, at that point, moral evaluation becomes at least possible.²⁰ Since our interest is in such moral questions, I will restrict my use of the term “sexual fantasy” to intentionally undertaken imaginative episodes. So the question at issue here is really whether *fantasizing* of a certain sort is morally problematic. When we ask whether a certain sort of sexual *fantasy* is morally problematic, we are really asking about the act of consciously and intentionally entertaining that fantasy.

I will be assuming, not arguing, that there is nothing wrong, in general, with privately enjoying sexual fantasies,²¹ say, about the first time one had sex with one’s current partner. Not everyone would agree. Julia Penelope (1980, p. 103) once suggested that sexual fantasy, even during masturbation, “may be a phallogentric ‘need’ from which [lesbian feminists] are not yet free. . .”, and Christopher Cherry (1988) has argued that all forms of fantasizing are morally wrong, because they distract us from the proper business of life. Such moral perfectionism has little to recommend it, and Penelope’s suggestion is purely speculative. As mentioned earlier, research shows that almost everyone has sexual fantasies, and the dominant view nowadays is that sexual fantasizing is “a common. . . aspect of normal sexuality”,²² something people do “to enhance the pleasure of other sexual activities (e.g., intercourse or masturbation) or as a pleasurable act in and of itself. . .” (Strassberg and Lockerd, 1998, pp. 403–4).²³

Let me emphasize that I do not mean just to say that fantasizing is *excusable*. My view, which seems to be shared by most sex therapists,²⁴ is instead that fantasizing is potentially valuable in its own right, both for the pleasure it can bring and, as Martin Barker (2014) emphasizes, as a way of exploring one’s erotic response to the world.²⁵ Nor should one

²⁰ Cooke (2014, p. 318) and Smuts (2016, p. 385) make similar points.

²¹ When I speak here of “enjoying” sexual fantasies, I simply mean intentionally entertaining them for the purposes of sexual arousal. I don’t mean to imply anything about one’s affective response.

²² I’ve elided the words “and natural”, whose meaning in this context is entirely unclear. We don’t need to commit the naturalistic fallacy, either.

²³ Leitenberg and Henning (1995, p. 469) put this well: “What humans think about can either enhance or inhibit sexual responsivity to any form of sensory stimulation, and, in the absence of any physical stimulation, sexual fantasy alone is arousing”. See also Morgan (2003) on the importance of intentional states to sexual arousal.

²⁴ See e.g. Perel (2006, ch. 9), Solot and Miller (2007, pp. 29–34), and Joannides (2014, ch. 28).

²⁵ I would similarly reject, along with most sex therapists, any suggestion that private fantasizing is wrong because it encourages masturbation. I regard masturbation not

think that sexual fantasy during partnered sex is necessarily a sign that something is wrong with one's sexual relationship with one's partner. Barbara E. Hariton and Jerome L. Singer (1974, p. 315) found, for example, that sexual fantasizing among their subjects was "generally not related to sexual or marital difficulty but rather with an enhancement of desire and pleasure".²⁶ Later studies have come to similar conclusions. There is now strong evidence, for example, that women who fantasize during intercourse are more likely to orgasm and that frequency of fantasy correlates *positively* (if at all) with sexual satisfaction (Leitenberg and Henning, 1995, p. 477).

1.2 Fantasy vs Desire

As emphasized at the outset, people's sexual fantasies vary enormously in their content. They range from vivid memories of prior events to hoped-for future events (a new romantic interest) to things one knows will never happen (sex with one's favorite celebrity) to things that are literally impossible to realize (sex with fictional characters, be they human, alien, or cartoon). They may be first-personal or third-personal, and they may be third-personal even when one is oneself a character in the story. One may identify with one of the characters or with none of them—I am inclined to say that one can even *be* someone else in one's fantasy—and such identifications can be shifting and fleeting, a frequently emphasized point that is usually credited to Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis (1968, p. 17).

just as excusable but (at least potentially) as a positive good, and not just as a substitute for partnered sex, as many earlier authors suggest (see e.g. Nagel (1969, p. 14), Ruddick (1975, p. 90), and Goldman (1977, pp. 270, 277)).

²⁶ This same point is made powerfully, though polemically, by Nancy Friday:

"Tell me what you are thinking about", the man I was actually fucking said, his words as charged as the action in my mind. As I'd never stopped to think before doing anything to him in bed (we were that sure of our spontaneity and response), I didn't stop to edit my thoughts. I told him what I'd been thinking.

He got out of bed, put on his pants and went home.

Lying there among the crumpled sheets, so abruptly rejected and confused as to just why, I watched him dress. It was only imaginary, I had tried to explain. . . . I'd never even have had those thoughts, much less spoken them out loud, if I hadn't been so excited, if he, my real lover, hadn't aroused me to the point where I'd abandoned my whole body, all of me, even my mind. Didn't he see? (Friday, 1973, p. 16)

No, sadly, he didn't. Only the man she would later marry would understand.

All this already makes it important to distinguish fantasizing about something from desiring it. If I fantasize first-personally about having sex with, say, Bette Davis, then it would not be wholly unreasonable to suggest that, at some level, I really do desire to have sex with her (despite the impossibility). But if I have a sexual fantasy in which Captain Kirk has sex with Mr Spock—perhaps I’ve been reading homoerotic K/S ‘slash fiction’ (Mag Uidhir and Pratt, 2012, p. 153)—then it is far from obvious that I must somehow desire that Kirk should have sex with Spock. What’s true (in the example!) is just that I find the idea of Kirk having sex with Spock sexually arousing. That makes it at least unobvious that my fantasy about Bette Davis must reveal my true desires either. Maybe I just find the idea of having sex with her arousing.

Some sexual fantasies, then, are about something one would actually like to have happen, and some are not. I’ll call fantasies of the former sort ‘desire-based’ fantasies; those of the latter sort I’ll call ‘pure’ fantasies. The latter are the ones that are ‘just’ fantasies.²⁷ Almost everyone who writes about sexual fantasy nowadays recognizes this distinction, at least in principle. But it is a common complaint that not everyone honors the distinction in practice. Bartky (1984, p. 323, fn. 1) notes explicitly that “the having of a fantasy, every detail of which the woman orchestrates herself is not like a desire for actual rape”. But then, as Jean Grimshaw (1993, p. 149) observes, Bartky “writes in what seems to be an undifferentiated way about fantasy and desire...”. Segal (1998, pp. 57ff) makes the same sort of complaint about many anti-pornography feminists. I’ll be arguing below that many of the more recent authors who’ve argued that ‘naughty’ fantasizing is morally problematic make this same mistake.

First-personal force fantasies—sexual fantasies in which one is being coerced to have sex—are most certainly ‘pure’ fantasies:²⁸ Women who have such fantasies do not secretly desire to be raped. It’s impor-

²⁷ Cherry makes the same distinction, though using different terminology: What I’m calling ‘desire-based’ fantasies he calls “surrogate” fantasies; my pure fantasies are his “autonomous” fantasies. I do not like the term “surrogate”, because it suggests that fantasies are a kind of substitute, and that need not be true. Cherry does, however, suggest a useful diagnostic: “...[H]ow will a fantasiser react to the promise (or as it may seem, threat) that the real thing can be arranged” (Cherry, 1985, p. 185)?

²⁸ Smuts (2016, p. 387) writes that “More likely than not, first person imaginings are [desire-based] fantasies”, but he gives no reason for this claim, and I see no reason to believe it. And third-personal fantasies can be desire-based: Some men who have ‘cuckolding’ or ‘hot wife’ fantasies really do want their partner to have sex with someone else, though many do not. So these distinctions cross-cut each other.

tant to recognize, however, that this was not always appreciated. In the Freudian tradition, fantasy has often been understood in terms of vicarious wish-fulfillment.²⁹ Fantasy of all types was regarded as a kind of substitute, and sexual fantasy was regarded a symptom of dysfunction: a result of “sexual dissatisfaction, immaturity, frustration, inhibition, masochism, and unconscious sexual conflicts. . .” (Leitenberg and Henning, 1995, pp. 476–7).

Women’s force fantasies, in particular, were taken to be evidence of the inherently masochistic nature of women’s sexuality—and even as evidence that some women are or would be ‘willing victims’ of rape (Hariton and Singer, 1974, pp. 313–4).³⁰ On the basis of interviews with women who have such fantasies, Nancy Friday vehemently rejects this claim:

Fantasy need have nothing to do with reality, in terms of suppressed wish-fulfillment. Women. . . whose fantasy life is focused on the rape theme, invariably insist that they have no real desire to be raped, and would, in fact, run a mile from anyone who raised a finger against them, and I believe them. (Friday, 1973, p. 127)

More systematic empirical studies—especially a fascinating study by Susan B. Bond and Donald L. Mosher (1986) that we’ll discuss below—would later confirm Friday’s thesis.³¹

I mention this history to make a dialectical point. As we shall see below, those who would argue that it is always wrong for men to fantasize about forcing women to have sex with them frequently base their argument upon some version of the following claim:

(FD) Sexual fantasies, if they are to have their intended effect upon us, must engage our sexual desires.

These authors then conclude that men who have forcing fantasies really do, in some sense, and to some extent, desire to force women to have sex with them. But (FD) would seem equally to imply that women who have force fantasies really do, in some sense, and to some extent, desire to be raped. And that is not just a conclusion some twisted person *might* draw but an actual conclusion that many otherwise thoughtful people

²⁹ Segal (1992, p. 70) suggests that this is a shallow reading of Freud. I wouldn’t know.

³⁰ To be clear, the authors I’ve just been citing do not endorse this view.

³¹ For a broad review of such studies, see Leitenberg and Henning (1995, pp. 482–4).

did draw. But, I am prepared to insist, there is *no* sense in which women who have force fantasies desire to be raped,³² so (FD) must be rejected unless these cases can be distinguished. In particular, it is not enough to *excuse* women's force fantasies on the ground that we live in a world in which men's domination of women, and women's submission to men, is eroticized. That may be so, but it does not prevent (FD) from implying that upwards of 60% of women secretly want to be raped, in some sense, and to some extent.³³

Now, obviously, some men do genuinely desire to dominate women, and in some cases that will extend as far as a desire to violate women sexually. Many men who have such desires will, one would suppose, also fantasize about dominating women. By definition, these men's fantasies are not 'pure' fantasies but rather what I have called 'desire-based' fantasies, and it is no part of my purpose here to argue that *desire-based* forcing fantasies are morally benign. Indeed, I am inclined to think that 'naughty' fantasies are morally acceptable only when the fantasizer themselves is clear that the fantasy is 'pure': that they do not, in any sense, nor to any extent, desire what arouses them in fantasy.³⁴ We'll return to this point below.

2 The Arguments

I now turn to discussion of arguments that sexual fantasies about things that are wrong are themselves wrong. We'll consider three types of arguments: A broadly consequentialist argument that such fantasies lead to harm, which we'll discuss in section 2.2; a virtue ethics-based argument that such fantasies tend to corrupt one's character, to be discussed in section 2.4; and a quite different argument that the eroticization of, say, rape is incompatible with the proper moral response to it, to which we'll turn in section 3. We'll begin, though, with something that isn't really an argument at all.

³² Unless that sense is something like: wanting to engage in roleplays in which they are 'raped'. We'll return to this point. The claim I am making is that no sane woman wants, in any sense, or to any extent, *actually* to be raped.

³³ Of course, I do not mean to imply that any of the authors we will be discussing would embrace this conclusion. I *am* claiming that their views imply it.

³⁴ A more nuanced view might be that the fantasy is benign only to the extent that it is 'pure'. But I suspect that there is less of a continuum here than a sharp distinction, at least in the cases that matter to us. A fantasy about someone one just met might be borderline, but force and forcing fantasies are typically one or the other.

2.1 The 'Intuitive' Worry

Susan Dwyer (2005, pp. 77-8) invites us to imagine two worlds that differ only in that, in one of them, many people have violent sexual fantasies and, in the other, no one does. "Which is the morally preferable world?" she asks. Aaron Smuts (2016, pp. 383-4) does something similar. Now Dwyer is clear that this example "does not establish very much". But my sense is that the instinctive repulsion many people feel when they imagine someone fantasizing about, say, violent rape makes them think there must be *something* wrong with enjoying such fantasies.

Citing Klaus Theweleit (1987), Grimshaw mentions sexual fantasies that certain German mercenaries recorded in their diaries between the two world wars. "These frequently involved the violent murder and mutilation of 'The Red Woman'—a mythical and over-sexualized figure of the communist woman..." (Grimshaw, 1993, p. 156). Such fantasies are horrifying. But my own response is, at the very least, amplified by my knowing that these were *not* 'just fantasies'. Many of these soldiers really did want to rape, murder, and mutilate Russian women, as history sadly confirms. We can stipulate, if we like, that Dwyer's imaginary subjects would never act on their fantasies. But it is far from obvious to me that such a stipulation will or even can affect our 'intuitive' response to those fantasies. I for one find it difficult to imagine how anyone could find the mercenaries' fantasies arousing unless they harbored genuine hatred for Russian women. But if someone did have 'pure' fantasies of this kind, then, or so I will be arguing, there is nothing wrong with their enjoying such fantasies.³⁵

I understand that, to many, this will feel wrong. But I think the point important. There are not many statistics concerning how many adults have sexual fantasies about children,³⁶ but Nancy Friday reports two such fantasies in *My Secret Garden* (see Room 13), and I have personally known two women who were willing to share such fantasies with me. Both of these women are wonderful human beings, no less outraged by the *actual* sexual abuse of children than I am. I do not think that the fact that they happen to be aroused by such fantasies speaks ill of them, and I do not think that their enjoying such fantasies is wrong, given

³⁵ The Japanese video game *RapeLay* raises similar issues. See Galbraith (2017).

³⁶ In a study of undergraduates, Person et al. (1989) found that 5% of women and 29% of men had recently had a fantasy of 'having sex with a much younger partner', but it is not clear just what that includes. Also worth mentioning here is the 'adult baby' kink, which is not uncommon.

that their fantasies are indeed ‘pure’. It is easy to understand why they might feel ashamed of their fantasies. But what I am arguing here is that, contra Bartky, there is nothing for them to be ashamed of. That is what is so important to me.³⁷

Our ‘intuitive’ response to thought experiments like Dwyer’s, I suspect, illicitly involves a kind of ‘backtracking’ counterfactual. These are counterfactuals like “If Kennedy had met Castro in 1963, Cuba would not have been a dictatorship”, uttered not because one thinks the meeting would have accomplished something momentous but because Kennedy would only have met Castro if he’d renounced communism. In the case of Dwyer’s example, I suspect that what we are really thinking is that, if no one had such fantasies, then no one would have such *desires*—and not because the fantasies give rise to the desires. That is, what we are thinking is that the world would have to be a very different place for no one to have such fantasies. But then it is not just the presence or absence of the fantasies to which we are responding.

In that sense, the fact that force and forcing fantasies are so common might reflect poorly on contemporary sexual culture. Indeed, it is a common refrain among certain sorts of feminists, most notably Susan Brownmiller (1975, pp. 322ff), that women who have force fantasies are, in effect, victims of the patriarchy, socialized to enjoy their own degradation: “The rape fantasy exists in women as a man-made iceberg. It can be destroyed—by feminism.” But why does Brownmiller think the fantasy needs to be destroyed? She never quite says.³⁸ But it would obviously be fallacious to infer from the fact that such fantasies are a product of unjust social arrangements that there is anything wrong with the fantasies themselves. Brownmiller’s book is, in part, itself a product of unjust social arrangements, just as *Schindler’s List* is, in part, a product of the Holocaust (Stear, 2009, p. 30).

It is a different question, however, whether those of us who would seek a more equitable form of heterosex are well served by the stock of sexual fantasies most readily available in contemporary culture. It may well be, in fact, that the real change we seek in individual heterosexual

³⁷ To anticipate section 2.2, empirical work shows that “Even fantasies about sex with children and arousal to sexual imagery of children do not, by themselves, indicate that someone is a child molester or has a strong potential to be a child molester” (Leitenberg and Henning, 1995, p. 488).

³⁸ In many ways, Brownmiller seems to be like Bartky’s character P, who is ashamed of having such fantasies. Brownmiller does discuss such fantasies of her own, and she certainly seems troubled by them.

relationships depends upon our somehow making available new ways of thinking about what Simon Hardy calls “heterosexual eroticism”.³⁹ As Hardy (2000, p. 79) observes, the erotic language of much mainstream pornography “is strongly predicated on the symbolic power of men over women”, and one might well say something similar about many romance novels (Snitow, 1983; Sonnet, 1999), and other forms of popular culture. My own view is that feminist and queer pornography have, potentially, an important role to play here and that some contemporary pornography has already started to explore a different vision of heterosexuality. But that is a topic for another paper.

To return to Brownmiller, it is far from obvious that eradicating gender inequality would ‘destroy’ women’s force fantasies. It isn’t just that men also have such fantasies. Jessica Benjamin (1983, pp. 382ff) has argued, largely amplifying themes in Hegel and Beauvoir, that human relationships, sexual and otherwise, cannot but be characterized by relations of power, with our desire for ‘recognition’ forever in danger of collapsing into dominance and submission.⁴⁰ Benjamin and many others have suggested as well that adult sexuality is inherently imbued with power. Grimshaw (1993, pp. 152–3), for example, reminds us of “the power to give pleasure, to dominate the senses of the other, temporarily to obliterate the rest of the world; the power involved in being the person who is desired. . .”.⁴¹ To give a concrete example, many people enjoy various forms of ‘teasing’ and ‘edging’: of taking one’s partner to the brink of orgasm and then delaying their release, despite their desperate pleas—and of being taken there. It would hardly be surprising if, in fantasy, such benign uses of power were taken to an extreme. Fantasy, as Judith Butler (1990) reminds us, is all about extremes.

It’s not the origin of such fantasies that should concern us, but their effects. The real worry is that such fantasies somehow *reinforce* or *support* the unjust social arrangements that allegedly give rise to them.

³⁹ Hardy’s paper, though maddeningly unclear at crucial points, is perhaps the best discussion of this issue known to me.

⁴⁰ See also Benjamin (1980, 1990).

⁴¹ I have elided Grimshaw’s mention of “the power to demand one’s own pleasure”, which is pretty clearly not equitably distributed and which seems quite different from the other forms of power she mentions.

2.2 Do ‘Naughty’ Fantasies Have Bad Consequences?

It’s not entirely unreasonable to be worried that a man’s fantasizing about forcing women to have sex might lead him to *want* to force women to have sex and even actually to do so. And some of the empirical literature has explored the role that such fantasies play in the genesis of sexual violence. Some researchers have suggested that perpetrators of such violence first ‘try out’ or ‘rehearse’ their crimes in fantasy before committing them (Maniglio, 2010, p. 297).⁴² But many people who never commit sexual crimes have similar sexual fantasies, and there is simply no evidence that having such fantasies, by itself, will incline someone towards sexual violence (Leitenberg and Henning, 1995, p. 488).

One might worry, however, that such fantasies will have less direct consequences. Thus, Diana Russell writes:

Proponents of sadomasochism espouse violence, pain and torture as long as they are consensual. But images of women being bound, beaten and humiliated foster ideas that this behavior may be acceptable. . . whether or not the recipients of this violence are portrayed as consenting. (Russell, 1982, p. 179)

Russell is concerned with pornography, not private fantasy, but one might have a similar worry even there. Might privately fantasizing about “violence, pain and torture” also “foster ideas that this behavior may be acceptable”? Might entertaining fantasies about sexual violence lead one to regard sexual violence as acceptable?

Eileen L. Zurbriggen and Megan R. Yost (2004) studied fantasies involving dominance, such as forcing fantasies (as opposed to force fantasies), finding that about 48% of men and 25% of women included such fantasies among their two favorite or most frequent ones. They did find there to be a statistically significant correlation, among men (but not women), between fantasies of dominance and acceptance of rape myths. But the correlation is weak ($r = 0.22$): A man who has such fantasies is not even 5% more likely to endorse rape myths than someone who does not. And, as Zurbriggen and Yost emphasize, it would be a mistake to conclude that enjoying such fantasies *makes* someone (even a little bit) more likely to accept rape myths. Correlation, as always, does not imply causation. Correlation is a symmetric relation, so Zurbriggen

⁴² This is why I said above that it is important not just that the fantasies be ‘pure’ but that the fantasizer be clear about that fact.

and Yost's data provides just as much support for the claim that it is accepting rape myths that makes a man more likely to have dominance fantasies, not the other way around. And, on reflection, that seems fairly plausible.

In fact, though, Zurbriggen and Yost's study may not bear upon the question we are discussing at all. The reason is that they do not distinguish between desire-based dominance fantasies and pure dominance fantasies. It would be no surprise if men who had *desire-based* dominance fantasies were more likely to accept rape myths—that is, to hold views that served to excuse or justify their genuine desire to dominate women sexually. Leitenberg and Henning (1995, p. 488) make a similar point: “Generally, . . . it seems that one needs to be concerned about these sorts of fantasies primarily in those individuals in whom the barrier between thought and action has been broken”, that is, in men whose fantasies reflect their desires or who are, more generally, unable to distinguish fantasy from reality. But I am not arguing that desire-based dominance fantasies are morally benign, only that ‘pure’ dominance fantasies are. Since Zurbriggen and Yost's results do not concern only pure fantasies, their bearing upon our discussion is not obvious.

Of course, it's possible that men who have pure dominance fantasies are also more likely to accept rape myths. But what little empirical work there is that might bear upon this question suggests otherwise. As was noted above, women who have feminist attitudes (which presumably involves not accepting rape myths) are no less likely than women who do not have such attitudes to have force fantasies. Relatedly, Critelli and Bivona (2008, p. 61) note that there has been little change in the prevalence of such fantasies over the last few decades, despite significant (if inadequate) changes in gender norms, the social status of women, and attitudes about sexual violence. Another study found no significant differences between BDSM practitioners and non-practitioners either in pro-feminist attitudes or in general attitudes about women. Indeed, though the difference was not statistically significant, the practitioners exhibited slightly *more* feminist attitudes than the non-practitioners, and this was true even of who prefer the dominant, rather than the submissive, role (Cross and Matheson, 2006, pp. 145–6).

2.3 Taking Fantasy Seriously

One of Catharine MacKinnon's many profound contributions to our understanding of gender oppression is her recognition of the role that

is played in sustaining it by the eroticization of gender inequality: of men's domination of women and of women's submission to men (see e.g. MacKinnon, 1989, p. 316).⁴³ In a similar spirit, Bartky (1984, p. 326) suggests that "women's acceptance of domination by men cannot be entirely independent of the fact that for many women, *dominance in men is exciting*".⁴⁴ It is no part of my argument here to challenge these insights. What I am questioning is whether someone who has 'pure' sexual fantasies about domination necessarily eroticizes *real* domination, and it is real domination that counts.

One way to avoid that conclusion would be to reinterpret the fantasies themselves. Thus, we find Grimshaw (1993, p. 151) insisting that sexual fantasies need not "have a clear and obvious meaning which can just be read off from some account of the salient features of the narrative".⁴⁵ As if to develop this point, Strassberg and Lockerd (1998, p. 404) note that the men in many women's force fantasies tend to be sexually attractive to those women and that the women are not "hurt in any way". In many such fantasies, "this desirable partner is overwhelmed by his attraction to the woman to the extent that he is willing to use force or coercion to get her to submit". So one might think of these fantasies as being extreme variants of another common fantasy theme: being found sexually irresistible (Sue, 1979, p. 303).⁴⁶

Dwyer complains that the strength of the impulse to reinterpret sexual fantasies seems to be proportional to how much they unsettle us. If Alex fantasizes about having sex with a celebrity, then we are happy enough to answer the question why Alex enjoys this fantasy by saying that Alex is attracted to that person. "It is only when we don't like what we see that we... seek reassurances that neutralize the elements of those fantasies we do not like" (Dwyer, 2005, pp. 78–9). But this seems to ignore the distinction, emphasized above, between desire-based fantasies and pure fantasies. If a fantasy is one that the person would, at least plausibly, be happy to have 'come true', then the question why they might enjoy that fantasy answers itself. But some fantasies, such as women's force fantasies, and many men's forcing fantasies, are ones that

⁴³ My own appreciation of this point owes much to Eaton (2007).

⁴⁴ In context, it is clear that Bartky means *sexually* exciting.

⁴⁵ See Butler (1990) and Segal (1998) for similar remarks. This is also a pervasive theme in Nancy Friday's writings about sexual fantasy.

⁴⁶ Eugene Kanin (1982, p. 119) expresses a similar view, going so far as to claim that "The conscious fantasizing of rape as a sexually rewarding event appears to be something of rare phenomenon".

the people who have these fantasies have *no* desire, they vehemently insist, to see realized. In that case, the question why the person would be aroused by such a fantasy is not so easily answered. Indeed, this is the central question in much of the literature on women's force fantasies. Showing that women who have such fantasies do not secretly want to be raped was job one, but it does not answer the question why women *do* have such fantasies.

That does not, however, mean that we should not take force fantasies at face value. Bivona and Critelli identify a subset of force fantasies, which they call 'erotic' force fantasies, in which "non-consent was feigned or token". It would not be utterly implausible to claim that these fantasies are not really 'rape' fantasies at all but something else. But nearly half the force fantasies Bivona and Critelli collected had both 'erotic' and 'aversive' elements, and 80% of these 'mixed' fantasies (so a bit more than a third of the total) "contained genuine non-consent by the self-character" (Bivona and Critelli, 2009, p. 41). Many of these fantasies also contained elements of physical violence used coercively (Bivona and Critelli, 2009, p. 44).⁴⁷

In a related but slightly different context, Patrick D. Hopkins (1994, p. 123) once argued that BDSM roleplays in which, say, one participant rapes another do not "replicate" that horrible crime but only "simulate" it and so should not be regarded as 'reinforcing' rape culture. As John Corvino (2002, p. 215) observes, however, it is not the simulation *qua* simulation that arouses: "What turns people on in naughty fantasies is not depiction, but rather what is being depicted". It is not the fantasy as mental object that is arousing nor (typically) the act of fantasizing itself. What is arousing is *what one is fantasizing about*: having sex with Bette Davis or Kirk's having sex with Spock. Call this 'Corvino's Observation'.

What Corvino is suggesting is that people who enjoy rape fantasies eroticize *rape*—wrongly, needless to say. This is clearest from an earlier passage in which Corvino considers a character Fred who enjoys fantasies about homo-erotic fraternity hazing rituals.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Some such fantasies can be very violent indeed. One that Friday (1973, pp. 156–9) attributes to 'Johanna', for example, features a knife-wielding assailant and is based upon an actual rape that she survived. A former lover shared fantasies with me that make that one seem sedate.

⁴⁸ Berys Gaut gives a similar argument:

When the rape fantasist imagines his fictional women, he is imagining them *as women*, that is, as beings of a kind that also has instances in the real world; and that he imagines them as women is, of course, essential

When Fred reads a fraternity-hazing story on the internet, does it matter for erotic purposes whether the story is true or not? Suppose Fred discovers that a favorite story that he had believed to be “fictional” is actually a biographical account. He might feel guilty about continuing to eroticize the story, but will he find it less erotic? Might he not even find it *more* erotic? (Corvino, 2002, pp. 214–5)

Presumably that is possible, but it does not seem to occur to Corvino that his opponent might answer: That would be horrible!

Compare a different case: Corvino’s character “Raymond, who collects and studies newspaper accounts of *actual* rapes in order to enhance his erotic life” (Corvino, 2002, p. 217). Either Raymond is aware of, and sensitive to, the very real harm those crimes did to very real women or else he is not. If he is not, then he sorely needs educating. But if he is, then it is a natural question how Raymond can still find these stories erotic. Does he simply ignore the women’s suffering, set it aside so he can get himself off? Corvino (2002, p. 216) is surely right that “some pleasures are bad because their objects are inappropriate as objects of pleasure”, and actual rapes of actual women are inappropriate objects of pleasure if anything is. But fantasies are different in precisely this respect: No one has been harmed, so there is no harm to ignore.⁴⁹

In response, Corvino might re-emphasize that people who fantasize about rape nonetheless eroticize *rape*. It would simply repeat Hopkins’s mistake to say that they take pleasure only in rape *fantasies*. It is not the fantasy *qua* fantasy that arouses them but what they are fantasizing about. But what I am suggesting is that this point needs to be handled with great care. There is something right about it. But people *can* and *do* respond differently to stories they read on Literotica and stories they read in the newspaper. We’ll discuss this point further below. For now,

to his imaginative project. Thus, **by virtue of** adopting such an attitude toward his imagined women, he implicitly adopts that attitude toward their real-life counterparts—and so reveals something of his attitude toward real-life women. (Gaut, 1998, pp. 187–8; my boldface)

As Cooke (2014, p. 320) notes, however, if the bolded “by virtue of” is meant in an empirical sense, then the evidence says otherwise. If, on the other hand, it’s meant in a conceptual or constitutive sense, then additional argument is badly needed. We’re about to consider whether any might be forthcoming. It isn’t exactly obvious that such men are incapable of distinguishing imaginary women from real ones.

⁴⁹ If one wants to reply that, in the fictional world of the fantasy, the (fictional) women will still have been (fictionally) harmed, then we’ll return to this issue below.

it's enough to have identified what the real issue is: whether people who enjoy rape fantasies eroticize rape, meaning *real-world* rape, not just fantasy rape.

Let me remind the reader, however, that our discussion here is restricted to private fantasizing. It could be argued that publishing 'Non-Consent' stories on Literotica has societal effects of some sort that are not just the result of individual readers' privately entertaining the fantasies described. One might wonder, as well, whether everyone who reads these stories appreciates that they are 'just' fantasies and what kind of responsibility the author and publisher might have to make reasonably sure that they do. But these questions, as I have just said, are outside the scope of this paper.⁵⁰

2.4 Fantasy and Character

Corvino (2002, p. 216) suggests two sorts of non-consequentialist arguments for the moral impermissibility of 'naughty' fantasies. The first is that "naughty fantasies are incompatible with good character"; the second is that "actively entertaining naughty fantasies is wrong in itself, apart from any connection with virtue". We'll discuss the second argument in the next section. This section will be devoted to the first.

Corvino himself does not develop this argument, but Dwyer (2005) does. The basic idea is that fantasizing about things that are wrong is liable to corrupt our 'character'. Dwyer thinks of character as involving whatever "principles of right action" we accept together with some mechanism for ordering these principles (p. 80).⁵¹ She also emphasizes that these aspects of our character can, in principle, be changed. One way of changing them is "to perform a certain type of action because [one] wants eventually to acquire a settled disposition to perform that action" (p. 81). But if that is a way to change our character for the better, then it is also a way in which our character could be changed for the worse.

Naughty fantasizing is meant to exemplify this phenomenon. Someone who has, say, forcing fantasies⁵²

⁵⁰ But see Heck (2023, §5) for some discussion of this issue.

⁵¹ Bare page numbers in this section are citations to Dwyer (2005).

⁵² Similarly, Hein (1982, p. 87) writes: "To degrade someone, even with that person's expressed consent, is to *endorse* the degradation of persons. It is to *affirm* that the abuse of persons is acceptable." I'm happy to concede that 'degrading someone with that person's expressed consent', in a BDSM context, amounts to endorsing the degradation of persons *with their consent, in a BDSM context*. But what Hein is claiming is that we can drop the italicized portion, and she gives no argument for that claim.

appears to endorse actions that might seriously undermine his character and thus his moral agency. He takes deep pleasure in fantasizing about harming others. . . . One ought not be the sort of person who takes sexual pleasure in the debasement of others. And one ought not act in ways that constitute being that sort of person. (p. 82)

It's hard to be sure exactly what argument Dwyer intends here. I would readily agree that one ought not to take any kind of pleasure in the *actual* debasement of others, but why should we suppose that people with forcing fantasies would do so? Just before this passage, Dwyer reminds us that "Habitually performing bad actions, or actions that desensitize one to morally salient facts, can seriously hinder the project of character development" (p. 82). Perhaps the thought, then, is that enjoying such fantasies will "desensitize" one to the wrongness of rape. If so, it would be good to have some evidence for this claim. The studies we reviewed in section 2.2 suggest otherwise.

Another possibility is that Dwyer is following Corvino, whom she approvingly cites a page or so later (pp. 82–3). On this reading, Dwyer is supposing that having a sexual fantasy *just is* taking a "pro-attitude" to the content of one's fantasy (e.g., having sex with Bette Davis, or forcing someone to have sex). This pro-attitude, Dwyer suggests, "can be usefully described by the term 'eroticization' . . ." (p. 79). The crucial claim is thus that someone who has rape fantasies eroticizes *rape*. If so, however, then it is hard to see what the mention of character adds to the argument: Fantasizing about rape is not wrong—or, as Dwyer sometimes says, "risky"—because it might distort one's character (p. 82). Rather, fantasizing about rape is wrong in itself because it involves taking pleasure in the debasement of a human being (even if that human being is oneself). So we have simply discovered again what the real issue is: whether people who enjoy rape fantasies eroticize real-world rape.⁵³

It's time, then, to address that worry directly.

3 Eroticizing What Is Wrong

If there is genuine ground for moral concern about 'naughty' fantasies, then, it amounts to this: that people who enjoy such fantasies wrongly eroticize the 'naughty' thing the fantasy is about. For example, men

⁵³ This, I take it, confirms Corvino's suspicion that the two arguments he mentions are closely related.

who have forcing fantasies wrongly eroticize rape when the appropriate response is rather disgust and condemnation. Thus, Corvino (2002, pp. 216–7) writes that “The intuition⁵⁴ that drives this [argument] is that any seriously wrongful activity merits an attitude of disapproval, and eroticization of such an activity is inconsistent with this attitude”. Similarly, Dwyer (2005, p. 79) writes: “To say that the content of a fantasy pleases the fantast is to say that the fantast takes a pro-attitude toward that content”. Hopkins (1994, pp. 119–21) collects a number of similar remarks from the 1982 collection *Against Sadomasochism*.⁵⁵

There is a lot to unpack here. We’ll begin with Dwyer.

The term “pro-attitude” denotes a loose collection of mental states of which desire, wanting, and so forth are the paradigmatic examples. What’s distinctive of such states is that they have some motivational force. So Dwyer is suggesting that a man who has forcing fantasies must have a desire, or something like one, to force women to have sex, “if only for the duration of the fantasizing episode itself” (Dwyer, 2005, p. 79). Lying behind this claim is the observation of Corvino’s mentioned earlier, which Dwyer (2005, pp. 82–3) cites: that it is not the fantasy *qua* fantasy that is arousing but what the fantasy is about, i.e., its ‘content’. This is confirmed by remarks that follow the sentence quoted in the last paragraph:

The particular pro-attitude that a person takes to the content of his sexual fantasies can be usefully described by the term “eroticization”, where, as John Corvino suggests, to eroticize an activity is to “actively regard...the activity with sexual *desire*”. (Dwyer, 2005, p. 79, emphasis added)

That something is wrong here is suggested by the fact that, as I’ve said repeatedly, and as Dwyer purports to recognize, most men who have forcing fantasies flatly deny that they have *any* desire, sexual or otherwise, actually to commit sexual violence. Dwyer’s argument seems, therefore, to deny that it is so much as possible to have ‘pure’ fantasies. Moreover, surely Dwyer would not want us to conclude that women who have force fantasies “actively regard [being raped] with sexual desire”. But it is hard to see how she can avoid that conclusion.⁵⁶ The claim

⁵⁴ Note that this is not an ‘intuition’ in the sense in which so-called experimental philosophers use that term. That is, it is not an ‘intuition about cases’. What Corvino has in mind is something more like a hunch.

⁵⁵ One of which is quoted in note 52.

⁵⁶ Admittedly, Dwyer (2005, p. 79) later remarks that her argument is that “some fantasizing is morally bad even if the fantast does not, in some sense of ‘want’, want to

quoted is perfectly general, and it would be unmotivated and arbitrary to restrict it to forcing fantasies only.

The central difficulty here is that Corvino's Observation is, in fact, profoundly misleading. This is made clear by a study mentioned earlier. Bond and Mosher (1986) presented two groups of undergraduate women with a story in which they were raped after leaving the campus library and asked them actively to elaborate the story in imagination.⁵⁷ But there was a difference. To one of the two groups, the story was presented as a sexual fantasy, the details of the story subtly altered to encourage that sort of reading. To the other group, by contrast, the story was presented as realistic. The results were as one might have expected. Women in the fantasy condition were significantly more likely to experience sexual arousal than women in the realistic condition, even in the odd setting of a laboratory (pp. 169–71), and they were significantly less likely to experience negative emotions such as anger and disgust—though, strikingly, some women in the fantasy condition felt guilty for enjoying the fantasy (pp. 171–4). Similarly, the post-experiment debriefing revealed that women in the fantasy condition were more likely to have found the experience overall somewhat pleasant, whereas women in the realistic condition tended to find it unpleasant.

It may be true, then, that it is the content of a fantasy that one finds erotic, not the fantasy *qua* mental construct. But that is compatible with one's finding forced sex, say, to be erotic *only in fantasy*. Indeed, what's most striking about Bond and Mosher's study is that it reveals a difference not just between how women respond to rape fantasies and how they respond to actual reports of real-world rapes. The difference is not just between truth and fiction. There is a difference between *fantasizing* about rape and *imagining* rape in a realistic way. Fantasizing about something is thus not the same as imagining it, even though fantasy does involve imagination.

This is not an easy difference to explain, though Bond and Mosher's study makes it clear that there is such a difference. It seems related to the distinction that James Harold (2003, p. 247) draws between

do what he fantasizes doing". But my complaint is that it is hard to square this remark with her remarks about pro-attitudes. Weren't we just told that someone who has forcing fantasies 'actively regards sexual violence with sexual desire'?

⁵⁷ One might reasonably have ethical concerns about such a study. Bond and Mosher (1986, pp. 181–2) do discuss these. Note also that the women in the study were not just women who have force fantasies, and Bond and Mosher did not use this as a variable. I would guess that the results would be even more impressive had they done so.

“accuracy-aspiring” fiction and other fiction, and to Cooke’s (2014, p. 319) distinction between “fictive” imagination and other forms. Most helpful, I think, is the distinction Shen-yi Liao and Sara Protasi (2013, p. 109) draw between “response-realistic” fiction and other fiction. Bond and Mosher (1986, pp. 177, 179) note that the emotions experienced by women in the realistic condition were not unlike those reported by actual victims of rape, though not nearly as intense—thus illustrating the ‘paradox of fiction’ and confirming that these women were responding emotionally to the story as they might if it were real. To explain the distinction between fantasy and realistic imagination, then, it will suffice, I think, to describe the different ways we engage with and respond to a story, depending upon which way we are taking it: realistically or fantastically.⁵⁸

Consider a very common sort of fantasy. You see someone on the street one day with their partner and children, someone you find disarmingly attractive, and later that evening you fantasize about having sex with them. There are a number of interesting questions we might ask about your fantasy. Why do you imagine doing with them exactly what you do? Is there something about the fantasy that reveals the nature of your attraction to this person? There are a number of other questions, however, that it would be inappropriate to ask, such as: What was it that led this person to cheat?⁵⁹ Did they feel guilty the next day? Did it affect their relationship, or their children? And what about you, you home-wrecker?

The point is not just that the story may not have filled in enough details for these questions to have answers. That sort of thing happens all the time with fiction. But when one reads ‘realistic’ fiction, one still imagines that such questions *have* answers. Even if the story ends with the clandestine lovers parting, and even if we do not know (and cannot know) what happened the next day, *something* did, and the whole point of the story may be to invite the question what that was.⁶⁰ That is: The

⁵⁸ In a similar spirit, Hershfield (2009) argues that fantasies have no ‘direction of fit’, unlike desires. But the same is true of fictive imaginings generally, and part of what I’m trying to do here is to distinguish fantasy from ‘realistic’ imagination.

⁵⁹ Assuming that is what they would be doing, i.e., that they are not in an open or polyamorous or ‘open’ relationship. But we can assume that cheating is part of the thrill.

⁶⁰ Sofia Coppola’s movie *Lost in Translation* does precisely that, to great effect. As the not-quite-lovers say goodbye, Bob (played by Bill Murray) whispers something to Charlotte (played by Scarlett Johansson), but we do not hear it. There has been much discussion (to say the least) about what it might have been, and Coppola, Johansson, and Murray are all often asked about it (George, 2023; Morgan, 2020). People desperately

story we are being told does at least happen within a larger world, even if some facts about that world are radically indeterminate. Fantasies, by contrast, are their own worlds. There need to be no reason for anything that happens in the fantasy, even an ‘indeterminate’ one, and there need be no next day.

I put it this way because I think the way Liao and Protasi put this point is not quite right:

... BDSM fictional worlds differ from [the real world] in important respects. For example, plausibly in BDSM fictional worlds women universally find pain to be sexually pleasurable. (Liao and Protasi, 2013, p. 110)

This gets BDSM itself wrong, because it confuses what we might call the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ perspectives. The person playing the submissive role has consented to be, say, spanked. But, once the scene begins, they may well shout “No!”, struggle to get away, and so forth. That’s why BDSM practitioners use safewords: words like “Pineapple”, which no one would normally utter in such a context, and which signal that the person really does need the scene to stop. Submissives in BDSM worlds, that is to say, find pain, well, painful. What’s true is that what happens within the scene does not have the *significance* that it normally would. Even as the dominant party treats the submissive with disdain and disrespect, humiliating and degrading them, both of them know that these attitudes exist only within the playspace. Indeed, it’s only because they know this that they can engage in this sort of interaction.

The same is true of roleplayed rape scenes. Say that Drew is pretending to rape Sam. Inside the scene, Sam does not want to be raped and does not consent. That is why Sam struggles, says “Stop”, and so forth. Drew, for their part, couldn’t care less whether Sam consents and makes it clear to Sam, inside the scene, that Sam’s pleasure and safety, and so Sam themselves, are of no importance. Outside the scene, by contrast, Sam and Drew have negotiated and consented to what is happening, and both of them know that Drew does not wish any genuine harm to Sam and will not only respect Sam’s limits but carefully monitor Sam’s well-being. It is, once again, only because Sam knows this that they can engage in this form of interaction in the first place. This point is not original with me. It is a common observation that participating in BDSM

want to know what Bob said to Charlotte! And one can want to know, even if one knows that there is no fact of the matter.

requires one simultaneously to occupy these two perspectives (Weille, 2002; Weiss, 2011).⁶¹ Sam must, on the one hand, immerse themselves in the scene, so that they can experience the emotions that they find so arousing.⁶² But Sam can only do that if they know that Drew will not genuinely violate their consent and will be careful not to do anything that would genuinely harm them. Such activities are no doubt risky, but, to many people, the erotic pay-off is worth the risk.⁶³

That is why it is perfectly possible for BDSM practitioners to be “as horrified by *actual* atrocities as anyone else” (Corvino, 2002, p. 214) while still finding ‘pretend’ atrocities arousing. It is also why we can answer Corvino’s question—whether Fred will still find his favorite story about hazing erotic if he finds out that it is a biographical report—as I earlier suggested we should: That would be terrible.

Another way to illustrate this point is to note that there are two senses in which someone might want to ‘act out’ a fantasy. Suppose that Alex fantasizes about having a threesome with their partner Drew and their best friend Sam. One sense in which Alex might want to ‘act out’ this fantasy is the obvious one: actually to have sex with Drew and Sam together. But there is another sense, too: pretend, with Drew, that they are having sex with Sam. It is entirely consistent with Alex’s enjoying such a fantasy that they do not want to act out their fantasy in either sense. It is also possible for Alex to want to act out the fantasy only in the sense of pretending and to have no interest whatsoever in actually having a threesome.⁶⁴ The same applies to force fantasies. The difference is that, in this case, no sane person would want to act out such a fantasy in the sense of actually being forced to have sex, though some people do want to act out such fantasies in the sense of pretending.

⁶¹ If we follow Stear (2009) and think of BDSM as a kind of make-believe, then these may be *quasi*-emotions in the sense of Walton (1978). But quasi-emotions *feel* like genuine emotions.

⁶² Something similar is true of BDSM pornography. You have to experience it as, on one level, involving power, humiliation, and the like, but at the same time recognize that it is robustly consensual, that the participants do not wish each other genuine harm, and so forth. You have to occupy the internal standpoint for the pornography to have its intended effect. But if you do not also occupy the external standpoint, then you are taking pleasure in what seems to you to be actual violence.

⁶³ Alyssa Brooks’s (2006) story, “Callie’s Kidnapping”, nicely illustrates this point, as does @iSlut_ (2010), a vivid recollection of a ‘consensual non-consensual rape’. This latter account may be disturbing to some readers.

⁶⁴ I do not mean here that Alex might want, *prima facie*, to have a threesome but not want, all things considered, to do so. Of course, that’s possible. But, it seems to me, it’s also possible that Alex has *no* desire to have a threesome.

The key to understanding this dynamic is distinguishing *sources of arousal* from *objects of sexual desire*. Conflating these is the fundamental mistake that Bartky, Corvino, and Dwyer all make.⁶⁵ In so far as fantasizing about some activity requires one to ‘eroticize’ it, it is just not true that one must “actively regard[] the activity with sexual desire” (Corvino, 2002, p. 214)—not if sexual desire is, as one would suppose, a species of *desire*. What’s true is just that one must find the activity sexually *arousing*, at least in fantasy—and, as we have seen, it is entirely possible to find something arousing in fantasy that one does not find arousing in ‘realistic imagination’, let alone in real life. That, indeed, is the magic of sexual fantasy: It allows us to enjoy our body’s response, typically involuntary, to certain sorts of thoughts or images, quite independently of whether they are things we desire, in any sense.

It’s instructive here to consider an argument that Christopher Bartel and Anna Crimaldi make in their paper “‘It’s Just a Story’: Pornography, Desire, and the Ethics of Fictive Imagining”, whose title I mention to emphasize that their paper is very much about the idea that pornography is ‘just a fantasy’. Bartel and Crimaldi write:

Appreciating a work of pornography requires not merely that one should imaginatively engage with the content of the work, but also that one finds that content sexually arousing. (Bartel and Crimaldi, 2018, p. 43)

That, indeed, would be the point of pornography. But then they go on to say:

... [F]or pornography to do its job of eliciting arousal, one *must* find its contents to be *desirable* in some regard. (Bartel and Crimaldi, 2018, p. 44, my emphasis)

The vague qualification “in some regard” is doing all the work here. I’m happy to concede this point if ‘desiring in some regard’ includes: desiring to watch pornography, or to entertain fantasies, that have that sort of content. But if ‘desiring in some regard’ means anything stronger, then the claim is simply false. It may be that Bartel and Crimaldi wish to derive this claim from an earlier one:

⁶⁵ Corvino (2002, p. 219) notes the distinction toward the end of his paper, but not quite for the right purpose. The (small) literature on sexual desire also tends to run these together. For careful consideration of the relation between them, see Jacobsen (1993). I think Jacobsen’s account of sexual desire very close to correct, though some of the things he says about arousal seem to me not quite right.

How is sexual arousal linked to desire? While much could be said about this topic, we could at least say that pornography typically aims to appeal to the consumer's desires because doing so is an effective means of achieving sexual arousal. (Bartel and Crimaldi, 2018, p. 43)

But even if that is true, it is too weak to sustain the claim I am questioning: that one *must* find the content desirable.⁶⁶ And it isn't true. Pornography typically arouses us *directly*, without need of a detour through desire, and sometimes in direct opposition to what we desire. That, indeed, is one of the things that can be so unsettling about it—and, I'll add, so powerful.

Like pornography, sexual fantasy is about arousal, not desire. It's tempting to think that, if you are fantasizing about that person you saw on the street, you must, 'at some level', want to have sex with them. But do you? What do you actually know about this person? Yes, you find them sexually attractive, but for most of us finding someone attractive is not by itself sufficient reason to want to have sex with them, even *prima facie*. It's a reason in favor, but that's it, and not really a very strong one. What's true is just that you find the idea of having sex with this person sexually arousing (at least, again, in fantasy). Whatever the author of Matthew 5:27–28 may have believed, having such a fantasy is not tantamount to committing adultery.⁶⁷ Do not be misled by the fact that someone who was intent upon cheating might very well fantasize

⁶⁶ This oscillation, between 'can' claims and 'must' claims, occurs throughout the paper. It surely is true that "An individual *may* use pornography as a way of satisfying an immoral desire; and by satisfying it, one *may* further cultivate that desire" (Bartel and Crimaldi, 2018, p. 42, emphasis added). But one *can* use anything to cultivate an immoral desire. So nothing follows other than that one ought not 'use' pornography in that way. Such weak claims also do not contradict anything to which Bartel and Crimaldi's opponent, Brandon Cooke, commits himself. Cooke's view is that:

Prompting some fictive imagining is intrinsically wrong only when the fiction is a means to encourage for export from the fiction to the actual world some belief or attitude that it would be blameworthy to hold. (Cooke, 2014, p. 317)

I take it that Cooke thinks, therefore, that fictive imagining *is* wrong when one thereby 'cultivates' an immoral desire. If so, then Cooke simply does not think that "fictive imagining is immune to moral criticism", as Bartel and Crimaldi (2018, p. 37) claim, only that it is not wrong in itself.

⁶⁷ In the New International Version, Jesus is recorded as saying: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

about doing so. Fantasizing about sex with a new partner need not be the first step on the road to infidelity. It does not necessarily reveal one's true desire.

I take this to be the real point of a remark of Nancy Friday's, part of which was quoted above and the rest of which serves as the epigraph to this paper:

Women... whose fantasy life is focused on the rape theme, invariably insist that they have no real desire to be raped... The message isn't in the plot—the old hackneyed rape story—but in the emotions that story releases. (Friday, 1973, p. 127)

One might read this as an attempt to reinterpret these fantasies, *contra* Corvino's Observation, but I think it is better understood as an attempt to identify the source of their power:⁶⁸ the emotions that such fantasies release. Some people just do find fear, humiliation, and so forth sexually arousing or, at least, conducive to it. If you're not one of those people, that may be hard to fathom, but surely we all know the thrill of an adrenaline rush. Critelli and Bivona (2008, p. 66) note that "A growing body of evidence indicates that anxiety, fear, and anger, which activate sympathetic arousal" of fight-or-flight responses, "can enhance sexual response". In one experiment, for example, women became more aroused sexually (both physiologically and subjectively) when they viewed a short erotic video if they were first shown an anxiety-inducing video rather than a 'neutral' video (Palace and Gorzalka, 1990). Fantasy is a safe space in which one can, so to speak, exploit sympathetic arousal for erotic purposes, and I'd suggest that the same is true of BDSM.

That, I think, is why some authors insist upon what we might call the 'autonomy' of fantasy, at least in its 'pure' form.⁶⁹ Thus, Butler (1990, p. 189) writes that "fantasy is always and only its own object of desire". That is too strong (even for Butler's purposes in that paper), but the contrast to which she is trying to draw our attention is correct.⁷⁰ Critelli and Bivona (2008, p. 67) put the point well: "Fantasies are powerful emotional experiences in their own right...". They are not necessarily substitutes for what one 'really' desires. Indeed, one might well add, with Elizabeth Cowie (1992, p. 137), that "The pleasure of sexual fantasy... is [better: can be] desired for itself, not as a simple

⁶⁸ See Cherry (1985, pp. 189–90) for some remarks in a similar spirit.

⁶⁹ Indeed, as noted earlier, what I call 'pure' fantasies Cherry (1985) calls 'autonomous' fantasies.

⁷⁰ See also Segal (1998, pp. 57–8).

means to sexual gratification”. One cannot understand sexual fantasy if one insists upon seeing it only as a surrogate: a substitute for what one wishes one could do, but for some reason cannot.

4 Closing

I have argued that ‘naughty’ fantasies are not, in themselves, morally problematic. The most worrying arguments that they are all rest, in the end, upon the claim that, for example, a man who has forcing fantasies ‘eroticizes’ rape, when he ought to condemn it. But such a man need only eroticize rape in the sense that he finds it arousing in fantasy. There is simply no reason to think that he must eroticize *real-world* rape, any more than women who have force fantasies must do so. Corvino’s Observation, as important a corrective as it may be, simply cannot do the work that he and Dwyer want it to do. What such a person finds arousing *in fantasy* may well be rape, but moving from there to the claim that this person must find rape arousing outside fantasy is just a sleight of hand.

If that is right, then people who enjoy ‘naughty’ fantasies do indeed have nothing to be ashamed of. Bartky’s worry was that a feminist woman who has force fantasies has *sexual desires* that conflict with her political commitments. But, just as Grimshaw charged, Bartky is simply conflating fantasy with desire, and desire with arousal. One might worry that, even though arousal is typically an involuntary response, there is still some kind of conflict if a feminist woman finds thoughts of rape arousing. But if the claim is that she must find thoughts of *real-world* rape arousing, then the argument just repeats the same mistake.

Similar remarks can be made about BDSM. Dwyer (2005, p. 84) claims that “even members of consensual BDSM practices take pro-attitudes toward (variously)⁷¹ sexual torture, bondage, submission, and domination”, extending her argument from fantasy to consensual BDSM. But what we have said about fantasy applies here as well. The only pro-attitude that BDSM practitioners must take towards such activities is: finding them erotic in the context of consensual BDSM roleplay. It would beg the question to assume that doing so is morally problematic. What underlies Dwyer’s argument is, once again, Corvino’s Observation, which is alleged to imply that such people must take some kind of pro-attitude

⁷¹ What she means is that different people will have pro-attitudes towards different of these activities.

towards *genuine* torture, domination, etc. But that, we have seen, is just a mistake. There might be other reasons to worry about BDSM, such as whether consent to such activities is really possible, but the sort of worry Dwyer expresses, and which several other authors have expressed (Linden et al., 1982; Vadas, 1995), can be dismissed.

Finally, let me say a word about how our discussion bears upon what I earlier called the ‘fantasy defense’ of pornography: the argument that, because pornography typically traffics in sexual fantasy, many of the concerns about its social effects can be set aside. Dwyer’s specific objection, that pornography encourages a sort of fantasizing that is itself wrong, has been answered, since ‘naughty’ fantasizing is not wrong. But the argument I’ve made depends, at a crucial point, upon a distinction between fantasy and ‘realistic’ imagination. If one thinks of the appreciation of fiction, as many people do, as essentially involving the deployment of imagination, then this induces a corresponding distinction between types of fiction: fantastical fiction, whose appreciation involves the use of fantastical imagination, and realistic fiction, whose appreciation involves realistic imagination.

Such a distinction would need much more careful development than I can give it here, and not just for lack of space.⁷² What I want to note here is simply that this distinction applies *within* pornography. Compare these two films:

- In Tristan Taormino’s film *Rough Sex 3: Adrianna’s Dangerous Mind* (Vivid, 2011), one of the vignettes, “Cash”, has Adrianna Nicole playing a prostitute and Ramon Nomar playing her client. Nomar subjects Nicole to a good deal of abuse, both physical and verbal. But this scene is clearly presented as a fantasy that Nicole has chosen to act out with Nomar. Prior to the scene, Nicole and Nomar discuss the fantasy, out of character, and they make it clear that this is a form of sexual interaction they both enjoy—when it is consensual, negotiated, and so forth. The film, that is to say, documents a consensual BDSM roleplay, which is clearly presented as such.⁷³
- B Skow’s film *Truth Be Told* (Girlfriends Films, 2013) tells the story of a woman who seeks to take revenge upon her ex-husband, Luke.

⁷² For one thing, as Liao and Protasi (2013, p. 110) note, a particular story will typically be fantastical in certain respects, and not in others.

⁷³ I’ve discussed this film in more detail elsewhere (Heck, 2021).

Early in the film, both Luke and one of his acquaintances have sex (separately, though consecutively) with another woman who has some kind of relationship with Luke. They treat her much as Nomar treats Nicole, and then Luke tells her to take her clothes and get lost. There is nothing in this scene that presents it as a fantasy. To the contrary, its narrative purpose seems to be to tell us something about what a scumbag Luke is. That narrative purpose might reasonably have been served by a sex scene that was two or three minutes long. But, in fact, this scene is about twenty-five minutes long, and it certainly seems to invite us to take erotic pleasure in the way these men mistreat this woman—fictional though they may all be. In this case, then, the film does seem to be inviting us to eroticize an abusive sexual interaction.

I won't consider here whether there are other ways to read *Truth Be Told*. My point, for now, is simply that these films do seem to differ in an important way. Both are fictional, of course,⁷⁴ but just one of them is fantastical.⁷⁵

References

- Barker, M. (2014). 'The "problem" of sexual fantasies', *Porn Studies* 1: 143–60.
- Bartel, C. and Crimaldi, A. (2018). "It's just a story": Pornography, desire, and the ethics of fictive imagining', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 58: 37–50.
- Bartky, S. (1984). 'Feminine masochism and the politics of personal transformation', *Women's Studies International Forum* 7: 323–34.

⁷⁴ Note that my criticism of *Truth Be Told* does not depend upon the claim that the actress was treated abusively, and I know of no reason to suppose that is true.

⁷⁵ Thanks to Louise Antony, Billy Brennan, Anne Eaton, Chris Hill, and Rachel Leadon for discussions that influenced this paper in its early stages. Thanks also to the students in my Summer 2021 and Spring 2023 courses on Philosophy of Sex, at Brown University, for their contributions to our discussion of sexual fantasy. Thanks also to the members of a seminar on Speech and Pornography that I taught in Spring 2019, especially Logan Dreher, Matthew Schrepfer, and Margot Witte, whose final papers were on sexual fantasy and which have inspired some of the thoughts presented here.

A talk based upon this paper was presented at the University of Minnesota and to Louise's seminar on Love, Sex and Desire at Rutgers, both in October 2023. Thanks to everyone present for their comments and questions, especially Phil Bold, Tamara Fakhoury, Sumeet Patwardhan, Cat Saint-Croix, and Louise, again.

- Benjamin, J. (1980). 'The bonds of love: Rational violence and erotic domination', *Feminist Studies* 6: 144–74.
- (1990). 'An outline of intersubjectivity', *Psychoanalytic Psychology* sup. vol. 7: 33–46.
- (1983). 'Master and slave: The fantasy of erotic domination', in Snitow et al. 1983, 280–99.
- Bivona, J. M. and Critelli, J. W. (2009). 'The nature of women's rape fantasies: An analysis of prevalence, frequency, and contents', *The Journal of Sex Research* 46: 33–45.
- Bond, S. B. and Mosher, D. L. (1986). 'Guided imagery of rape: Fantasy, reality, and the willing victim myth', *Journal of Sex Research* 22: 162–83.
- Brooks, A. (2006). 'Callie's kidnapping', in V. Blue (ed.), *Lips Like Sugar: Women's Erotic Fantasies*. San Francisco CA, Cleis Press, 109–14.
- Brownmiller, S. (1975). *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. New York, Simon and Schuster.
- Busch, T. M. (2019). 'Perceived acceptability of sexual and romantic fantasizing', *Sexuality & Culture* 24: 848–62.
- Butler, J. (1990). 'The force of fantasy: Feminism, Mapplethorpe, and discursive excess', *differences* 2: 105–25.
- Cherry, C. (1985). 'The inward and the outward: Fantasy, reality and satisfaction', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* sup. vol. 11: 175–93.
- (1988). 'When is fantasising morally bad?', *Philosophical Investigations* 11: 112–32.
- Cooke, B. (2014). 'The ethics of fictive imagining', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 72: 317–27.
- Corvino, J. (2002). 'Naughty fantasies', *Southwest Philosophy Review* 18: 213–20.
- Cowie, E. (1992). 'Pornography and fantasy: Psychoanalytic perspectives', in Segal and McIntosh 1992, 132–52.

- Critelli, J. W. and Bivona, J. M. (2008). 'Women's erotic rape fantasies: An evaluation of theory and research', *The Journal of Sex Research* 45: 57–70.
- Cross, P. A. and Matheson, K. (2006). 'Understanding sadomasochism: An empirical examination of four perspectives', *Journal of Homosexuality* 50(2/3): 133–66.
- Dwyer, S. (2005). 'Enter here—at your own risk: The moral dangers of cyberporn', in R. Cavalier (ed.), *The Impact of the Internet on Our Moral Lives*. Albany NY, SUNY Press, 69–94.
- Eaton, A. W. (2007). 'A sensible antiporn feminism', *Ethics* 117: 674–715.
- (2016). 'Taste in bodies and fat oppression', in S. Irvin (ed.), *Body Aesthetics*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 37–59.
- Friday, N. (1973). *My Secret Garden: Women's Sexual Fantasies*. New York, Pocket Books.
- (1980). *Men In Love: Men's Sexual Fantasies: The Triumph of Love Over Rage*. New York, Dell Publishing.
- Galbraith, P. W. (2017). 'RapeLay and the return of the sex wars in Japan', *Porn Studies* 4: 105–26.
- Gaut, B. (1998). 'The ethical criticism of art', in J. Levinson (ed.), *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 182–203.
- George, J. (2023). 'Lost in Translation and 20 years of debating an ending whisper'. <https://perma.cc/FTP9-HWXM>.
- Gibson, P. C., ed. (2004). *More Dirty Looks: Gender, Pornography and Power*. London, British Film Institute.
- Goldman, A. (1977). 'Plain sex', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 6: 267–87.
- Grimshaw, J. (1993). 'Ethics, fantasy, and self-transformation', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 35: 145–58.
- Hardy, S. (2000). 'Feminist iconoclasm and the problem of eroticism', *Sexualities* 3: 77–96.

- Hariton, E. B. and Singer, J. L. (1974). 'Women's fantasies during sexual intercourse: Normative and theoretical implications.', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 42: 313–22.
- Harold, J. (2003). 'Flexing the imagination', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 61: 247–58.
- Heck, R. K. (2021). 'How not to watch feminist pornography', *Feminist Philosophical Quarterly* 7(1). Article 3.
- (2023). 'Does pornography presuppose rape myths?'. Forthcoming in *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*.
- Hein, H. (1982). 'Sadomasochism and the liberal tradition', in Linden et al. 1982, 83–9.
- Hershfield, J. (2009). 'The ethics of sexual fantasy', *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 23: 27–49.
- Hopkins, P. D. (1994). 'Rethinking sadomasochism: Feminism, interpretation, and simulation', *Hypatia* 9: 116–141.
- @iSlut_ (2010). 'Consensual nonconsent', *A Slut's Memoir*. <https://perma.cc/VU7J-LMTR>.
- Jacobsen, R. (1993). 'Arousal and the ends of desire', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53: 617–32.
- Joannides, P. (2014). *Guide To Getting It On*, 7th edition. Oregon, Goofy Foot Press.
- Kanin, E. J. (1982). 'Female rape fantasies: A victimization study', *Victimology* 7: 114–21.
- Knafo, D. and Jaffe, Y. (1984). 'Sexual fantasizing in males and females', *Journal of Research in Personality* 18: 451–62.
- Laplanche, J. and Pontalis, J.-B. (1968). 'Fantasy and the origin of sexuality', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 49: 1–18.
- Leitenberg, H. and Henning, K. (1995). 'Sexual fantasy', *Psychological Bulletin* 117: 469–96.
- Liao, S. and Protasi, S. (2013). 'The fictional character of pornography', in H. Maes (ed.), *Pornographic Art and the Aesthetics of Pornography*. New York, Palgrave-Macmillan, 100–18.

- Linden, R. R., Pagano, D. R., Russell, D. E., and Star, S. L., eds. (1982). *Against Sadomasochism: A Radical Feminist Analysis*. San Francisco, Frog In the Well.
- MacKinnon, C. A. (1989). 'Sexuality, pornography, and method: "Pleasure under patriarchy"', *Ethics* 99: 314–46.
- Mag Uidhir, C. and Pratt, H. (2012). 'Pornography at the edge: Depiction, fiction, & sexual predilection', in H. Maes and J. Levinson (eds.), *Art and Pornography: Philosophical Essays*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 137–60.
- Maniglio, R. (2010). 'The role of deviant sexual fantasy in the etiopathogenesis of sexual homicide: Asystematic review', *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 15: 294–302.
- Meeker, C., McGill, C. M., and Rocco, T. S. (2020). 'Navigation of feminist and submissive identity by women in the BDSM community: A structured literature review', *Sexuality & Culture* 24: 1594–618.
- Morgan, M. (2020). 'Why does "Lost in Translation" end with a mystery?'. <https://perma.cc/SMM6-LT2A>.
- Morgan, R. (1982). 'The politics of sado-masochistic fantasies', in Linden et al. 1982, 109–23.
- Morgan, S. (2003). 'Sex in the head', *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 20: 1–16.
- Nagel, T. (1969). 'Sexual perversion', *Journal of Philosophy* 66: 5–17.
- Neu, J. (2002). 'An ethics of fantasy?', *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* 22: 133–57.
- Pace, L. (2015). *Asking For It*. New York, Berkeley.
- Palace, E. M. and Gorzalka, B. B. (1990). 'The enhancing effects of anxiety on arousal in sexually dysfunctional and functional women', *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 99: 403–11.
- Penelope, J. (1980). "'And now for the hard questions...'", *Sinister Wisdom* 15: 99–104.
- Perel, E. (2006). *Mating in Captivity*. New York, Harper.

- Person, E. S., Terestman, N., Myers, W. A., Goldberg, E. L., and Salvadori, C. (1989). 'Gender differences in sexual behaviors and fantasies in a college population', *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 15: 187–98.
- Ruddick, S. (1975). 'Better sex', in R. Baker and F. Elliston (eds.), *Philosophy & Sex*. Buffalo NY, Prometheus Books, 83–104.
- Russell, D. (1982). 'Sadomasochism: A contra-feminist activity', in Linden et al. 1982, 176–83.
- Segal, L. (1992). 'Sweet sorrows, painful pleasures: Pornography and the perils of heterosexual desire', in Segal and McIntosh 1992, 65–91.
- (1998). 'Only the literal: The contradictions of anti-pornography feminism', *Sexualities* 1: 42–62. Reprinted in Gibson, 2004, pp. 59–70.
- Segal, L. and McIntosh, M., eds. (1992). *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*. New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press.
- Shulman, J. L. and Horne, S. G. (2006). 'Guilty or not? A path model of women's sexual force fantasies', *The Journal of Sex Research* 43: 368–77.
- Smuts, A. (2016). 'The ethics of imagination and fantasy', in A. Kind (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Imagination*. Routledge, 380–91.
- Snitow, A., Stansell, C., and Thompson, S., eds. (1983). *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*. New York, Monthly Review Press.
- Snitow, A. B. (1983). 'Mass market romance: Pornography for women is different', in Snitow et al. 1983, 245–63.
- Solot, D. and Miller, M. (2007). *I ♥ Female Orgasm*. Cambridge MA, Da Capo Press.
- Sonnet, E. (1999). 'Erotic fiction by women for women': The pleasures of post-feminist heterosexuality', *Sexualities* 2: 167–87.
- Stear, N.-H. (2009). 'Sadomasochism as make-believe', *Hypatia* 24: 21–38.
- Steinem, G. (1983). 'Erotica vs pornography', in *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*. New York, Holt, 219–30.

- Strassberg, D. S. and Lockerd, L. K. (1998). 'Force in women's sexual fantasies', *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 27: 403–14.
- Sue, D. (1979). 'Erotic fantasies of college students during coitus', *The Journal of Sex Research* 15: 299–305.
- Theweleit, K. (1987). *Male Fantasies, vol. 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, tr. by C. Turner, et al. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- Vadas, M. (1995). 'Reply to Patrick Hopkins', *Hypatia* 10: 159–61.
- Vargas-Cooper, N. (2015). 'My hot, consensual introduction to the rape fantasy romance novel', *Jezebel*. <https://perma.cc/9DPR-UB68>.
- Walton, K. L. (1978). 'Fearing fictions', *Journal of Philosophy* 75: 5–27.
- Weille, K.-L. H. (2002). 'The psychodynamics of consensual sadomasochistic and dominant-submissive sexual games', *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 3: 131–60.
- Weiss, M. (2011). *Techniques of Pleasure: BDSM and the Circuits of Sexuality*. Durham NC, Duke University Press.
- Whisnant, R. (2016). "But what about feminist porn?": Examining the work of Tristan Taormino', *Sexualization, Media, & Society*, 2. <http://doi.org/10.1177/2374623816631727>.
- Willis, E. (1983). 'Feminism, moralism, and pornography', in Snitow et al. 1983, 460–7.
- Zheng, R. and Stear, N.-H. (2023). 'Imagining in oppressive contexts, or What's wrong with blackface?', *Ethics* 133: 381–414.
- Zurbriggen, E. L. and Yost, M. R. (2004). 'Power, desire, and pleasure in sexual fantasies', *Journal of Sex Research* 41: 288–300.