

## The Organ of Tactility: Fantasy, Image and Male Masturbation

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**Abstract** This article explores the interplay of fantasy and image in male solitary masturbation in the virtual age. Online pornography drastically changed the intimate relationship between the hand and the penis. The case of a seventeen-year-old boy and his excessive use of Internet pornography is used to highlight pornography's impact on a person's well-being and neurology. A brief exploration of three histories of masturbation shows how discussion of masturbation often serves political agendas and the central role of sexual fantasy in the practice. Sexual fantasy is explored through the research of British psychoanalyst Brett Kahr. To examine the prevalence of the eye in pornography, philosopher Michael Taussig's concept of "the eye as the organ of tactility" is discussed. The essay concludes by offering a framework to discern whether masturbating to images might be disordered or not. Fantasy, as nonvisual sexual arousal, with mindfulness can relieve a person from the tyranny of the eye and compulsive masturbation.

**Keywords** Boys, Brett Kahr, Erotic Fantasy, Internet, Mark Twain, Masturbation, Men, Onanism, Pornography, Samuel-August Tissot, Sex, Sexuality, Michael Taussig, Technology

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## Introduction

Masturbation is widely practiced, though rarely discussed. It has eclipsed what has been called the coital imperative, as an estimated 98% of men (and 87% of women) masturbate (Kahr, 2007, p. 75). With masturbation—which the Kinsey report defines as “the deliberate self-stimulation which effects sexual arousal”—almost always culminating in orgasm, it is a practice that delivers what it promises (Phipps, 1977, p. 183). Still, Western culture remains ambivalent about masturbation. The Swiss physician, Samuel-August Tissot (1728-1797), arguably more than anyone else, exploited this ambivalence. Long before Tissot, however, Catholic monks tried to starve, freeze, or castrate their desire to death, thereby giving us an ironic understanding of masturbation as self-abuse. Etymologically, the word has a few possible origins: from the Latin *mas*/masculinity and *tubare*/to move violently or from *manus*/hand and *stuprum*/debauch and *perpetrare*/to perpetrate. Slang terms describing the intimate act are legion. The practice has also moved out of the private sphere, as many online sites, one being [www.beautifulagony.com](http://www.beautifulagony.com), give ordinary people ways to upload their non-pornographic pleasure for others to see or read.

Tissot’s *The Diseases Caused by Masturbation*, published in 1760 in French, recounts numerous patient narratives, all leading to dire consequences. Tissot, as many physicians in his day, believed that the body contains the right amount of fluids, and if the balance is disturbed, illnesses set in. “There is another seminal fluid,” he writes, “which has so much influence on the strength of the body and on the perfection of digestion which restores it, that physicians of every age have unanimously admitted, that the loss of one ounce of it, enfeebles more than forty ounces of blood” (2015, pp. i-ii).

Ejaculation is dangerous. Tissot depicts the frightening results of losing one's seminal and precious fluid (humors). He quotes Aretaeus of Cappadocia, the first-century Greek physician, who paints an equally dire picture: "Young persons assume the air and the diseases of the aged; they become pale, stupid, effeminate, idle, weak, and even void of understanding; their bodies bend forward, their legs are weak, they have a disgust for every thing, become fit for nothing, and many are affected by paralysis" (p. 3). Echoing Celsus, the second-century Greek philosopher, Tissot states only the weak masturbate.

Tissot, placing himself among distinguished physicians and philosophers who warned against masturbation—Galen, Pliny, Aetius, Sanctorius, Lomnius, Tulpius, Blancard, and Muys, to name but a few—paints a grim picture for all who masturbate. Masturbators suffer from deranged stomachs, sunken eyes, loss of appetite, impaired memory, digestive problems, insensible perspiration, sleep disturbances, and physical deformation, as well as "apoplexies [strokes], lethargies, epilepsies, loss of sight, trembling, paralysis, and all kinds of painful affections" (p. 4). Some may even develop "spontaneous gangrene" (p. 5) and die if coitus follows masturbation. Feeling the need to repeat himself, Tissot quotes the Dutch (Christian) physician, Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738): "Too great a loss of semen produces weakness, debility, immobility, convulsions, emaciation, dryness, pains in the membranes of the brain, impairs the senses, particularly that of sight, gives rise to dorsal consumption, indolence, and the several diseases connected to them" (p. 7). "We are ignorant what sympathy the testicles have with the body, but particularly with the eyes," Tissot warns (p. 5). It is no surprise that he discourages fantasy, since imagination that leads to sexual arousal also overheats the

brain, at equally ominous consequences. Today, Tissot is read with amusement. Not all classical voices, however, followed Tissot.

Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835-1910)—better known as Mark Twain—delivered a speech during his 1879 tour of Europe at a Parisian men’s club entitled, “Some Thoughts on the Science of Onanism.” The talk was later published as *On Masturbation* (Twain, 2017). Despite puritanical thought thriving during Twain’s life, he exposes the Victorian culture’s rich ambivalence towards masturbation. He opens his speech by admitting (or confessing) the obvious—men masturbate:

My gifted predecessor has warned you against the “social evil” –adultery. In his able paper he exhausted that subject; he left absolutely nothing more to be said about it. But I will continue his good work in the cause of morality by cautioning you against that species of recreation called self-abuse—to which I perceive that you too are much addicted. (p. 7)

The fact that persons from a wide range of disciplines, especially medicine, philosophy, and religion write on masturbation, Twain concludes, speaks to masturbation as a “stately subject; this shows its dignity and importance” (p. 8). Although Twain states he wants to “[caution men] against that species of recreation called self-abuse,” his speech is essentially a celebration of this intimate practice (p. 15). Referencing scientific, literary, political and cultural “masters,” Twain shifts the power held by Tissot’s treatise. Twain quotes Homer (seventh to eighth century BCE) who said: “Give me masturbation or give me death” (p. 9). That Homer was a blind poet/bard—and Tissot warns against going blind when one masturbates—does not go unnoticed. Twain builds his argument by referencing Julius Caesar (130-85 BCE), who highlighted the egalitarian nature of

masturbation: “To the lonely it is company; to the forsaken a friend; to the aged and the impotent it is a benefactor; they that be penniless are yet rich, in that they still have this majestic diversion” (p. 10). He reminds his audience of Daniel Dafoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, who said: “I cannot describe what I owe to this gentle art” (p. 11) and of President Benjamin Franklin who described masturbation as “the mother of invention” (p. 14). One senses Twain appreciates the “the Old Master” Michelangelo, who told Pope Julius II: “Self-negation is noble, self-culture is beneficent, self-possession is manly, but to the truly great and inspiring soul they are poor and tame compared to self-abuse” (p. 15). Twain ends his speech by describing masturbation as “a science” (p. 23).

Just as one thinks Twain fully affirms masturbation, however, he addresses the consequences of “excessive indulgence in this destructive pastime...: A disposition to eat, drink, smoke, to laugh, to joke, and tell indelicate stories—and mainly, a yearning to paint pictures” (p. 24). Twain, of course, poked fun at the members of the men’s club. Still, he channels Tissot:

The results of this habit are, loss of memory, loss of virility, loss of cheerfulness, loss of hopefulness, loss of character, and loss of progeny. Of all the kinds of sexual intercourse, this has the least to recommend it. As an amusement it is too fleeting; as an occupation it is too wearing; as a public exhibition there is no money in it.” (p. 25-26).

Twain sees masturbation banned from most conversation, except for some male-to-male banter. With “don’t play a Lone Hand too much,” Twain concludes his speech (p. 28). We have come, of course, a long way since Twain’s speech. The Internet and permanent online access now dominate our lives.

The developmental importance, psychodynamic impact of, and motivation for masturbating to pornography are well researched (Carvalheira, Bente, & Stulhofer, 2015; Diorio, 2016; Garlick, 2012; Goren, 2003; Kaestle & Allen, 2011; Kwee & Hoover, 2008; Lillie, 2002; Staehler & Kozin, 2017; Strager, 2003; Wood, 2011; Yule, Brotto, & Gorzalka, 2017). These studies, recognizing the ambivalence and changing nature of sexual expression and increased masturbatory practices, rarely discuss the intimate relationship between sexual fantasy and image and how image may be replacing fantasy. Before we proceed, two terms central to this essay need definition: *Pornography* is understood as any sexually explicit image or depiction other than the naked body of one's partner; *Sexual fantasy* may be defined as "an image, a thought or a fully elaborated drama, which passes through our mind principally during sexual activity, either coital or masturbatory, often resulting in orgasm" (Kahr, 2007, p. 547).

Dismissing Tissot's warnings about the dangers of masturbation comes naturally to a culture that has had numerous sexual revolutions since the 1960s. Twain's satirical wit can only take us that far. This article addresses the interplay of sexual fantasy and pornographic images in male masturbation. It does not seek to address the meaning of sexuality or the ethical, moral, and religious issues tied to pornography, such as the exploitation of women and minors; stereotyping of race; the commodification of lives; nonconformity; sexual aggression, power, and control; or, legal matters. Rather, the focus is on sexual fantasies and men masturbating to online images. As pornography scholar Stephen Strager states, "The masturbating man is pornography's audience" (2003, p. 51). Having the masturbating man in mind, this essay asks: *Are images masquerading as*

*fantasies, possibly even replacing erotic imagination in the Internet age? And, Do images merely serve the deeper unconscious fantasies a person holds?*

Writing about masturbation and pornography in a way that invites deeper personal, pastoral, theological, and psychodynamic reflection is challenging, for words are easily assigned sexual innuendo. The title, with its inclusion of the word “organ,” Tissot feeling the need to “repeat himself,” and Twain speaking to the “members” of a men’s club, all demonstrate this difficulty. Our minds do sexualize what we experience, as well as what we read. Care has been taken in this regard in writing this essay and only three brief sexual fantasies are mentioned. Brett Kahr, in turn, provides verbatim fantasies of more than a thousand persons, some titillating when others might be seen as gross (Kahr, 2007, 2008).

First, this essay reflects on the case of Jude as given to us by British psychotherapist, John Woods. Jude, who was referred to counseling after periods of school absenteeism, used Internet pornography excessively as he masturbated disorderedly. The sheer number of images Jude consumed alienated him from himself and others. Jude introduces the question whether modern masturbation is driven by fantasy or by image (upon image). The essay next explores the role of fantasy in the rich and storied history of masturbation, followed by a discussion of Brett Kahr’s epic study on sexual fantasy. Identifying a shift from fantasy to image, the essay then appropriates Australian philosopher Michael Taussig’s concept of the eye as “the organ of tactility” as he reflects on mimetic desire. The essay concludes by offering a framework to discern whether masturbating to images might be disordered and life-depriving. Counselors and therapists, when they facilitate the exploration of sexual fantasies and masturbatory

practices, can assist others to hold the tension around “the masturbatory paradox”—that sexual fantasies and practices that provide pleasure can also instill guilt and confusion, and even become addictive. They can also encourage nonvisual sexual arousal (the use of fantasy) and mindfulness to achieve relief from the tyranny of the eye.

### **A Young Man’s Masturbatory Practices**

London-based therapist John Woods explores the psychodynamics of masturbation and pornography in the Internet age in his essay, “Seeing and being seen: the psychodynamics of pornography through the lens of Winnicott’s thought” (Woods, 2015). Woods warns against the danger of pornography: “A compulsive form of voyeurism means that the young person cannot bear to be seen and becomes painfully alone with his violent masturbation fantasies” (p. 163). He introduces the central concern that drives this essay: *Contemporary masturbatory practices are now driven by the eye and pornographic images, even if they serve a deeper, unconscious fantasy.* Woods sees contemporary masturbatory practices, now part of a sexualized self, as remaining insatiable despite consuming images online. He quotes a British study that found one-quarter of boys between 14-18 years of age are concerned about the amount of pornography they consume. The same study found a relationship between the frequency of using pornography and problems related to employment, relationships, and sexual intimacy.

Woods references researcher Jill Manning’s landmark meta-analysis on the use of pornography in the United States, “The Impact of Internet Pornography on Marriage and the Family: A Review of the Research” (2006). A brief detour from Woods’ article to look at Manning’s research is informative. Manning writes that “Internet pornography is



distinct from other forms of pornography because of the ‘Triple-A Engine’ effect of Accessibility, Affordability, and Anonymity—a combination of traits unique to the virtual square” (Manning, 2006, p. 133). Her research found that pornography (a) leads to sexual deviance, especially in the form of ritualistic masturbation; (b) increases the possibility for sexual perpetration (rape), (c) changes intimate relationships (viewing persons as sexual objects or part objects), (d) instills the acceptance of the rape myth (believing women cause rape), and (e) causes behavioral and sexual aggression (p. 135). Tested on these variables, users of pornography generally tested 20-31% higher than the general population. Amongst the many studies Manning quotes, a study by Zillman and Bryant indicated 68% of their respondents, all active users of pornography, experienced decreased sexual intimacy with their partner and 52% lost interest in relational sex, preferring solitary masturbation instead (p. 143).

Manning’s analysis of the impact of pornography on children and adolescents showed that users:

(a) can be easily coerced into viewing pornography or manipulated into the production of it, (b) have limited ability to emotionally, cognitively, and physiologically process obscene material they encounter voluntarily or involuntarily, (c) can be the victims of another’s pornography consumption in ways adults are often more resilient to, (d) can have their sexual and social development negatively impacted through exposure to fraudulent and/or traumatic messages regarding sexuality and relationships, and (e) can develop unrealistic expectations about their

future sexual relationships through repeated exposure to fantasy-based templates. (p. 146)

Manning's research is echoed by Heather Wood, who found that the use of Internet pornography fuels manic defenses (feelings of power and omnipotence), offers an escape from real relationships, invites part-object relating, is a vehicle to express sadism (or sadism by proxy), allows scenes where desire and arousal can meet, and avoids or subverts the superego (Wood, 2011, pp. 130-135). Similarly, a study of nearly 600 heterosexual married men by Ana Carvalheira and her colleagues showed that 70% of the men masturbated at least once a week to pornography. The frequency of their masturbation was related to sexual boredom, frequent use of pornography, and low relationship intimacy (Carvalheira et al., 2015, p. 626). As John Woods' work with Jude indicates, serious psychodynamic and relational implications can result from the combination of visual images fueling sexual fantasies, a hand, and a penis.

Woods introduces us to Jude, a seventeen-year-old who withdrew from the world after being bullied and was referred to counseling for school absenteeism. As with most boys, "the first sexual experience [for Jude did] not begin with a nervous request to meet or get to know someone; it [was] watching a parade of grotesquely degrading images of women, often mixed with violent abuse" (Woods, 2015, p. 165). Jude did not masturbate to conscious fantasies, but did so to images. The images were "fused with a state of sexual arousal and masturbation" (ibid.). The school social worker who referred Jude, not knowing the extent of his involvement with pornography, also expressed concerns about his excessive use of the Internet. A social worker invited Jude to a day center, in part to get him out of his bedroom, where he made an advance to a girl. The girls rejected his

approach. (p. 168). As identified by Manning, pornographic use can limit a man's ability in face-to-face intimate relationships. Jude felt rejected, wanted to stab the girl, and said he wanted to kill himself due to his failure to relate to girls. With Woods, Jude described how he felt ugly and angry, and wanted to break things:

Jude admitted watching Internet pornography for many hours and enjoyed seeing women being abused. One scenario was that of a man grabbing a woman's throat and punching her in the face. After masturbating, he would "crash," feeling low and guilty. But he maintained he would never give up pornography because he might become more dangerous on the street. (p. 168)

Jude was emotionally and physically distant from his father and he had much contempt for his mother as she tried to hold things together after a divorce. He was proud of his vast collection of digital pornographic images, ready at hand, which he carefully labeled and catalogued. He relied on the images to fuel his masturbatory practices, for fantasy alone was too weak to arouse him (a sign of erectile dysfunction). Woods suggested that Jude turned the absence of his father into victory by accumulating the images, and wondered out loud Jude was confusing fantasy and reality as he looks at the images. Woods sought ways to make conscious to Jude the fantasy that fuels his masturbatory practices. Jude initially remained dismissive of the counseling journey, fearing that Woods would ask him to give up his images. In a session where he admitted to illicit online activity and stalking behavior in real life, Jude stated: "I feel dehumanized... It is being seen by you. I don't want you to see everything, but you have to see it all" (p. 169). Jude confessed to Woods that he watched films of women urinating

and defecating, sometimes covering themselves in excrement. Other films were filled with violence. Woods observed that Jude was projecting his self-disgust onto his mother and other women.

Although Woods does not address the neuroscience behind Jude's practices and behavior, Gary Wilson's *Your Brain on Porn: Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction* (2014) gives us a deeper understanding of what Jude was experiencing. The neuroplasticity of the brain—the fact that the brain or biology can shape itself after an environment such as online pornography—demands that we remain mindful of the impact of our use of technology. The brain is responsive and malleable. For Wilson, there is a strong correlation between the addictive brain and the brain of someone compulsively engaging pornography. “Most users regard internet porn as a solution – to boredom, sexual frustration, loneliness or stress,” Wilson writes (2014, p. 9). When a person “faps,” the slang for masturbating to porn, the person has an experience stronger than masturbating to “static” porn (print media). Free and abundant online galleries of short movies (including GIFs), not only flood the pleasure centers of the brain, but also can wear those centers out. For many using pornography, as was true for Jude, pleasure can only be found by engaging increasingly graphic material. The shortness of the GIF clips demand clicking and searching for additional material.

Wilson describes how pornography stimulates the reward circuitry of the brain—the amygdala, the prefrontal cortex, the nucleus acumbens, the ventral tegmentum area (mid-brain) and the hypothalamus' suprachiasmatic nucleus (Wilson, 2014, p. 58). These areas also govern emotions, drives, and unconscious decision-making, and release dopamine, which is not only the feel-good (pleasure) opioid of the body, but places the

brain in a state of seeking and searching. Dopamine prompts nerves to synchronize the ways they transfer signals (“firing” together), a state needed for orgasm and active in addiction. Dopamine also facilitates the creation of new neural connections (a “wiring” together called Hebb’s Law). The dopamine and its neural effects increase as anticipation grows and novelty surprises. “Internet porn is especially enticing to the reward circuitry because novelty is always just one click away. It would be a novel ‘mate’, unusual scene, strange sexual act, or...” (p. 60), Wilson writes.

*Your Brain on Porn* identifies pornography’s “supernormal stimulation,” a state of arousal that leads not only to *desensitization*, a numbed response to stimulus, but also *sensitization*, having a powerful memory of what kind of image pleasures (p. 80). Furthermore, the brain experiences *hypofrontality*, “reduced brain activity in the prefrontal regions, which weakens willpower in the face of subconscious cravings” (p. 81). *Dysfunctional stress circuits* mean that minor stress causes cravings and relapses (ibid.). A period of noFapping—also called “rebooting,” restores neural functioning to men (Wilson, 2014, p. 18). NoFapping (See: [www.nofap.com](http://www.nofap.com)), which has become a cultural movement built on a simplistic morality, has been questioned as a sustainable path honoring the complexity of human desire and sexuality and the ambivalence of being embodied (Stahler & Kozin, 2017). Jude’s adolescent brain, vulnerable to over-stimulation, was strained under the cost of fapping.

As Jude’s journey with Woods deepened, he felt attracted to a new girl. When the relationship did not work out, Jude was appropriately sad. Woods found Jude less angry and showing signs of developing what D.W. Winnicott called “the capacity to be alone” (in the presence of others) (Winnicott, 1994). The capacity calls on a person to contain

emotion in one's body and to have appropriate relationships with other bodies. Slowly Jude began to find pornography boring. His regression to a pornographic universe where there are no rules but a sense of omnipotence and control—attitudes that can be described as anal--stopped. Jude's accompanying splitting and projection, especially towards his mother and women, diminished. His bedroom became a place of rest and relaxation as he was in touch with his personal exhaustion, with no felt need for pornography and compulsive masturbation (Woods, 2015, p. 171).

In reflecting on Jude's case, Woods states that Internet pornography and compulsive masturbation is first a defense against loneliness and isolation, and then becomes catalysts for those very experiences. Neurologically, *Your Brain on Porn* affirms Woods' observation. Pornography causes a break between the subject and the object viewed. This break, for Jude, was repaired as he entered into a significant relationship with Woods, the only father figure that modeled maturity to him. It was Woods and Jude seeing each other, and more specifically Jude being seen by Woods, that removed Jude's desire for watching image after image. "Mother and baby usually look into each other's eyes, the baby sees itself, and the mother's liveliness reflects the baby's," Woods reminds his readers (p. 171). Emotional belonging and security are instilled as eyes meet. The irony of Jude's journey is this: As he was seen by Woods, Jude no longer felt the need to look at pornographic images and a normal fantasy life—including the fantasy of being with another person—returned. We are reminded of Numbers 6:22-26 where God states: "The Lord bless you and protect you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his face to you and

grant you peace” (*Common English Bible*, 2011). We live a facial existence, which pornography and masturbation try to mimic, but fail to do so.

Jude shows us that for many boys and men, masturbation comes fused with images, and personal as well as interpersonal burdens. The images serve unconscious fantasies and desires. Jude’s practices also show that masturbation today is very different compared to the masturbatory practices of pre-Internet eras.

### **Learning From a Very Brief History of Masturbation**

A pastoral theological evaluation of masturbation has been done by James Nelson, Donald Capps, Judith and Jack Balswick, and earlier by William Phipps, to name but a few pastoral theologians (Balswick & Balswick, 1999; Capps, 2003; Nelson, 1978; Phipps, 1977). Phipps, who taught Religion and Philosophy at Davis and Elkins College, writes positively about “fantastic images...the picture on the screen of the mind,” that accompanies healthy masturbation (1977, p. 193). For at least 5000 years, masturbation has intrigued people enough to draw the practice on Ancient Egyptian papyri as it shows the god Atum masturbating with his own mouth. The intrigue continues as sex historians remind us that our sexual practices may not have changed much the last few thousand years: “Sexual manuals written thousands of years ago in ancient China covered almost all the same techniques one would find in a sex manual today, with only one major exception” (Baumeister & Bushman, 2017, p. 46). The exception is sadomasochism.

In the next paragraphs, three histories of masturbation are consulted keeping the intimate relationship between fantasy, image and masturbation in mind. The histories are:

Jean Stenger and Anne Van Neck's *Masturbation: The History of a Great Terror* (2001), Thomas Laqueur's *Solitary sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (2003), and Mels van Driel's *With the Hand: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (2012). Each book approaches their topic in a unique manner. Stenger and Van Neck offer a defined historical and feminist take on masturbation. Laqueur, whose book is twice the length of the other two, addresses masturbation (though he prefers "solitary sex" to describe the habit) as *a problem*. Van Driel, in turn, offers an unabashedly positive, though not without concern, review of this solitary practice.

Belgian feminist historians Jean Stenger and Ann Van Neck's *Masturbation* looks at Western attitudes toward masturbation in the late 1800s and the 1900s and the social forces that informed and also followed this era. They show how Tissot's thoughts—a chapter is dedicated to him—are reflected in the typical European attitudes toward this practice during that era. No bodily system remained untouched by masturbation: the nervous system, the sense organs and phonation, the skeletal system, the muscular and how the body stores fat, the respiratory system, the cardiovascular system, the digestive system, the genitourinary system, and ultimately the process of dying (p. 3). Masturbation leads to total physical and moral failure and agony as many a physician and theologian argued. Antidotes during this time were gymnastics, swimming, a clean diet (Sylvester Graham and his crackers; John Harvey Kellogg and his cereal) and memorizing poetry. The purpose was a dead-tired boy or man who will fall asleep before the temptation for masturbation sets in (p. 9). Mechanical "instruments" were developed, such as a penis ring with sharp teeth, to be worn to prevent "the bad habit" (p. 13). Some men resorted to infibulation, piercing the foreskin in two places and inserting a metal ring, disallowing



the foreskin to retract and thus stopping erections (p. 89). When everything else failed, the church recommended marriage (p. 15). Stenger and Van Neck note that *all the social anxiety against masturbation came from the bourgeoisie*. They explore how different economic and social classes engaged masturbation. The authors argue that the campaign against masturbation starting in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was a deliberate attempt by the upper class to control the minds of the lower classes. It is the bourgeoisie who turned the moral attitudes toward masturbation into a medical concern and an outrage against society.

*Masturbation*, does have a few telling references to sexual fantasy: The Franciscan Benedicti of the late 16<sup>th</sup> century warned against the pollution that “is provoked through diabolical illusion,” which is the work of the devil himself (p. 23). Here, fantasy is judged harshly by moral theology. Likewise, the 17<sup>th</sup> century French physician and sexologist, Nicolas Venette (1633-1698), following the Benedicti tradition, warned against “venereal illusions which trouble the imagination” (p. 32). Venette, who held strong patriarchal and chauvinistic attitudes, believed that women struggle with these illusions more than males do. Stenger and Van Neck also give much weight to *Onania*, or, *The heinous sin of self-pollution*, the 1712 book by British surgeon John Marten, which went through numerous printings. Marten was one of the first creators of printed soft-core porn. *Onania* indicates the moral turn against masturbation similar to that of Tissot. The book inspired by the biblical narrative of Onan, laid the groundwork for Tissot’s writing. Marten emphasized the belief that masturbation is a physical threat to one’s health and society and also saw masturbation as morally wrong. Marten’s authority as a physician gave his writings credence few could challenge. He was a good

salesman and placed advertisements in his book for vaginal oils and various cures of self-abuse.

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Stenger and Van Neck notice that the focus turned to the masturbatory practices of children. They refer to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), who, in his *Emile* (published in 1763), warns the young boy not to succumb to the “instinct,” which is a “deadly habit” (Stengers & Neck, 2001, p. 57). Later Rousseau wrote about his personal introduction and experience of “this deplorable advantage” in his *Confessions* (published 1778), a vice “particularly attractive to active imaginations” (ibid.). This imagination, Rousseau states, avail a woman to a man “without needing to obtain her consent.” The authors remind their readers that Rousseau masturbated for much of his life.

Stenger and Van Neck next turn to *The Diseases Caused by Masturbation*, by Tissot (1728-1797), who identifies the pleasures “solicited by the imagination” as disrupting the seminal fluids of the body (Stengers & Neck, 2001, p. 71). When semen is spilled because of the imagination, more so than when it happens naturally, the man is at grave risk for the illnesses mentioned in the introduction. Tissot saw the imagination as being so powerful that it can control the senses, even attack the brain, as can be seen in the chronic fatigue manifested in masturbators. Like many Germans, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) followed Tissot and warned parents and educators in his *On Pedagogy* (1803) to protect children from “the evil thoughts from one’s mind,” recommending spending as little time as possible in a bed (Stengers & Neck, 2001, p. 90). Kant too saw masturbation as disastrous on one’s wellbeing.

Stenger and Van Neck notice a slight change in attitude toward masturbation with Sir James Paget (1814-1899), Queen Victoria's physician, who first challenged the popular masturbatory beliefs of his day, especially the ones who argued mental and physical illness is the result of masturbation (p. 125). Still, he strictly forbids "fornication." Jules Christian, a French physician, also noted in 1881 that masturbation is so widespread that "very few people can boast having escaped it completely" (p. 129). Tissot, Christian felt, was wrong, for the number of persons affected by masturbation was too low. Still, the focus remained on morality and compromised physical health. *Masturbation* also discusses Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Stenger and Van Neck highlight Freud's warning for "a preponderance for a fantasy life over reality, a situation that forms a pattern for a number of other functions" (p. 140). The three pages addressing Freud identify his ambivalence toward the practice, but do not exhaust Freud's contribution.

One of the few references to looking at images surfaces in Stenger and Van Neck's discussion of *Scouting for Boys*, the 1914 manual by Robert Baden-Powell (1857-1941), who warned that "trashy books and looking at lewd pictures are very apt to lead a thoughtless boy into the temptation to self-abuse. This is the most dangerous thing for him, for should it become a habit, it quickly destroys both health and spirits..." (p. 146). *Scouting for Boys* was translated into many languages as the Scouts moved from the United States across the globe. The attitudes of Baden-Powell, Stenger and Van Neck remained in place until World War II, when cultural shifts toward sexuality were documented in the Kinsey report of 1948 (to be discussed in a following section). By 1972, research showed that the majority of persons no longer saw masturbation

physically detrimental or a personal sin, though religious doctrine persisted in seeing it as a moral failure, even as it was judged less harshly (p. 166). *Masturbation* is a rich book tracing a large number of philosophers, educators, physicians and theologians who created a culture that awakened terror around the practice of masturbation. With an emphasis on morality and physical health, the book rarely reflects on sexual fantasy and the use of images. The next book on the history of the practice, by Berkeley historian Thomas Laqueur, does pay significant attention to the role of imagination.

Laqueur's *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* is a tome of more than 500 pages. It primarily covers the period from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the dawn of cyberspace, more or less the same period Stenger and Van Neck covered, but with more depth and detail. Laqueur shows how masturbation was not a primary issue in the ancient world, but really came into focus in the 16<sup>th</sup> through 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Laqueur too argues that the strong taboo against masturbation was driven by wealthy, progressive Enlightenment thinkers, not the religious powers of the day. For Laqueur, the date of a cultural shift around masturbation is "in or around 1712," when *Onania*—which he identifies as "masturbation's primal text"—was published (Laqueur, pp. 13, 25).

Coincidentally, 1712 is also the year Joseph Addison (1672-1719) published his essay: "The pleasures of the imagination or fancy." Addison, a poet and politician, declared that

Our imagination loves to be filled with an object... The mind of man naturally hates every thing that looks like restraint upon it and is apt to fancy itself under a confinement when the sight is pent up in a narrow compass... Everything that is new or uncommon raises a pleasure in the imagination. (Laqueur, p. 318)

Addison's quote, which seems timeless and drafted without knowledge of Marten's *Onania*, describes the trend that placed the imagination, seen as the negotiator between the senses and the mind, under suspicion, even if Addison attempted to elevate its importance.

Laqueur finds it ironic that, just as a profoundly individualistic culture came into being through the notion of morality as self-government and self-sufficiency—the self being “autarkic”—masturbation came into its own as a grave physical threat and moral failure (p. 19). He identifies the imagination and sexual fantasy as one reason why masturbation became such an offense, as the act, always done secretly and prone to access, was not rooted in reality (p. 21). It is “the disconnected, imaginative, individualist, resolutely ahistorical qualities of masturbation” that continue to inform its taboo nature (p. 22). The eternal challenge for masturbation, Laqueur identifies, remains how to have a relationship with oneself without losing a relationship with others.

*Solitary sex* covers *religion* (Judaism and Christianity), *medicine* (Marten and Tissot as main figures), *moral philosophy* (Rousseau), *pedagogy* (Kant), *psychogenesis* (Freud), *research* (Kinsey), and *gender studies* (Marie Bonaparte, Jill Johnson and Betty Dobson). The book also addresses the era pre-1712, looking as Greek Mythology, early Judaism and Christianity, and Roman culture, periods of time where masturbation is recognized, but never seems to be placed in anxious focus. For Laqueur, sexual fantasies or the role of the imagination never strays too far from any discussion of masturbation, for the passion that emanates from the imagination also must be managed by society (p. 58). He references Kant on the imagination as representative of the general attitude toward masturbation and fantasy or the imagination:

[It is unnatural] if a man is aroused... not by its real object, but by his imagination of this object, and so stray in a way contrary to the purpose of the desire, since he himself creates its object. For in this way the imagination brings forth an appetite contrary to nature's purpose... [or to the contract of mutual pleasure that is marriage]. (Laqueur, p. 60)

Imagination—as “the theater of the mind”—serving the solitary vice, is guilty or moral failure. The charge came easy due to the excesses of the imagination (p. 69).

Kant's thoughts are not much different from Talmudic interpretation that views “imagination [as] more injurious to health than the sin itself” (p. 122). The danger and misuse of the imagination when it comes to masturbation remain tied, though after the Kinsey Report (1948) the attitudes of danger and misappropriation began to change.

In a chapter called “The problem with masturbation,” Laqueur discusses the intimate relationship between fantasy and masturbating. Especially during the Enlightenment, he suggests, masturbation and the social outcry against the act were “motivated not by a real object of desire but by a phantasm; masturbation threatened to overwhelm the most protean and potentially creative of the mind's faculties—the imagination—and to drive it over the cliff” (p. 210). By focusing on and even eradicating the act, the imagination could be saved. By calling on Freud to name the problem with masturbation, Laqueur also indicates that attitudes toward the imagination had not changed much between the 17<sup>th</sup> to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> centuries: “Masturbation contributes to the substitution of fantasy objects for reality” (p. 210). A belief during this enlightenment period was that the practice “heats” the imagination, which turns it into a dangerous idolatrous instrument. The problem, however, is difficult to solve, for the imagination,

which is “voluptuous, fiery” is not easily constrained (p. 213). Since using the imagination during masturbation is a conscious act, the moral judgment on person using imagination in this way was severe. “Fictions and phantasms—the made-up, imagined, self-fashioned products of the mind—always at the ready, were the real villains of the piece [sic],” Laqueur concludes (p. 214).

One Enlightenment proponent against fantasy, the German physician Christoph Hufeland (1762-1836), felt that youth turned to self-pleasuring too early, causing them to postpone marriage. “The expansion of flaming of fantasy with all sorts of indecent and unworthy pictures,” Hufeland stated, leads to “fantasy [being] armed and [it] takes over the whole being” (Laqueur, p. 215) Other proponents referred to the imagination as “the fatal rage of masturbation,” able to excite all the organs, including emotion, thereby claiming power over a person’s life (ibid.). Nocturnal emissions were less morally fraught than when emissions were weakened by the imagination. “That which sullied, that which transgressed, was no longer semen in all its sticky specificity, but rather the imagination reveling in desires of its own, unnatural creation” (p, 216).

In the absence of a proper object for sexual intercourse, the imagination provided where reality failed. “The mind’s eye,” the English physician Alexander P. Buchan (1716-1824) declared, interferes with the normal “indulgence of sexual appetite [and causes the] evil consequences of this vicious habit” (ibid.). With little exception, European progressive intellectuals saw the imagination as a vice. Laqueur faults the Enlightenment for coming to a place of seeing the imagination in a completely different light compared to classic medicine, where someone such as Diogenes the Cynic (412-323 BCE) saw masturbating to one’s imagination as the most efficient, dignified and

satisfying of practices, an act of much higher standing and less self-depleting than visiting with a prostitute (p. 217). Not surprisingly, masturbation had its Enlightenment proponents too, in the person of John Hunter (1728-1793). Hunter, a British physician, stated that the only affliction persons have, was reading the misinformation regarding “solitary friction.” Hunter—in the tradition of Diogenes the Cynic—was adamant that “masturbation does less harm than the natural [act]” (p. 217). In the second and third editions of his book, *A Treatise of the Venereal Diseases* (first published in 1786), however, Hunter’s support of masturbation was edited out and he merely questioned whether masturbation causes medical ills as popular belief dictated.

Laqueur too identifies Rousseau as the Enlightenment person who saw masturbation’s use of the imagination as “deceitful and counterfeit,” a description he gives in his *Emile* (Laqueur, p. 220). Furthermore, the imagination, an admirable faculty that should have fueled democratic values or economic products, was tainted by the solitary practice. “The onanist mobilized the imagination not to produce art and poetry or compassion; in fact he or she produced nothing at all or, worse, nothing but bottomless self-absorption at the expense of any possible social good” (p. 221). As the 19<sup>th</sup> century approached, masturbation remained a problem for being “*the* solitary vice,” “*the* secret vice” and for being “antisocial” (p. 245). Regarding the latter, Laqueur names masturbation a threat to heterosexuality, often being done in excess, being addictive, and establishing behavior not under control of any authorities.

As Laqueur concludes his chapter on “The problem with masturbation,” he identifies two primary reasons for the negative evaluation of masturbation that spanned much of the 17-19<sup>th</sup> centuries: First, “Anxiety about masturbation was an expression of



anxiety about the new political economic order writ large on the body” (p. 280). The solitary vice undermined authoritarian systems. Second, print media became a prominent market player and pornographic or antisocial material could not be controlled. Europe’s social values were under threat. Erotic literature, sometimes referred to as “pillow books” or “books to be read with one hand,” were popular (p. 332, 334). Paintings of nude virgins, sometimes masturbating while reading (*Midday Heat* by Emmanuel de Ghendt, *Solitary Pleasure* by Pierre-Antoine Baudouin, *The Dangerous Novel* by Isidore Stanislas Helman and *Lonesome Pleasures* by Thomas Rowlandson, would be examples), made it into print and into personal collections. Society depended on the very media it feared. Laqueur summarizes the West’s dilemma as follows: “Print culture, the essential communication network of civil society and the teacher of its most basic ways of being and feeling, depended on and encouraged precisely the qualities that made masturbation so threatening” (p. 303).

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, illnesses were no longer ascribed to masturbation. Though medical understanding increased significantly, religious and moral values mostly resisted change. Rather, the attention shifted away from illness to guilt, neurosis, and personal failure. Viewing masturbation through the lens of “fantasy, excess, and secrecy on the one hand and incompleteness, falseness and lack of sociability on the other” maintained culture’s ambivalent relationship with the practice (p. 365). Laqueur has a rich discussion of Freud on masturbation (pp. 365-68; 381-98), which is outside the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say that “[Freud, in 1895] argued that there was a specific *somatic*, depleting quality to masturbation that resulted in neurasthenia—nervous debility—and that this neurosis could be distinguished from *Angstneurose*, anxiety

neurosis” (Laqueur, p. 367). Freud, however, rejected a generalized view on masturbation, saying it had to be evaluated case by case. *Solitary Sex* also references Sándor Ferenczi (1873-1933), Freud’s Hungarian colleague, who saw the imagination doing all the heavy lifting during masturbation as the other senses are “silent” during the practice, and this “work” causes the fatigue and debility the masturbator experiences. When one has sex with a partner, Ferenczi believed, the imagination could rest and the man will be “invigorated in the act” (Laqueur, p. 219). Laqueur faults Freud and Ferenczi for not escaping the legacy of *Onania* and the Enlightenment’s turn against masturbation. The views of Freud, Ferenczi, and other 19<sup>th</sup> century psychoanalysts, however, did not have nearly the impact *Onania* and Tissot had on the general cultural attitudes towards masturbation. Rather, Laqueur argues it was feminist scholars, including psychoanalysts such as Melanie Klein and Helen Deutsch, and feminists such as Anne Koedt, Joan Garrity and even Betty Dobson (who wrote *Sex for One: The Joy of Self-loving*, published 1995) who, in changing views of women’s masturbation, changed masturbatory perceptions for men, too (p. 398).

Laqueur does not discuss the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in depth, a time in which computer technology forever changed the practice of masturbation. However, modern influences such as a new political order, printed media, globalization, the Internet, and the growth of social media will forever change cultural values toward masturbation. Furthermore, religion and medicine have been stripped as authorities in a postmodern world. This change is noticeable in the next history to be discussed, that of the Dutch urologist and sexologist, Mels van Driel, as he describes the pornification of masturbation.

Van Driel, in his *With the Hand: A Cultural History of Masturbation* explores his topic thematically (Driel & Vincent, 2012). In this engaging book, he weaves together mythological, historical, biblical, religious, philosophical and contemporary beliefs about masturbation. He discusses the attitudes toward the act within Christianity, Judaism, the Islamic tradition, and Taoism, and addresses the demographics around masturbation, education, sex aids, doctors and scientists, writers, poets and artists, entertainment, and even animal masturbation.

Van Driel approaches his readers with humor and Dutch open-mindedness:

In itself it stands to reason that the habit of masturbation can lead to passivity. But what's wrong with that? For many people an active, mutually satisfying sex life is bound up with self-esteem and hence far from idyllic. All in all, however, it is not a good idea for men to masturbate five times in quick succession. The seminal vesicles empty and finally all that comes out is a little liquid, or in the worst case, blood. Apart from that, after fourteen days of complete abstinence—no masturbation or coitus—the sperm will find their own way out via the urine. (pp. 13-14)

Van Driel is the reverse incarnation of Tissot as he seeks to undo the taboo of masturbation. He, too, takes physicians such as Tissot to task for the ways they influenced the Western mindset toward masturbation. Following Stenger, Van Neck, and Laqueur, Van Driel argues that much of masturbation's taboo serves "the creation of a perfect society" (p. 184). The concern during the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was, in part, that if the wealthy masturbate, the poor, who fornicate, will outnumber the ruling class by larger

numbers they already do. He addresses the relationship between fantasy, images and masturbation when he writes: “Perhaps many persons masturbate with their loved one’s image in front of them. So, isn’t that love? A lesser kind of love? What is love?” (p. 14). Van Driel raises questions of what is real and whether masturbation helps or hinders the building of intimate relationships. The topic of whether or not masturbating is actually self-love still needs to be researched, Van Driel states, though he has doubts. Still, Van Driel appreciates fantasy and quotes research in which 42% of respondents masturbated to their own fantasies without using images (p. 24). He identifies fantasy as central to masturbation and laments that “unfortunately, the role of fantasies is not given sufficient prominence in [educational] publications” (p. 27) As long as the emphasis remains on the genital and physical, Van Driel states, fantasies will be neglected. Fantasies, of course, are not always assisting a person in reaching orgasm through masturbation. When they are traumatic fantasies or exclude the self, Van Driel sees a severing in the relationship between fantasies, well-being and pleasure.

In his chapter, “Artists,” Van Driel discusses depictions, drawings, paintings and etchings from the sixth century B.C.E. to 20<sup>th</sup> century that depict persons masturbating. He does not discuss the images per se—which are reproduced in the book—but highlights the fact that masturbation has been a topic of interest to painters such as Rembrandt and Dali, an artist such as Jordan McKenzie (who paints with sperm), and a photographer such as Serrano.

As Van Driel concludes his book, he turns to the use of pornography in the service of masturbation. He judges “the pornification of our society” harshly (p. 236). The availability of pornography causes “masturbation addicts. Marriages break up

because men creep out of bed at night, penis in hand, and sit in front of the computer,” Van Driel attests (ibid). For especially young people, “porn removes sex from the realm of human relationships and locates it purely in the genitalia and in mechanical movements...” (p. 237). When masturbating to images replaces relationships, it fuels narcissism, leads to objectification and cuts off the tie that bonds people together. Education, Van Driel suggests, is the only approach to combat the use of pornography and to change the taboo of masturbation into the celebration of solitary sex (p. 241).

As we conclude a brief look at three histories on masturbation, Western culture’s deep ambivalence towards this universal practice remains intact. As sociologist Steve Garlick writes, the histories of masturbation and anti-masturbation are complex and can focus on procreation, heteronormativity, social order, religion, morality, philosophy, notions of the body, scientific knowledge, capitalism, film, ethics, and medicine, to name but a few approaches (Garlick, 2012, p. 308). Yet, the common theme is one of moral judgment and a call to revisit our relationship with an intimate practice. The research of Brett Kahr on the sexual fantasies of contemporary Brits, arguably more than anybody else, shows not only a proliferation of masturbatory practices, but also on the role of fantasy. His work is discussed next.

### **Brett Kahr and Our Sexual Fantasies**

“The central masturbatory fantasy...provides the most important insights into the core of the human mind,” writes research therapist and London-based analyst, Brett Kahr (Kahr, 2007, p. 76). Our sexual fantasies indicate who we are. Kahr surveyed more than 19,000 persons as part of the *British Sexual Fantasy Research Project*. His research was first

published in *Sex and the Psyche: Revealing the true nature of our secret fantasies from the largest ever survey of its kind* (Kahr, 2007) and reprinted in revised form as *Who's Been Sleeping in Your Head? The secret world of sexual fantasies* (Kahr, 2008). We will draw on *Sex and the Psyche* unless otherwise indicated. Most of the fantasies in the book were given by the respondents in the survey, but some are also from Kahr's case material. The fantasies were reported online, some written down and sent to him and others recorded as an audio file. Kahr himself interviewed hundreds of persons. He warns his readers that the fantasies—from ordinary Brits of all standings and religions who lived “a reasonably healthy life”—shock, disgust, titillate and arouse even to the point of climax (p. xii). Here the focus will not be on the fantasies per se—revealing as they are—but rather on what Kahr learnt about *the nature, role and function, even the importance of sexual fantasies*. Kahr, identifying with Theodor Reik, states he listens to fantasies with his “third ear...concentrating not only on what the patient says, but also on what the patient does not say, attempting at all times to decipher the secret meanings of the patient's dilemmas, meanings which remain obscure even to the patient” (p. xix).

“Sexual fantasies,” Kahr writes, “can serve not only as a source of deep pleasure, but also as a cause for great shame. Often our fantasies will stimulate both excitement and revulsion simultaneously, and this produces a great deal of psychological turmoil” (p. xxiii). Living between orgasms and despair and between pleasure and pain or even disgust—often fueled by a singular fantasy—Kahr's patients reveal that sexual fantasies are deeply rooted in their lives. Reflecting on the fantasizing about someone else other than our partner, he writes that “we do not yet have a sufficiently clear idea about whether our fantasies may be good for us; they may, in fact, induce the most potent of

orgasms...[but might fantasies about someone else] indicate that our relationship at home might be in trouble?" (p. xxvii).

*Sex and the Psyche* opens by telling of Jasper, who ritually masturbates to videos of women boxing "Mohammed Ali-style" (p. 5). Like many, Jasper's inner life is "dominated by ... a perplexing sexual fantasy," now mirrored back to him from a screen, which awakens "shame and suffering about his internal world" (p. 9). When he does have sex with his model girlfriend, he does so with the lights off and fantasizing about boxing women. Having introduced Jasper, Kahr raises significant questions about sexual fantasies:

What is a sexual fantasy? What constitutes a "normal" fantasy? Why do we have sexual fantasies in the first place? What purpose or purposes do our sexual fantasies serve? ... If we fantasize about someone other than our partners during sex or masturbation, does that mean that our relationship might be in trouble? ... Is there a difference between the fantasies that we have during sex with a partner and the fantasies that we indulge in during private masturbation? [And,] Do we control our fantasies, or do our fantasies control us?" (pp. 9-10)

"I have come to the conclusion," Kahr writes, "that a significant majority of adults maintains a most uncomfortable relationship with their private sexual fantasies, in spite of the fact that most fantasies culminate in orgasm," a dynamic he calls "the Masturbatory Paradox" (p. 11). This paradox might be the *first* truth to be accepted in reflecting on sexual fantasies and is fueled, in part, by the fact that one may not know the person" who *has been sleeping in your head*," the person being masturbated to or who becomes the fantasy partner during sex (p. 12).

In laying a foundation for his book, Kahr normalizes sexual fantasies: “I regard our sexual fantasies as completely normative experiences, which develop from our earliest infantile fantasy capacities and become increasingly sexualized as we progress through the life cycle” (p. 25). By its very nature, a fantasy is always transformed and invested with personal desires and pleasures. He also provides a brief synopsis of “the sexperts,” primarily analysts who reflected on sexual fantasies. He identifies Heinrich van Kaan, a German physician, who in 1844 published *Psychopathia Sexualis*, a book on the mental pathologies of human sexuality (p. 26). Like Tissot, Van Kaan held grave concerns about masturbation, which he saw as a sexual perversion, especially since it was often tied to fantasy. Kahr also names the Austrian psychiatrist and professor, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, whose *Eine klinisch-ferencische Studie (A clinical forensic study; Published in 1886)* was more liberal than van Kaan’s. Von Krafft-Ebing writes about a man with masochistic fantasies entertained since childhood, but which was very dissatisfying when he enacted them with a prostitute. Since sexual fantasies follow masturbation and vice versa, he referred to fantasies as “psychical onanism” and launched the discipline of sexual fantasy studies (p. 27). “Psychical onanism,” Von Krafft-Ebing believed, is more prevalent in those with masochistic traits.

Freud, who met Von Krafft-Ebing at conferences, is the next person Kahr identifies. Freud qualified in medicine at the University of Vienna in 1886, just as von Krafft-Ebing’s work was published. Freud’s argument for a connection between early childhood experiences and neurotic illness was not well received by Von Krafft-Ebing, who called it “a scientific fairy tale” (p. 28). Freud, of course, continued with his research to argue that all people have erotic and violent fantasies and urges. Kahr reminds us that



in his *Three essays on the history of sexuality* (published in 1905), Freud named the relationship between “perverse” sexuality (sucking, biting and licking) and infantile experiences of the breast, thereby legitimizing foreplay (p. 29). Not surprisingly, Kahr sees Freud as the first to explore the origins of sexual fantasies and how they relate to a person’s early life, especially the life around mother and father. Still, Freud “regarded much of human sexual functioning as degenerate” (ibid.). Freud’s contribution, according to Kahr, was showing that sexual fantasies “serve as the fulfillment of primitive, unbearable wishes, and that sexual fantasies also protect the mind from often even more uncomfortable thoughts” (ibid.). Later, Freud linked sexual fantasies to mental turmoil, writing in his essay “Creative writers and day-dreaming,” that “We may lay it down that a happy person never phantasies, only an unsatisfied one. The motive forces of phantasies are unsatisfied wishes, and every single phantasy is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality” (Quoted in Kahr, p. 33).

Freud’s famous statement, “I am accustoming myself to the idea of regarding every sexual act as a process in which four persons are involved,” is interpreted by Kahr that Freud could have had the male and female elements of being a person in mind, or that every lover fantasizes about someone else during sex (p. 31-32). This latter scenario Kahr identifies as “the intra-marital affair,” which is a separate chapter in *Whose been sleeping in your head?* (Kahr, 2008, pp. 69-110). Before Freud’s death in 1939, Freud wrote of a man whose only path to sexual arousal was fantasizing about mother *and* father (Kahr, 2007, p. 34). Still, sexual fantasy, Kahr concludes, was never a primary focus for Freud. For Kahr, who appreciates Freud more than Laqueur does, Freud’s work initiated a more humanist understanding of sexuality and sexual fantasy (p. 35).

The final “sexpert” Kahr addresses is Alfred Charles Kinsey, the Indiana University sexologist who published *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948. Kinsey exposed the subterranean sexuality of the American male, recently having returned from World War Two, when he interviewed 12,000 males. He also opened interest in the sexuality of women after he published *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* in 1953. Kinsey’s work initiated the academic study of sexuality in the United States.

In a chapter called “The Science of Psychological Fingerprints,” Kahr explores different aspects of sexual fantasies beyond the Masturbatory Paradox. He argues for the normalcy of sexual fantasies: “I would regard the capacity to fantasize as completely normal... In fact, I would be extremely concerned if I met a patient who could not fantasize, as this might indicate an impoverishment of mental functioning” (p. 15). His research also indicates that “technological distractions do not prevent fantasy; in many cases [digital images or videos] will inflame fantasy” (p. 16). Jude’s case, discussed earlier, would be an example of this statement. For many of Kahr’s subjects, sexual fantasies, which can be conscious or unconscious (p. 17), promise “escape from the confining strictures of ordinary reality” (p. 15). Serving as a specific kind of daydream, fantasies are also vulnerable to one’s specific contexts and relationships. Most often, however, desires and needs that resist awareness drive our fantasies. If the unconscious fantasy is one of self-destruction, as a number of Kahr’s patients showed, self-sabotage permeates their lives, but they remain unaware how this dynamic determines much of their lives.

Furthermore, sexual fantasy can be simple and brief or elaborate with an intricate or complicated narrative, and entertained with or without the aid of mind-altering substances such as alcohol, marijuana or other drugs or sex toys (p. 19). There might be a single person in one's fantasy or there might be a great many, the latter more likely causing one to feel "perverted," Kahr writes. Kahr's subjects entertained sexual fantasies at all hours of the day, outside or during sexual intercourse and exploration, and when alone or with others (ibid.). Some of the fantasies were very personal—and thus rarely appealing to someone else and thus best not shared—or imbedded in cultural and historical behavior. Some reflected mild, "vanilla sex" while others were extreme forms of sadomasochism, violence and perversion (p. 21). Kahr identifies "pub fantasies" as those fantasies we'll readily share with friends, whereas most sexual fantasies will remain private (pp. 21). One might share how one would like to make love to the person across the bar, but may not reveal one's homosexual fantasies. The more disturbing the fantasies are, the less likely we are to share them with others. Some persons return to the same fantasy or structure (dominance or fetish)—such as the "central masturbation fantasy" as Jude showed—while "others utilize a broader variety of different fantasies" which may include persons, animals, objects, and places (p. 22). In addition, Kahr shows us how our fantasy lives can be fixed, rigid, predictable, and even logical, or more fluid, plastic, open to new experiences, or even illogical, with those traits being the poles of a very large spectrum (p. 23). Some men only fantasize about their partner, some never about their partner; some men will have sexual relations with women only, but fantasize exclusively about males.

Psychodynamically, these fantasies serve many purposes, which are evident in the numerous case discussions Kahr provides. Some fantasize to repair narcissistic wounds; they hide concerns of genital or bodily inadequacy; they allow for the exploration of latent homosexual wishes; they can seek to recreate a pleasurable or painful childhood or sexual experiences (which are then incorporated, disguised, and transformed); fantasies can reflect the nature of the caregiving received in infancy and childhood; and, they voyeuristically reflect on the parents' bedroom—the Oedipal crisis (Kahr, 2007, pp. 168, 260, 369ff, 429). Giving his readers a summary on the functions of sexual fantasies, Kahr identifies fourteen meanings of sexual fantasies in a chapter with the same title. The meanings are: wish-fulfillment, self-comfort and self-medication, trial action and experimentation (of personal and sexual identities), elaboration of childhood play, establishment of object relationships, transitional objects and transitional phenomena (symbolic mothering), communication of inner unconscious or unanalyzed conflict, indulgence in masochistic punishment, defenses against intimacy and merger, discharge of aggression, avoidance of painful reality (by using aspirational wishes), the evacuation of sadistic strivings, mastering trauma (as well as shame and loss), and establishing equilibration of the self (as part of the capacity for creativity) (Kahr, 2007, pp. 468-490). Kahr warns that “We cannot ever attain absolute certainty in our psychological detective work [about the meanings of sexual fantasies], instead, we present *hypotheses* to our patients, so that we can use the observations as a starting point for a psychotherapeutic conversation” (Kahr, 2007, p. 380). We are best reminded that fantasies originate in “*biography*” and not in a person’s “*bloodstream*,” genetic make-up, or hormone levels (p. 435; Italics original).

After discussing some key figures on sexual fantasy and key findings of the research project, Kahr turns to a discussion of specific sexual practices, including masturbation. Even though the medical profession deems the practice “a perfectly reasonable, pleasurable and normal form of sexual self-expression and self-pleasuring,” he writes, “psychotherapists and psychoanalysts have long known that masturbation may also serve some more defensive and complicated functions for the human being” (Kahr, 2007, p. 79). The practice, first discovered by an infant, is practiced by 97% of males and 87% of females and equally across race, religion and class. As a “positive” practice,

masturbation can provide bodily pleasure, reduce depression, stress or anxiety, facilitate sleep, be used as an erotically arousing adjunct during lovemaking with one’s partner, help to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, provide a vehicle in which loving fantasy can be utilized and so much more... Furthermore, masturbation may serve as a source for sexual release for the widowed, the handicapped, the celibate, or anyone else who does not have access to a regular sexual partner. It may even be a means of indulging in fantasies which one could not, would not or perhaps should not enact with one’s regular partner or partners. (p. 80)

Kahr, as if reflecting on a reason a man can give for masturbating, says the belief that the emission of semen will prevent prostate cancer, is yet to be fully proven.

Kahr, affirming the sexual fantasies and masturbatory practices of persons, does out masturbation’s addictive potential, which can minimize the potential of finding a real partner. Furthermore, it may lead to “the reinforcement of dangerous or sexually perverse

fantasies,” as is true for many pedophiles masturbating to the images of minors (p. 80). Sadistic and perverse fantasies can also induce guilt and shame and being deemed a “wanker” is almost always an insult, not a compliment. Wondering why men tend to masturbate more often than women, Kahr names one reason the fact that men have a less complicated relationship with their external genitalia compared to women. Whereas a man touches his penis to urinate from a young age and many times a day, women can do so without touching their “internal genitals.” Psychodynamically, some men masturbate to unconsciously see if their genitals—forever vulnerable—are still there (p. 81). The act resists castration fear.

Not surprisingly, Kahr’s research also indicates a strong relationship between pornography and masturbation. Eighty-seven percent of males and 56% of females in Kahr’s study have used pornography to stimulate sexual arousal and increase sexual experience. Virtual content is fueling masturbatory practices. One reason Kahr identifies is that “the vast proportion of males would claim not to have had a fully satisfying sexual experience without achieving orgasm; and many, though certainly not all, women would agree” (p. 93). Pornography and masturbating to orgasm provide satisfaction and release.

Kahr’s work is important as it offers us a deeper understanding on the paradox and complex nature of sexual fantasies. The chapters after “The Science of Psychological Fingerprints”—discussed in the preceding paragraphs—focus on the varied ways the British practice their sexuality, which might mean that they are not having sex at all. Some fantasies are depictions of straight sex, others focus on gay sex; some fantasies are with known persons, whereas the majority of fantasies include strangers; some are fantasies of solitary activities, others include groups or crowds. Fifty-eight percent of

men in Kahr's study fantasized having sex with more than one person (p. 167). Some fantasies include persons, other fantasies include things or objects or demand a certain context; some fantasies seem normal, others are dirty; some fantasies speak of love and romance, others of domination, penetration, humiliation, power, and control. Persons perceived to be predominantly ordinary have fantasies across this wide spectrum. "We notice," Kahr writes, "not only the wide range of content, revealing the breadth of secret sexual thoughts but also an extraordinary diversity in terms of style" (p. 117).

Kahr writes that, in his experience, therapists and counselors typically view sexual fantasies in one of six ways: 1) Fantasies are the products of deeply disturbed minds and traumatized persons; 2) Fantasies are not serious compared to those who violate others sexually in rape, for example; 3) Fantasies are symptoms of unresolved aggressive conflicts that will impact everyday living; 4) Fantasies are symptoms of unresolved aggressive impulses that remain tied in inner worlds; 5) Fantasies are potentially creative ways to deal with life and powerful emotions such as aggression; and 6) Some therapists are caught between their desire to address pathology and their open-mindedness and compassion to matters sexual and personal experience (p. 388).

Kahr's work beckons us to understand ourselves more deeply, a task that is unlikely to happen if we do not explore the unconscious fantasies and their wish-fulfillments that fuel our masturbatory practices. When we ritually and compulsively seek image upon image, with increased intensity as Jude did, one can even argue that the eye has replaced fantasy as a source of stimulation. It does not surprise that Kahr, towards the end of this book, briefly discusses the impact of online pornography on the fantasy lives of persons (p. 515). He describes the use of pornographic images "an area of growing

concern” and “a troubling and preoccupying issue” (ibid.). The case Kahr discusses of a couple in their thirties who were rarely intimate, shows the destruction that unfolded when the husband first denied masturbating but then got caught red-handed asleep in front of graphic, sadistic pornography. Much courageous work led the couple back to sexual relations that were life-giving to both in the partnership. Whereas Kahr’s work highlights the prevalence and passion of ordinary persons’ fantasy lives, this essay asks what happens to a male who primarily masturbates to images, even if those images serve an unconscious fantasy. What happens when the “mental infidelity” and the “intra-marital affair” as Kahr identifies cheating on one’s partner in one’s imagination or with pornography, are reinforced by *visual infidelity*, the inevitable result of pornography (pp. 138-139). The eye and the ritual of looking at a screen mandate us to revisit the role of the eye in human nature (and sexuality). We will do so following the thought of Michael Taussig who explores the eye within mimetic desire.

### **The Eye as the Organ of Tactility**

The eye has eclipsed fantasy. Furthermore, sexual fantasies now rely on the eye for its own stimulation. Whereas the eye seeks constant stimulation, the fantasies in Kahr’s study show that they are especially sustained by and tied to early—and often traumatic—life experiences. The mind typically does not rapid-fire through fantasies to build arousal. Rather, it usually returns to a familiar (or even the same) mental picture, which is slowly built. In addition, it seems as if the eye has bound the hand. The hand, now serving the eye, swipes a screen for minutes or even hours on end as the perfect image is sought, to



briefly touch a penis to orgasm. In the language of philosopher Michael Taussig, the eye is “the organ of tactility” (Taussig, 1993, p. 20).

In his *Mimesis and Alterity* (1993), Taussig argues that culture is built on two opposing but intimately connected dynamics: imitation and difference. Human beings seek to take nature and built a second nature, which is alike, yet dissimilar. We copy, especially through our tools and machines, but do so imperfectly. Creating social constructions through our mimetic capacities, we seek to invigorate life with what Taussig calls “the true real” (p. xvii). We know, however, that there is a difference between “the real and the really made-up,” yet we continue to live as if what is real and what we created are the same (ibid.). The only way to proceed, Taussig states, is to “retreat to the unmentionable world of active forgetting” as we “marvel at [mimesis]’ wonder or fume at its duplicity” (p. xviii). We’d rather forget the original experiences that now seek mimetic replication. An in-depth discussion of Taussig’s fascinating work, in which he draws extensively on especially Walter Benjamin, but includes numerous anthropological studies, lies outside the scope of this essay. His construct of “the eye as the organ of tactility,” however, is instructive for this project (p. 20).

The Cuna Indians of Panama’s San Blas Islands created shamanistic curing icons and protective spirits—*nuchus*—in the shape of their Spanish colonizers. This fact has intrigued anthropologists, as the colonizers brought nothing but disease and destruction. After reflecting on the Cuna Indians, Taussig turns to the eye. In a chapter entitled “Physiognomic Aspects of Visual Worlds,” Taussig begins with a 1933 quote from Walter Benjamin: “[Man’s] gift for seeing is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else. Perhaps

there is none of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role” (p. 19). The eye, Taussig suggests as he follows Benjamin, is the organ by which we not only “other” an object or a person—but we use the eye to become someone else. We mimic to return to a primitive state, to a time and place where we lived a simpler, ritualized life that made more sense.

“Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction,” Taussig quotes Benjamin (p. 20). Mimesis not only *copies*, but creates *contact*, a “palpable, sensuous connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived” (p. 21). The eye, more so than the other organs, is used to build contact. The advertising world knows this best and readily exploits the eye’s power. Through the eye the intricate relationship between producer, laborer, and product, which Karl Marx highlighted, is severed (p. 22). Taussig does not address masturbation or pornography, but drawing on his thought one can say that the eye creates the contact between a man, his digital screen, and a pornographic image that serves deeper desires. We use our eyes to touch and be touched. Fantasy, which can play a similar function, becomes work when one can swipe one image after the next.

“The organ of tactility” is an optical analogy to describe not only how mimesis functions, but it serves what Benjamin refers to as “the optical unconscious,” that world we mimetically long for (Taussig, 1993, p. 24). Film, Taussig shows, often portrays the optical unconscious, a new subject-object relation that serves mimetic desire. Men, for example, who will never cry in real life, may shed tears while watching a movie. Specifically, the construct implies a world in which personal experience is diminished and dominated by the images that is being perceived. Returning to his discussion on

Marx and the eye breaking the production cycle, Taussig broadens his picture of the optical unconscious world, a world in which production has “the increasingly modest role of the hand” and in which “the constellation of the eye, hand and soul, is torn apart by the division of labor” (p. 36). Taussig reflects that as machines manufacture, the product dominates both the creator and the laborer alike.

We minimize the stronghold of the eye as the organ of tactility by insisting “on breaking away from the tyranny of the visual notion of image” (p 57). Identifying the West as being disembodied, Taussig references Amazonian healers whose healing is always embodied and filled with sensual (and non-visual) stimuli, whether it is singing, dancing, smelling, inducing nausea (which Taussig identifies as “untheorized territory”) or leaving the body as spirit. It is by focusing on the body, the senses that can awaken “interior images,” and the non-visual that a person can break the power of the eye, Taussig suggest (p. 58). Of course, this break is not easily navigated as the image too sensorizes or stimulates the body, as masturbating to pornography teaches us.

The eye as the organ of tactility, considering our discussion thus far, informs this project in at least six ways. *First*, Taussig persuasively argues that the eye is the organ of tactility. We touch ourselves, not by the hand, but with our eyes. When the touching eye is placed in the context of masturbating to pornography, the insatiable nature of desire meets an infinite source. The self can consume image upon image and rarely tires, even if the life holding the eye is filled with despair and depleted.

*Second*, the eye serves the desire to be or to become someone else. As it serves imitation, the eye forgets the difference inherent to mimetic desire. Specifically, the eye creates the illusion of relationship, of desirability, control, sexual omnipotence, and

potency. Although the desire to be someone else is natural, the eye rarely delivers on this promise of alterity. The powerful, mimetic relationship one experiences with the image is not the same as a relationship such as the one Woods had with Jude, where each person was recognized in deep mutuality. Rather, mimetic relationships with online images lead to isolation and alienation.

*Third*, just as photos and film awaken an optical unconsciousness, pornography too awakens a world where relationship is promised, where pleasure is always available, where boredom never exists and stimulation is a mere click or swipe away. As Kahr showed, masturbating to sexual images can serve unconscious memories and desires. The mimetic magic of optical unconsciousness can be understood in a variety of ways, whether religious, economic, or psychodynamic. The fourteen meanings of sexual fantasies Kahr identifies, whether self-comfort and self-medication or trial action and experimentation, and the establishment of object relationships or communicating inner conflict, describes the optical unconsciousness of masturbating to pornography.

A *fourth* way Taussig's work informs this project is the acknowledgement that there is a difference between mental images internally created and images (or imitations) internalized from outside sources. A man masturbating to personal fantasies deeply linked to his repressed unconsciousness, for example, rarely becomes bored of those images, whereas the images found online easily lose their titillation and the eye will seek images more explicit, vile, or violent, as our discussion on the neuroplasticity of the brain also indicates.

*Fifth*, the organ of tactility facilitates and engages in touch. Mimesis not only copies, but also creates contact. The physical touch of a screen or a mouse as images are

being consumed, the “foreplay” that precedes masturbation to pornography, gives new meaning to touching oneself. This touch can be so profound that the question can be raised on the difference between “the true real” and “the real and the really made-up” (p. xvii). The eye as the organ of tactility entices, but never remains focused on an object too long. Doing just that, focusing on an object—even a pornographic one—may break the power of the eye as the urge to seek a new image is resisted. Also, being mindful—to encourage emotional regulation and minimize disembodied masturbation—may change one’s masturbatory practices and remove a sharp focus on an image (Reid, Bramen, Anderson, & Cohen, 2014; Reid, Garos, Carpenter, & Coleman, 2011).

*Finally*, Taussig shows how mimesis leads to forgetting, as demonstrated by the Cuna Indians’ puzzling creation of healing icons in the image of the very colonizers who destroyed their way of living and who introduced catastrophic illnesses. As the relationship between the eye, the hand, and the penis deepens, so too may be repression of the original experiences that gave content to one’s sexual fantasies. One can also expect a repressed person to be more defensive when challenged on the role and function of masturbating to pornographic images in the serves of certain fantasies.

Taussig’s work, when combined with Kahr’s, broadens our understanding of masturbating to pornographic images, even if those images serve deeply personal fantasies. “The wonder of mimesis,” Tausig writes, “lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and power” (pp. viii-vix). As Woods already indicated in his discussion of Jude, “the original” can be understood in terms of D.W. Winnicott’s capacity to be alone. In the remainder of the essay we return to Kahr’s work as we ask:

When does masturbating to pornography become an addictive and thus life-depriving practice that no longer informs life in positive, vitalizing ways, but one that leads to personal and interpersonal depletion? Furthermore, boundary between what is life-depriving and what is illegal might be blurry.

### **When the eye dominates over fantasies**

The history of masturbation shows that images, whether mental or in print, are inherent to its practice. In today's Internet culture, the eye reigns supreme. Brett Kahr's research shows that sexual fantasies are a normal part of almost all persons' sexual (including masturbatory) practices. He names, with great concern, the prevalence of pornography and how images can ruin lives and relationships. In a chapter called "Normality and Perversion in the Bedroom and the Boardroom," Kahr asks: "*Is your fantasy perverse?*" (Kahr, 2007, p. 533). In light of the severe moral judgment masturbation has received in history, however, it is important for us not to hear the question as a moral judgment on a normal behavior. Using the term "disordered" to describe masturbation that depletes personal well-being—rather than "perversion"—can help us move beyond the moral connotations of being "perverse." Still, talking about the dangers of masturbating to pornography does awaken images of Tissot and his message of doom even as clinicians and researchers are unanimous in recognizing life-depriving elements in some masturbatory practices.

Reflection drawing on how the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* identifies addiction and recent discussions on hypersexuality as a disorder are informative. The *DSM-5* frames addiction as "*impaired control, social*

*impairment, risky use, and pharmacological criteria,*” the latter speaking to increased tolerance (APA, 2013). This framework may inform our discussion better than the criteria for Paraphilic Disorders, which address voyeurism, exhibitionism, frotteurism, masochism, sadism, pedophilia, fetishism and transvestic disorder, even as these disorders also cause distress or impairment (APA, 2013).

A proposal to include “Hypersexual Disorder” in the *DSM-5* was unsuccessful despite clinicians’ arguments (Kafka, 2010, 2014; Reid, 2015). Rory Reid, a psychologist and sex researcher from the University of California Los Angeles, played a significant role in proposing the inclusion of “Hypersexual Disorder” in the *DSM-5*. He admits that the topic of hypersexual behavior is in its infancy as he defines the disorder as “a repetitive and intense preoccupation with sexual fantasies, urges, and behaviors, leading to adverse consequences and clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning” (Reid, 2015, p. 221). Reid’s definition supports our argument that masturbating to images can be disordered. A defining feature of Hypersexual Disorder is “multiple unsuccessful attempts to control or diminish the amount of time an individual engages in sexual fantasies, urges, and behavior in response to dysphoric mood states or stressful life events” (ibid.). However, looking at symptoms only and counting those to assess severity, Reid warns, is not an effective way to measure disorder as it assumes that a single criterion is equal to other criteria. Time spent serving the disorder, Reid argues, is also not an effective measure of severity (p. 222). Masturbating “once a week for 15 minutes might not be considered excessive or problematic whereas sex with an extra-dyadic partner outside a

monogamous committed relationship once a week for 15 minutes is likely both problematic and excessive,” Reid writes (*ibid.*).

Reid was joined by Martin Kafka, a psychiatrist and fellow sex researcher who also argued for the inclusion of Hypersexuality Disorder in the *DSM-5* (Kafka, 2010, 2014). Kafka mentions reasons why Hypersexuality Disorder was excluded from the *DSM-5*: There were “persisting general criticisms that the proposed revision potentially would add many new diagnoses that pathologize normal behaviors, including sexual behavior.” Also, some clinicians believed that the inclusion of Hypersexuality Disorder would lead to “a medicalized excuse for immoral conduct” (*Kafka, 2014, p. 1259*). Questions were also raised as to whether hypersexuality is a behavioral and non-substance related addiction (such as gambling) or a sexual disorder (Kor, Fogel, Reid, & Potenza, 2013)? It was the lack of consensus on symptoms, frequency, risk and insufficient empirical and epidemiological research that led to hypersexuality not being included in the *DSM-5* as a distinct clinical syndrome.

Still, the proposed criteria (excluded from the current *DSM-5*) for hypersexuality is helpful, as the criteria can also be used to assess disordered masturbation:

A. Over a period of at least six months, recurrent and intense sexual fantasies, sexual urges, and sexual behavior in association with four or more of the following five criteria:

1. Excessive time is consumed by sexual fantasies and urges, and by planning for and engaging in sexual behavior.



2. Repetitively engaging in these sexual fantasies, urges, and behavior in response to dysphoric mood states (e.g., anxiety, depression, boredom, irritability).
3. Repetitively engaging in sexual fantasies, urges, and behavior in response to stressful life events.
4. Repetitive but unsuccessful efforts to control or significantly reduce these sexual fantasies, urges, and behavior.
5. Repetitively engaging in sexual behavior while disregarding the risk for physical or emotional harm to self or others.

B. There is clinically significant personal distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning associated with the frequency and intensity of these sexual fantasies, urges, and behavior.

C. These sexual fantasies, urges, and behavior are not due to direct physiological effects of exogenous substances (e.g., drugs of abuse or medications), a co-occurring general medical condition, or to manic episodes.

D. The person is at least 18 years of age.

Specify if: Masturbation, Pornography, Sexual Behavior With Consenting Adults, Cybersex, Telephone Sex, Strip Clubs.

(Reid, 2015, p. 222)

Kahr can inform our discussion too, as he draws on the work of British psychiatrist, Estela Welldon, a specialist in forensic psychotherapy (Kahr, 2007, pp. 534-535). Although Welldon writes about “perversion” and we prefer “disordered,” masturbating to pornography does lead to addictive behavior and personal and relational alienation. Welldon’s work, in addition to the *DSM-5* criteria for addictions, provides an additional framework that can inform a conversation between a therapist and a counselee to discern whether masturbation has become disordered or not. Disordered masturbation can be recognized in the following ways:

***Impaired control***

The person masturbates to pornography.

He masturbates without mindfulness.

He masturbates compulsively and repetitively.

He experiences an urge or intense desire to masturbate.

He sees his own actions as bizarre or inexplicable.

He spends much time accumulating and curating images.

He has unsuccessfully tried to stop the practice.

He carries significant guilt feelings or has no feelings about the practice.

### ***Social impairment***

Shows little regard for his own emotional and relational well-being.

He treats others as objects, rather than as people.

Masturbatory practices keep the person from seeking or initiating intimacy with a partner.

He is increasingly lonely and isolated, without any close friends.

He shows little concern for the women in the images.

Masturbating to pornography is done in secrecy and leads to a life of deceit.

He uses masturbation as the only way to release pent-up social and sexual anxieties.

### ***Risky use***

He is generally unable to mourn early losses or to address trauma, which may have contributed to the seeking of pornographic images.

He uses masturbating to pornography to self-medicate an underlying depressive state.

He masturbates in public spaces or settings where others can expose the act.

The practice is complemented by stalking behavior or interpersonal violence.

The practices interfere with other areas of life, such as being a professional or being economically responsible.

### ***Increased tolerance***

Disturbing images of increased humiliation, violence, or dysfunction are needed to achieve or sustain arousal (sadism and masochism).

The challenge masturbators, clinicians, and researchers alike face is knowing whether masturbating to pornography is disordered or not. It is very likely that the next edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* will include a category of hypersexuality or a similar disorder. Until then, conversations on the meaning of masturbatory practices between a clinician and a counselee needs to suffice. Still, cause and effect are not easily determined here. It does seem, however, that masturbating to pornography easily escalates to the point where it becomes a concern.

Kahr provides a case of masturbation similar to Jude's case as he asks when masturbation becomes a perversion. He introduces us to Julius, a man in his late seventies, who have been masturbating twice daily since his mid-teens. Julius has had the same fantasy his entire life: He ties up the teenage girl who rejected him in real life and

sadistically rapes her in fantasy while masturbating to great orgasmic pleasure. Julius has dated intermittently for more than fifty years, but has been unable to sustain a relationship with any woman. “Many men have aggressive fantasies about women,” Kahr writes, “but the vast majority manage also to make love to their female partners in tender and sensitive ways, thereby offering evidence of a more adaptable, creative erotic love. But in Julius’ case, the fantasies became so compelling that they may well have prevented him from becoming more intimate” (Kahr, 2007, p. 536).

With the dawn of Internet pornography, sexual fantasy and masturbation— inherent parts of human sexuality—have gained the potential to destroy lives and relationships. Pastoral psychotherapists, especially, can help persons in their understanding of behavior that is natural.

## **Conclusion**

“And if your right eye causes you to fall into sin, tear it out and throw it away. It’s better that you lose a part of your body than that your whole body be thrown into hell (Matt 5:29),” is an intriguing verse (*Common English Bible*, 2011). Men, over the past two thousand years, have defied this text. Men do not cut off their penises or pursue lobotomies (if one accepts that we truly have sex in our brains). One would think that “psychical onanism” (Von Krafft-Ebing) would lead persons of faith to entertain castration, blindness or even traumatic brain injuries. Yet, men who self-abuse do not self-mutilate. Despite parents who might threaten their son with “I will cut off your Willy if you touch it again...,” men show another logic in their relationship with their penises.

Pastoral theologians and psychologists need to remain curious about this intimate practice. Masturbation might be the most common form of relaxation for persons who are stressed by their private, relational, and professional lives (Rosewarne, 2014, p. 253). That arguably includes the majority of teenagers and adults. Relaxation and escape from the stresses of life not only *sustain* a person, but also *prevent* destructive coping mechanisms. Lester, played by Kevin Spacey in Sam Mendes' *American Beauty* (Mendes, 1999) validates Rosewarne's argument as he speaks to a co-worker: "My job consists of masking my contempt for the assholes in charge, and at least once a day retiring to the men's room so I can jerk off while I fantasize about a life that doesn't so closely resemble hell" (Weeks, 2015, p. 50). Lester describes the ambiguity or being enslaved by a specific economy and free at the same time. The enslavement that comes from watching pornography, however, is qualitatively different from what Lester experienced. This demands that we continually explore the intimate relationship between the eye and fantasy and their respective roles in masturbation. When Lester had to defend himself for masturbating when his wife Carolyn (played by Annette Benning) caught him in the act, he was fantasizing about Angela, (the teenage daughter of a friend played Mena Suvari). Internet pornography was not his practice.

When masturbation is dissociated from sexual desire and fantasy, the role and function of the act changes. Woods showed in his work with Jude that a significant relationship, one in which a form of reparenting can occur and meaning can be explored, can empower a person to deepen his relationship with self and other. Fantasy returned to Jude as images began to disappear. Kahr's research similarly indicates the thin line where fantasy and pleasure crosses over into compulsion and disorder. Masturbation plays a

central role in the formation of a boy's or man's identity. Doing so with a rich fantasy life continues a tradition that spans millennia.

In this paper, masturbation is described as a *practice*. Pastoral and especially practical theologians have identified the importance of especially religious practices in recent years (Bass & Copeland, 2010; Conner, 2011; Doehring, 2015; Dykstra, 2005; Miller-McLemore, 2012; Swinton, 2007). A practice, one can argue, *is behavior a person or persons do over time and in specific contexts that has meaning and purpose*. Whereas practical theologians look at religious practices, pastoral theologians are also called to look at practices that may not that easily fit into a narrow Christian worldview. Practices such as masturbation, pimple picking, checking (on one's phone), collecting, forgetting (even if part of an illness), and avoiding can teach us much about human nature and how we relate to God. When it comes to masturbation, no man should be left to his own devices.

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