Abstract

With its implicit vilification of materiality, the notion of objectification has failed to produce a coherent and effective ethical analysis of heterosexual sex work. The concept of derivatization, grounded in an Irigarayan model of embodied intersubjectivity, is more effective. However, queer sex work poses new and different ethical challenges. This paper argues that although queer sex work can entail both objectification and derivatization, the former is not ethically objectionable, and the latter, although the cause for some justified ethical concern, must be analyzed within the context of structural sexual injustice.
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In recent work, I argue that the often deployed, but not nearly as often analyzed in detail, concept of objectification is no longer philosophically tenable, due to its reliance on theories of the self that privilege the mind over the body and autonomy over intersubjectivity (Cahill 2011). I then proceed to offer a different theoretical framework (“derivatization”) with which to analyze the ethics of various social and political phenomena that feminist philosophy has often explored using the concept of objectification. One chapter of this work, perhaps predictably, focuses on the lingering ethical questions surrounding sex work, but remains admittedly limited to hegemonically heterosexual institutions and practices. In this discussion, I seek to move beyond hegemonic heterosexuality to explore whether and how the queerness of two forms of queer sex work (gay male prostitution and pornography) interact with my critique of objectification, and whether derivatization can productively frame the ethical questions posed by such queer sex work.

I begin the discussion by defending my rejection of objectification as a useful tool of ethical analysis, particularly of sex work, and then proceed to explain and defend derivatization as a more effective tool. I then interrogate gay male prostitution and pornography along the lines of derivatization, and conclude that these forms of queer sex work as currently practiced do involve derivatization, and thus are ethically questionable. However, I also argue that the ethical responsibility for such derivatization is distributed differently from that associated with hegemonic heterosexual sex work due to the effects of structural sexual injustice.

It is important to note at the outset that although sex work in general has been a controversial topic in feminist theory, most of the controversy has been generated by sex work associated with hegemonic heterosexuality. Nevertheless, my analysis here is influenced by these controversies. Specifically (although I do not have space to elaborate on these points here; see my previous work for a more detailed analysis), I tend to reject those approaches to sex work that assume that it necessarily raises different kinds of ethical questions than other forms of work, while also rejecting those approaches that view it primarily as a transgressive phenomenon that undermines sexual injustice. Instead, I view it as a social and political phenomenon that, like many other phenomena, is deeply intertwined in complex ways with systematic inequality. Finally, with regard to pornography and prostitution oriented toward gay men, which will serve as the focus of much of this discussion, I reject approaches (such as Dworkin 1989) that view such phenomena primarily through the lens of gender inequality between men and women, and thus, for example, constructed the gay male body as essentially feminized (see Stychin 1992 and Marlowe 2006 on this point). Instead, I will approach, for example, the representations of male bodies in gay male porn not as quasi-women, but as gay male sex objects.

Objecting to Objectification as a Tool of Ethical Analysis

In this section, I will argue that the notion of objectification most commonly utilized by feminist thinkers is flawed as a tool of ethical analysis. Moreover, I will argue that these flaws make it particularly ill-
suited to address the phenomenon of sex work. I approach the feminist notion of sexual objectification primarily through the work of Martha Nussbaum, Linda LeMoncheck, and Rae Langton (LeMoncheck 1985; Nussbaum 1995; Langton 2009); although many other feminist thinkers (most notably, perhaps, Simone de Beauvoir and Catharine MacKinnon [Beauvoir 1974; MacKinnon 1987]) have developed theories that demonstrate that patriarchal systems objectify women, and how those systems function to perform such objectification, Nussbaum, LeMoncheck, and Langton have provided the most direct analyses of what objectification actually is, and how and why it constitutes a serious ethical harm. Although these analyses differ in some important ways, for simplicity’s sake I will here emphasize the commonalities among them.

Most crucially, all generally assume that to be treated as an object is not to be treated as a subject. LeMoncheck, for example, writes that “[I]t is only when women are regarded as inanimate objects, bodies, or animals, where their status as the moral equals of persons has been demeaned or degraded, that the expression ‘sex objectification’ is correctly used” (LeMoncheck 1985, 11). Likewise, Nussbaum names the mistake of objectification as “a question of treating one thing as another: One is treating as an object what is really not an object, what is, in fact, a human being” (Nussbaum 1995, 256–57; italics in the original). Langton agrees: “Women are treated as things, when they are treated as sex objects. What this amounts to is a matter of debate, but let us say provisionally that in sexual contexts, women are treated as things to the extent that women are treated as merely bodies, as merely sensory appearances, as not free, as items that can be possessed, as items whose value is merely instrumental” (Langton 2009, 316).

For Nussbaum, LeMoncheck, and Langton, the traits that distinguish a subject from an object are also the traits that endow the subject with moral worth. The ethical wrong of objectification, from this perspective, is that it denies those aspects of a person that are central to moral dignity and value, and therefore degrades that person. Out of the three, Nussbaum is most careful to emphasize that not all forms of objectification constitute ethical harms; or, more to the point, a focus on the materiality of the subject (such as, to use her example, using a lover’s stomach as a pillow) is not inherently unethical. The phenomena that present Nussbaum with the most acute ethical challenge are sexual interactions that either undermine autonomy (by involving a loss of the sense of the individualized self), entail instrumentality (by “using” the sexual partner’s body to achieve sexual pleasure), or both. Although Nussbaum is careful to note that not all sexual interactions have these traits, she is equally aware that many pleasurable sexual interactions do. So, unless we are willing to deem these pleasurable sexual interactions unethical (and Nussbaum is not), they must be somehow rescued, a feat that Nussbaum accomplishes by requiring a larger context of respect for autonomy. Thus, treating a person as an instrument “if it does not take place in a larger context of regard for humanity… is a central form of the morally objectionable…. Denial of autonomy and denial of subjectivity are objectionable if they persist throughout an adult relationship, but as phases in a relationship characterized by mutual regard they can be all right, or even quite wonderful” (Nussbaum 1995, 289–90).

Ultimately, all of these theories of objectification rely upon a theory of the self that privileges both autonomy and nonbodily characteristics. And herein lies my central critique of objectification: although Nussbaum and LeMoncheck take great pains to reserve a place for an ethical, embodied subjectivity (Langton seems barely interested in the prospect), their reliance on essentially nonbodily characteristics as hallmarks of moral dignity serves to marginalize the body and the other from the self
in deeply problematic ways. And once the body and the other are marginalized from subjectivity, it becomes virtually impossible to explain how the experience of being treated as a sexually appealing body can actually enhance rather than undermine one’s sense of self.

Attempting an ethical analysis of sex work using the lens of objectification demonstrates its conceptual flaws. If one assumes that sex work is ethically problematic because it objectifies sex workers, some central elements of sex work become difficult to understand. This is because in many cases, sex work requires workers to function precisely as subjects (beings with emotions, desires, and sensations) and not as objects. In order to be successful, a prostitute must enact behavior that only subjects can enact: she must give the impression that the sex with the client is enjoyable, that the sexual desires of the client actually align with her own, and/or that she has an emotional bond with the client. Of course, there is nothing about sex work that precludes the sex worker from, for example, actually enjoying either the sex or an emotional bond. The point, however, is that current constructions of sex work in contemporary Western culture require the adopting of some specific kind of subjectivity, a fact that is at risk of being missed entirely if the ethical analysis focuses on how sex work constructs sex workers as “mere things.”

In addition, using objectification to analyze the ethics of sex work assumes that being identified as and with one’s body is necessarily degrading. The objectification analysis rests on the ethical diagnosis of being reduced to one’s body, a diagnosis that neatly positions the body as subordinate to the allegedly more valuable, nonbodily elements of identity. Although one could argue that criticizing sex work as the “selling of one’s body” (a simplistic formulation I would reject out of hand) might emphasize the value of the body to identity, I hold that the criticism does just the opposite. Contemporary Western culture, after all, does not respond with much angst at the prospect of individuals being compensated for their intellectual skills and actions. That is because the idea of being reduced to one’s mind is more than faintly ridiculous; one cannot be reduced to that which is most central to one’s worth. Using objectification in ethical analyses of sex work reinscribes the familiar hierarchy of mind over body, a hierarchy that feminist philosophy has correctly worked hard to deconstruct.

Thinkers from both the analytical and continental traditions have challenged the exclusion of the body from models of subjectivity, and the masculinist overtones of both autonomy and rationality have been well documented. But the fact that the notion of objectification is philosophically flawed does not mean that the phenomena that feminists have analyzed using that notion are ethically acceptable. It does mean, however, that any ethical analyses of those phenomena must not make the mistake of relying on an ideal of the rational, autonomous, disembodied person.

An Alternative Approach: Derivatization

To develop my alternative to objectification, I borrow heavily from the work of Luce Irigaray to arrive at a model of embodied intersubjectivity. I posit an Irigarayan theory of the embodied, intersubjective, yet ontologically distinct sexuate self—that is, a self necessarily marked by sexual (and other kinds of) difference, limited, embodied, and contextualized. For Irigaray, the mistake that has been made in Western metaphysics is not one of overemphasizing sexual difference, but of failing to acknowledge and represent sufficiently the sexual difference that ineluctably marks humanity (Irigaray 1985;
In neglecting to recognize that the human being is not one, but always at least two, Western approaches to gender have constructed women as nothing more than men-who-lack (take your pick: women can lack rationality, genius, creativity, decision-making capabilities, authority...), and that lack justifies their subservient role. When it comes to sexual ethics, this construction of women as men manqué entails the belief that there is no feminine sexuality except that which fulfills male heterosexual needs; similarly, the role of the wife is determined by the needs of the husband, and the good mother shapes her behavior around the needs of her children.

Correcting this situation, Irigaray argues, involves the recognition and construction of women as ontologically distinct from men. Ethics must be grounded in a refusal to reduce the multiplicity of human existence to a single unity by means of an allegedly (but actually persistently gendered) gender-neutral standard. Here I must take pains to note that Irigaray's dependence upon a notion of irreducible sexual difference has not only been persistently controversial in feminist thought, but has given rise to a host of strikingly different interpretations. Margaret Whitford has suggested that Irigaray's sexual difference is a strategic tool rather than an ontological claim (Whitford 1991, 84). In a similar vein, Penelope Deutscher argues that Irigaray's sexual difference is that which Western metaphysics has denied and excluded, and in doing so, has rendered both impossible and devoid of content; it is "a hypothetical possibility on the border of histories of representation of femininity" (Deutscher 2002, 29). Alison Stone rejects these interpretations in favor of a defense of an ontological interpretation of Irigaray's sexual difference grounded in a philosophy of nature that recognizes the essentially polar character of the world (Stone 2006).

Regardless of the particular interpretation of Irigaray's notion of sexual difference, there is general consensus that her approach is marked by a distinct heterosexism (Grosz 1994a; Hope 1994; Deutscher 2002; Stone 2006). The challenge, as I see it, is to extract from her ethics of sexual difference a pattern of ethical engagement with the other that does not require a particular sort of difference (that between women and men). Irigaray's relentless focus on sexual difference is effective in many ways: it utilizes the inherent diversity among human bodies as an ethical inspiration rather than a challenge, and it provides a robust account of gender inequality. But Irigaray's theory does not require that sexual difference be the only relevant difference, even if it is the one that she considers most foundational and/or salient.

I read Irigaray as claiming that the fact that the other is irreducibly different from me is the foundation for actual dialogue and interaction. If I turn or attempt to turn the other into a version of myself, or if I require that the other be like me in some fundamental way in order to deserve ethical consideration, truly ethical interactions become impossible. Indeed, interactions themselves become impossible, because there are not two distinct beings between whom the "between" can come alive. Turning the other into a mere shadow of my own self, or constructing the relation around that in the other that is the same as myself, amounts to mere solipsism.

With this model of ethical engagement in mind, I offer "derivatization" as an alternative to the concept of objectification. Briefly, derivatization echoes the grammatical structure of objectification while avoiding its somatophobic implications. As commonly understood (and as formulated by Nussbaum), objectification is the mistake of treating something that is not an object as an object, and it constitutes an ethical wrong precisely because it's better to be a subject than an object. Derivatization is the mistake of treating something that is not a derivative as a derivative, and it constitutes an ethical wrong...
because it's better to be ontologically distinct than ontologically reducible to another. Here, materiality and embodiment are not, as in the case of objectification, utilized as evidence of degradation.

To derivate is to treat another subject as if the only salient aspects of his or her subjectivity are those that align with the subjective elements of one's self (or another privileged self). The waiter who must radiate endless cheerfulness and patience; the mother whose worth is measured by how quickly and completely she meets her child's needs and wants; the athlete who is expected not only to take enormous physical risks on a regular basis, but also, for some mysterious reason, demonstrate moral righteousness: all these are derivate subjects. Their roles certainly require them to be subjects, to do the sorts of things and exhibit the sorts of traits that only subjects can do and exhibit. But they must be certain kinds of subjects, subjects whose identity and behavior does not exceed those whom they serve, raise, or entertain.

Derivation serves to undermine the ethical dynamic of relations by positioning one subject in a determining relation over the other's identity. That is, the derivate subject is degraded not by being mistakenly treated as an object, but by being mistakenly treated as a subject whose subjectivity (actions, speech, appearance, and so on) can be wholly determined by the subjective needs or desires of another. When derivation occurs, the difference between the two subjects is collapsed: the derivate subject is treated as if s/he is not in fact distinct from the derivate subjecting subject, but entirely derived from her/him. Derivation can happen both on an individual level (for example, when a person sizes up a potential romantic partner, judging that potential partner against a list of pre-existing requirements) and on a structural level (for example, when standards of feminine beauty are oriented around a set of allegedly knowable heterosexual male desires). Of course, the structural and the individual become intertwined, such that overarching patterns of dominance and subordination have profound effects on who tends to derive, who tends to be derivate, and where and how that derivation is expressed.

The ethical relevance of difference that grounds the concept of derivation must not be confused with the Kantian emphasis on autonomy. The ethical aspiration of Irigaray's sexual ethics is to be found not in the ability to act as an independent individual, but in the capacity to engage in relations in an ethical and just way. The point is not to be freed from the influence of others, but to be able to both affect and be affected by relations, precisely because the distinct subject brings something to those relations that the other cannot encompass. Relations that function with the assumption that one subject's being is reducible to the other's fail to recognize difference, and in doing so not only degrade the derivate subject but the relation itself, which devolves into a mere monologue, void of surprise, wonder, and vulnerability.

In order to avoid derivation, relations must be marked by three traits. First, the relating beings must acknowledge an ontological distinction between them: the other must be approached as different, with a subjectivity that does not map neatly onto any other subjectivity. Second, the relation must be constructed as dynamically co-constituting, in contrast to the alliances described by social-contract theory, where autonomous individuals with pre-existing preferences enter into mutually beneficial agreements. Here, because subjectivity always arises in the context of relations, those relations can transform and constitute the subjectivities of those involved. To try to foreclose the possibility of such influence—to attempt to construct the relationship such that one of the relating beings is subjectively invulnerable—is to enact dominance. Both parties must have some subjective skin in the game. Third,
the relation itself must be understood as marked by the particularity of the parties involved. Although some relations will, obviously, share some similarities with others, they would always be distinct in some important ways. Being married to multiple people in one's lifetime, for example, is not to engage in the same relation with different persons, but to engage in different relations *tout court*.

Note that relations that are focused almost entirely on the relating beings' bodies could clearly meet these standards, a fact that demonstrates that derivatization is not tainted by the somatophobia that undergirds objectification. Engaging in sexual relations with a virtual stranger, purely on the basis of physical attraction, for example, could be quite ethical. Within an ethical framework that assumes that objectification is degrading, the analysis would ask whether the parties treated each other as mere bodies; the assumption would be that if the answer is "yes," the interaction was unethical. But as soon as we disentangle embodiment from degradation, we can see that treating each other primarily as embodied beings does not in fact constitute an ethical wrong. Instead, we should ask: Did the parties approach each other's embodied subjectivity as nonreducible to their own? And: Did the parties understand each other as simultaneously transforming and transformable? If these questions are answered in the affirmative, then it would seem that derivatization had not been in play, and that the interactions were ethically acceptable.

As long as the self is defined as necessarily embodied, then to be treated as a body is an insult that holds no sting, and sexual experiences that are clearly focused on a subject's materiality can serve to enhance human flourishing. Because relations are central to human (inter)subjectivity, rather than potential threats to a subject's dignity and ethical worth, the loss of autonomy involved in some positive sexual experiences (a loss that Nussbaum has difficulty reconciling with her Kantian commitments) no longer shows up as an ethical difficulty.

As a tool of ethical analysis, the notion of objectification has the tendency to oppose the body, materiality, and relations to moral worth and dignity. The concept of derivatization avoids such mistakes, and is therefore better positioned than objectification to analyze the phenomenon of sex work.

### Derivatization and (Sex) Work

A focus on derivatization would provide a fresh ethical perspective on sex work. For example, it would render ethically questionable any form of prostitution requiring a worker to adopt a sexual subjectivity utterly limited by the sexual desires and preferences of the client, in an interaction where the worker's own sexual subjectivity is not constructed as an appropriately active or engaged factor. Moreover, because contemporary Western culture involves a deep and abiding pattern of derivatizing women, the degree to which the social phenomenon of prostitution perpetuates and normalizes unequal gender relations would also be a relevant question.

However, such an analysis does not lead to a blanket condemnation of the sale of sex or sexual services. An ethics based in a recognition of embodied intersubjectivity does not necessarily problematize the exchange of any particular service for money. What it does problematize—and this point has implications for many forms of labor, not just sex work—are forms of labor where the worker's subjectivity *qua* worker must necessarily be reduced to the desires, whims, needs, and so on.
of the client. It is not ethically problematic that a person doing a certain form of labor (say, a teacher, or a waiter, or a lawyer) is useful to the individual paying for that labor; what is ethically problematic is if the doing of that labor requires the worker to adopt a subjectivity that is not recognized as ontologically distinct.

For example, as I have described elsewhere, an ethically acceptable doctor–patient relationship ought to be marked by a recognition that each person brings to the relationship distinct forms of knowledge and capabilities (including, importantly, physical capabilities) as part of their subjectivity. If the patient's subjectivity as a patient becomes reducible to the doctor's desires—say, if the patient learns not to ask important questions in order to maintain the doctor's authority—then the intersubjectivity of the relationship is weakened. Likewise, if the doctor bases the decision to prescribe a certain medication only upon the fact that the patient wants it, and does not bring to bear upon that decision the doctor's knowledge of the effects of that medication, again, the intersubjectivity of the relationship has been weakened to a problematic degree.

Described in this way, derivatization may seem uncomfortably close to Kantian instrumentality. After all, in the example above, couldn't we understand the distinction between the ethical and the unethical doctor–patient relationship as resting upon whether the doctor is constructed as a mere means rather than an end? Yet I would argue that there are crucial differences between the two analyses. For one, the notion of derivatization keeps the focus not on the similarity of the two parties, the fact that they are both equal by virtue of their shared capacity for reason (as in the case of the Kantian approach to the person), but instead emphasizes relevant differences (in expertise, in this case) between them. Second, the ethical analysis does not privilege autonomy or independence, and thus does not consider as even mildly or potentially problematic the fact that the parties may be useful to each other. Instead, the analysis questions the ethical robustness of the interaction, defined by the ability of both parties to contribute substantially to it. Finally, the ethical analysis allows for both nonbodily and bodily traits to be incorporated into the interaction easily (the patient may be able to perceive bodily changes astutely, and the doctor may be able to examine the patient's body effectively). That is, the materiality of the parties involved is not approached with ethical suspicion.

There is no reason to believe that sex work could not be socially, politically, and economically constructed such that the subjectivities that sex workers enacted were not reducible to the demands of their clients. Indeed, surely some instances of sex work currently enacted would meet this standard, although given the patriarchal nature of hegemonic heterosexuality, such instances are probably exceptions to the rule. In a nonderivatized context, the sex worker could be constructed as an expert, with a wider and deeper understanding of sexuality and sexual practice than those without similar training and experience. Clients could be constructed, perhaps, as seeking greater sexual fluency. They could hire the sex worker not merely to have their particular sexual desires, whatever they may be, automatically and obediently fulfilled, but rather to have them explored, considered, transformed, and engaged in a way that recognizes the ontological specificity of the parties involved.

The question demanding exploration now is whether the notion of derivatization can be deployed effectively in the context of queer sex work—a question that is particularly interesting given how roundly Irigaray has been criticized for her heterosexism.
Derivatization and Gay Male Pornography and Prostitution

In this section, I will consider the specific case of pornography and prostitution oriented toward a gay male audience. First, I will establish that such pornography and prostitution involves both objectification and derivatization, but that the former doesn't merit ethical concern. The presence of derivatization, however, does merit ethical concern. Ultimately, I will argue that the ethical responsibility for that derivatization is allocated differently from the responsibility for the derivatization present in hegemonic heterosexual sex work, due to structures of sexual injustice.

When it comes to evaluating the ethics of pornography produced for a gay male audience, there seems little doubt that it objectifies the bodies it represents: they are represented as sex objects, as sexually appealing material entities, and as appropriate recipients of a sexualizing gaze. However, my analysis of objectification has concluded that none of those elements of objectification constitute an ethical problem. Indeed, it seems that the sexual objectification of the gay male body is ethically desirable for at least two reasons. One, it is a comparatively rare example of sexualization of the male body itself. Although I argue that constructing or representing bodies as sexually appealing is not problematic, surely there remains a troubling disproportionality at work, such that even to refer to a "sex object" implies a feminine body. Insofar as gay male porn breaks down that association, it undermines rather than perpetuates gender inequality. Second, the sexual objectification of the gay male body implicitly recognizes and validates gay sexuality. The sheer admission that gay male desires exist, and can be catered to, counters the marginalization of queer sexualities, and allows for the flourishing of forms of sexual practice that run contrary to heterosexist norms.

A different question, now: does pornography designed for gay male viewers derivatize the bodies it represents? Many scholars have noted that the beauty standards utilized in gay male porn not only reveal elements of racism and ageism (Waugh 1985; Burger 1994), but also are strikingly consistent. At least with regard to gay male porn (Duncan 1989; Miller 2001; MacKinnon 2003, 48; Mercer 2003) and it seems to gay male prostitution as well (Pittman 1971), there seem to be at work beauty standards that are similar both in kind and in rigor to those required by hegemonic heterosexual sex work, resulting in a lack of diversity in the kinds of bodies deemed sexually appealing. Here, derivatization seems to be in full force: the sexual desires of the client, both individually and collectively, are determining the sexual subjectivities that are represented and offered. Even the demand for gay male prostitution may reveal derivatization; Donald J. West and Buz de Villiers argue that persistent ageism within the gay male community results in older gay men finding themselves less capable of finding willing sexual partners (West and de Villiers 1993, 329).

Let's assume, then, that gay male porn and prostitution involve derivatization. That they do should raise serious ethical concerns, similar to the kinds of concerns raised by the derivatization found in hegemonic heterosexual forms of the same phenomena. Yet it is also important to interrogate the potential differences between the two; for example, we should ask whether the derivatization that these phenomena involve imposes identical harms. On one level, it would seem that the answer to that question is certainly yes. In both cases, the subjectivity that the sex worker takes up in order to perform the sex work in an acceptable manner is defined entirely by the needs and desires of the client. In both
cases, then, there is a failure to recognize the ontological distinction between the sex worker and the client, and so the intersubjectivity of the exchange is insufficient to render it ethically acceptable.

It is important to note that here my Irigarayan approach departs significantly, if somewhat paradoxically, from the work of Irigaray herself. In my analysis of gay male prostitution, the fact that the sex worker and the client are of the same sex does not minimize or mitigate the role of difference in the interaction. As mentioned above, I take the theoretical work that the notion of sexual difference accomplishes in her philosophy to serve as the paradigmatic, but not sole, example of difference itself. That is, where sexual difference may or may not be at work, other differences certainly are, precisely for the fact that any embodied human being is delimited by a wide diversity of identity traits. Sexual difference, for Irigaray, is the most undeniable of differences, and, truth be told, the one that she is most interested in exploring philosophically. But I read the very undeniable of sexual difference as a demonstration that all ethical interactions must be grounded in a mutual recognition of irreducible difference. Although it is certainly true that Irigaray herself does not address, and would most likely be uninterested in, the difference between the gay male sex worker and the gay male client, I want to argue that the inescapability of difference indicates that they are also nonreducible in their embodied subjectivities.

However, that the derivatization present in gay male pornography and prostitution is similar in some ways to that in hegemonic heterosexual pornography and prostitution does not mean that the two have identical ethical meanings. Specifically, I will now set out to argue that the political marginalization of queer sexualities, including male homosexuality, results in a higher likelihood that sexual outlaws will turn to sexually derivatizing phenomena such as gay pornography and prostitution. Such an insight does not obviate the ethical difficulties that such pornography and prostitution represents, but it contextualizes them in such a way as to hold the larger culture responsible for that marginalization. Moreover, although I have limited my analysis thus far to gay male pornography and prostitution, it seems likely that this marginalization, and its relation to sex work, would apply to a variety of sexual identities and preferences. Thus, in the following section, I often refer to the broader category of queer sexualities, not only male homosexuality.

The sexual subject is an obviously intersubjective entity; the development and practice of a sexual subjectivity necessarily entails relations with others. To say that the sexual subject is intersubjective is immediately to place sexuality in the realm of both the social and the political, for the sexual subject must meet the other in a social and political context. If that social and political context names certain sexual identities, practices, and orientations as pathological, taboo, or inherently unethical, then that context precludes the possibility of exploring such identities, practices, and orientations in a free and open way. Drucilla Cornell writes:

> The project of becoming a person is dependent on the psychic space of the imagination, particularly when it comes to the living out and the contesting of sexual personae. Thus, I have defined the imaginary domain as itself a minimum condition of individuation. The demand is that we all have, as sexuate beings, the imaginary domain granted to us as part of the equivalent evaluation of the worth of our personhood. To demand equality in this manner is to demand sexual freedom as long as one accepts that sexual freedom is intimately related to the release of the constraints on the imaginary imposed by gender
The degradation of queer identities and practices is an example of the kind of imaginary limitation that Cornell has in mind. It is important to note here that understanding sexuality as inherently social and political is not to say that a particular social and political context is powerful enough to control entirely the kinds of sexual subjectivities that exist. Sexual subjectivities are embedded within, but not entirely reducible to, these contexts. Outlaw sexualities exist, but do not have equal access to socially sanctioned means of expression or exploration—that is, such sexual outlaws do not have the option of exploring their sexual possibilities without the very real threats of harassment, violence, even annihilation.

In such a context, sex work, precisely because of its marginalization and the ability to engage in it in relatively private ways, may constitute a haven of sorts, a place for the kind of exploration that dominant society cannot abide. If the surrounding culture does not allow or encourage certain forms of sexual intersubjectivity in an open and free manner, then the derivatized experiences that sex work provides may become all the more appealing or even necessary for a flourishing sexual subjectivity (or as flourishing a sexual subjectivity as can exist within that political context). Queer sex work, including the derivatization that it may entail, may constitute one of the few sites where those queer desires are constructed as efficacious, relevant, and acceptable.

Carl Stychin's critique of the anti-pornography arguments of MacKinnon, Dworkin, and John Stoltenberg comes to a conclusion that resonates with my analysis:

> While gay male pornography may be a forum for the construction of male sexuality, it also represents a marginalized sexuality that is culturally “outlawed.”... The feminist critique fails to recognize the marginalization of gay men. This marginalization affects the viewer's perception of the pornographic signifier and the differing context changes the signifier's very meaning. The signifier assumes a new meaning because it is received at the fringes of dominant culture. In other words, if the viewer's context defines the meaning of an image, then the dominance and submission of pornography assume a different signification when received by marginalized gay men. (Stychin 1992, 875–76)

Stychin then continues to argue that because gay porn enhances the subjectivity of gay men, it cannot be interpreted as objectifying gay men—and is therefore not subject to the feminist critique that is aimed at heterosexual porn (881). My own work on the ultimately illusory subject–object distinction does not allow for such an easy refutation; to argue that a certain cultural phenomenon allows for certain kinds of subjectivities to flourish in no way constitutes an argument that objectification is not present.

Nevertheless, Stychin's emphasis on outlawed sexualities mirrors my interest in the relation between ethical responsibility and structural sexual injustice. Specifically, I want to argue that the social and political structures that fail to recognize the validity of outlaw sexualities bear some of the ethical responsibility for the derivatization present in queer sex work. As long as sexual outlaws face...
significant social barriers to the development of their sexual flourishing, the seeking out of interactions where their identities form the basis of those interactions, such that they involve the derivatization of the other, then those outlaws cannot be held solely or primarily ethically responsible for the derivatization they impose on others.

This line of argument, of course, assumes that the outlaw sexualities in question and/or the expressions of those sexualities are not inherently ethically questionable; although this is a point that I cannot address in detail here, I would not want to commit to a position that holds any and all sexual preferences equally worthy of social and political recognition (the pedophile being an obvious example of a sexual outlaw to whom I would not want to extend social recognition). For the purpose of this discussion, then, I am comparing the distribution of ethical responsibility for the derivatization present in sex work developed for recognized sexualities (primarily, hegemonic male heterosexuality) with that developed for unjustly marginalized sexualities.

If the larger social context bears some of the ethical responsibility for the derivatization in queer sex work, what about the responsibility for derivatization in hegemonic, heterosexual sex work? After all, hegemonic male heterosexuality is socially constructed to encourage heterosexual men to derivatize women, and to find representations of derivatized women sexually appealing. It would seem, then, that the larger social context also bears some of the ethical responsibility for the derivatization present in hegemonic heterosexual sex work.

Yet I would hold that there remains a significant difference between the two phenomena. The role that derivatization plays in the construction of hegemonic male heterosexuality is marked by privilege; that is, the hegemonic male heterosexual enjoys a variety of social benefits simply by virtue of identifying as a male heterosexual, and access to sexual derivatization of others is one of these unjust social benefits. Because the derivatization present in sex work oriented toward hegemonic heterosexual desires is the result of privilege, not subordination, it is part and parcel of a set of social advantages that the ethical heterosexual male ought, as much as is possible, to reject and undermine. In contrast, the derivatization present in pornography and prostitution oriented toward unjustly marginalized sexualities functions not as yet another instantiation of privilege, but as a sort of haven (although not an ethically unproblematic one) from a sexually unjust set of social structures. With regard to derivatization and sex work, then, the ethical responsibilities that accrue to individuals in a context of sexual inequality differ according to how those individuals are positioned in relation to privilege. Those whose sexualities are recognized, valued, and privileged bear a greater responsibility to refrain from and indeed reject derivatization, precisely because their privilege affords them a greater scope of sexual expression and recognition. Those who bear the brunt of sexual injustice, including the harms of un- and misrecognition, fewer civil rights, harassment, and violence, are somewhat less blameworthy than the privileged when they engage in derivatizing actions, given that they have significantly less freedom to flourish sexually.

Note, of course, that this analysis rests on social conditions that are subject to change, and that, in contemporary US society at least, seem to be changing rapidly. Should an outlaw sexuality gain social recognition, such that there are virtually no barriers to those individuals who identify with that sexuality in terms of their sexual expression and flourishing, then the ethical responsibility to refrain from derivatization would once again fall more heavily on the individual. However, although there is little doubt that significant progress has been made with LGBTQIA rights and recognition in contemporary
US society, I do not think that the days of heteronormativity are behind us yet.

There are, of course, many forms of queer sex work, including ones that trouble much more deeply standard notions of sexuality than the ones I have mentioned here and that therefore may require more detailed ethical analysis concerning derivatization. What is to be made, for example, of sexual preferences (such as the desire to be utterly dominated by another) that seem to reject intersubjectivity entirely? Or of those that, in a neat reversal of the usual examples of objectification, are centered on nonsentient objects (some of which may be subjectified in a variety of ways—think of the increasingly lifelike sex dolls that are available—and some that may bear little resemblance to human subjects)? Or, finally, what can ethicists say about situations where individuals need assistance from others (because of disabilities, for example) to have sexual encounters? In such cases, the intersubjectivities involved become even more complex.

Such questions demand further consideration. However, I would like to close this discussion by reiterating the point that there is nothing inherently derivatizing about sex work itself, including queer sex work. If sex work were reconstructed as necessarily recognizing and engaging the ontological and sexual specificity of the parties involved, in a dynamic and fluid way, the ethical considerations that I at least am concerned with would be rendered moot. In terms of queer sex work in particular, such ethical interactions could take a variety of forms. Individuals who wished to deviate from a lifetime of heterosexual practices may turn to queer sex workers not to fulfill some clearly defined desires that predate the encounter, but to explore whether new desires could be sparked. Individuals already living queer sexualities may seek to explore different kinds of queerness, whether in terms of practices or different sorts of partners. That these engagements involved the exchange of money (or other services), and that they required bodily interactions would be ethically irrelevant. Indeed, the embodied expertise that the sex worker offers would be understood as a valuable element of the exchange, one that was central to the sex worker’s professional identity and capability. In other words, the fact that the sex worker had distinctly embodied capacities, skills, and knowledge wouldn’t make the worker less of a person; it would be one basis, and a crucial one, upon which the worker would be valued as a professional.

What would matter, ethically speaking, would be the presence (or lack) of wonder, the willingness (or refusal) to place one’s embodied subjectivity in relationship with that of a robust other, and the recognition (or denial) that the other may transform one’s embodied subjectivity and vice versa. These sorts of distinctions, as opposed to those that a focus on objectification would produce, provide the basis for an ethical consideration of sex work, including queer sex work, that does not perpetuate somatophobia and is therefore better aligned with feminist concerns.

Notes

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the anonymous *Hypatia* reviewers for their insightful responses to earlier drafts of this article.

1. The following volumes on sex work, for example, are focused almost entirely on sex work for a straight male clientele: Shrage 1994; Brock 1998; Dank and Refinetti 1999; O’Connell Davidson 1999 (which includes a relatively short analysis of female sex tourists); Weitzer 2000 (which notes the gap in the literature); and Spector 2006. A 2011 issue of *Hypatia*...
(vol. 26, no. 1) features a “found cluster” of articles on “sexual expression,” several of which focus on pornography and/or prostitution, with scarcely a mention of queer sex work. Elias et al. 1998, with an entire section on (gay) male prostitution (in addition to an entire section on johns), is an exception. Van der Poel 1992 critiques the absence of scholarship on male prostitution.

2 By now, the feminist literature on philosophy of the body is so extensive that a comprehensive list of works that develop this idea is impossible to provide. For a representative sample, however, see Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993; Diprose 1994; Grosz 1994b; Gatens 1996; Weiss 1999; Ahmed 2000; and Young 2005.

3 For feminist critiques of rationality, see Lloyd 1993 and Nicholson 1999. For feminist critiques of autonomy, see Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000.

4 Moreover, just as dominant images of women's bodies can influence unhealthy eating patterns and negative self-images, these standards may be damaging to the health of gay men's bodies; see Duggan and McCreary 2004.

References