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PERSPECTIVE |

My Body Under Capitalism

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This creative-critical personal essay unpacks the structural mechanisms and invisible biases that allow gendered violence and the whore stigma to flourish. I embody my role as unsympathetic victim-survivor of sexual assault, refusing to conform to societal pressures around virtue and propriety. Resisting the temptation to point the finger at any one perpetrator, I explore the co-option of women's bodies and my demons with a subversive literary arsenal, using humor, volatility and disruption as weapons. This essay-in-fragments explores consent culture, objectification and the commodification of my body as I engage in transactional sex and sex for pleasure, with an aim to subvert expectations around sex workers, who are often accused of "asking for" rape.

Keywords: *sex work, consent, objectification theory, sexual assault, creative writing*

Introduction

I first turned to sex work after I was raped on camera at a film audition in Los Angeles. The production studio was just a large warehouse with a lit set, the wall behind the camera lined with thousands upon thousands of MiniDV cassettes, the blinking red light of the camera my only witness. Two security doors, one after the other, each required multiple keys to lock or unlock so I knew that there would be no quick escape. That moment which was captured on freeze frame forever was the moment I became aware of the cost of living as a woman under patriarchy. It was a scene which thrust my previously confident sexuality into an existential state of crisis, after which I would renegotiate my relationship to sex and capitalism, finding my way again to a place of sexual empowerment. From the time I first had sex when I was sixteen with a guy I met online in a Prodigy chatroom, I was instantly addicted to the high that sex promised and delivered. I took pleasure in the total annihilation of self I experienced every time I wrapped long sweaty limbs around another person or two or three. Although I was raised to think of sex as something shameful and forbidden—my grandmother would admonish, "The last granddaughter to fall pregnant gets all my pearls!"—sex for me was a creative outlet, a way of expressing my affection where words failed. I was diagnosed at an early age with major depression, social anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorders. Existing in the world, finding myself in complex relation to other people, never came easy. With sex I could lean into the unspoken, languaging my body instead. I could lose myself in the friction, heat and chemistry that dissolved boundaries between self and not-self without worrying about filling awkward silences. With youth on my side, there was no question that I incited desire, and from this I drew a sense of power. I fucked and I wanted to be fucked. This power, however, was stripped from me by the Hollywood producer who asked me to remove my clothes and bend over for the camera before he penetrated me.

In that white-hot moment under the spotlights, as the camera continued to roll, I was no longer a subject. My rapist made me an object, put me to use to satiate (in less than three seconds) his own desire. Afterwards I froze, I fawned: typical trauma responses brought on by abject fear. In the aftermath of my rape, I questioned whether I had—as the saying goes—*asked for it*. Whether somewhere in the consent form I had signed, I had unknowingly agreed to my own violation. Although I had already fucked close to a hundred men and women, I had never felt debased in my sexuality until that moment. Had my overt sexuality made me a target? I knew that if I went to the police I would not be believed. If anything, I would be publicly shamed. My history of promiscuity, recreational drug use and psychiatric illness would make me an object (again, that word) of ridicule. I stayed silent; I learned to forget what was taken from me. Instead, I reclaimed my subjecthood by taking charge of my own objectification. If men wanted me that bad, they could pay for it. I could leave my eight-dollar-an-hour job and monetize by body as needed to subsidize my self-searching and utmost need for artistic expression.

I was a creative writer then, as I am now. I have also been a documentarian, a digital artist, a painter, a poet, a maker of collage. In an effort to make sense of my relationship to a patriarchal society which treats women's bodies as less than, and which treats some bodies as more "deserving" of rape than others, I began to explore the relationship between my body and capitalism in a series of written fragments. The collage-like nature of this fragmentation both reflects the traumatic nature of the incident which sparked this article's inquiry; the fragment, slash or jump-cut is also a feminine mode of address which resists prescribed norms established by a mostly dead/white/male literary canon. As a PhD candidate in the field of creative writing, my research inquiry is as much

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grounded in my body as it is in critical practice. The body I live in is neurodiverse, it has suffered trauma, and therefore my mode of communication will differ from traditional (read: removed, impartial) academic address: it mimics the rhythms and associative nature of my thoughts.

In Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick* she challenges us to "universalize the 'personal' and make it the subject of art" (2006, p. 195). As Lauren Elkin writes in *Art Monsters* (2023), Kraus is not purporting that one woman represent all women, so much as that any woman has the right to claim their own lived experience as worthy of attention. I agree with Elkin that personal testimonies will lay the foundation for a more ethical world. This article will not do the work of drawing conclusions for the reader but will serve as provocation, to raise awareness and spark reform: I am willing to make myself an art monster to deconstruct the whore stigma. In the following dispatches I will self-mythologize through performative writing that exemplifies the personal as political. Here is my testimony.

Sex and Capitalism on My Mind

I've been thinking about the relationship between male entitlement and capitalism and the female body (non-cis included) as commodity. One thing I've struggled with throughout my life, while being unable to extricate myself from the mercilessness of the male gaze, is how to weigh my intrinsic self-worth against the value of my object-body as defined by my gender, my appearance, the way I take up space in this world. "Feminism and capitalism are at odds," Rebecca Solnit writes, "if under the one women are people and under the other they are property" (2019, p. 93). The central concern of this essay is the problem of living in a feminized body under a patriarchal capitalist system and how this affects one's ability to thrive, let alone survive.

I feel a certain way about capitalism, which is perpetuated almost entirely by wealthy white men who operate in a world I've occasionally glimpsed by opening my legs, and I feel a certain way about sex, although these feelings are shaped and molded by my amorphous way of existing in this world. They are most certainly influenced by structural inequality, which is something I am less at the mercy of than trans women or women of color, for example. The one thing I know to be true is that I'm finally aging out of the sex kitten category—my all-access pass may have been revoked when I gave birth—and I welcome the oncoming invisibility.

"How does it feel to not be beautiful?" my friend asks, as we run our children around the park. Each of us became single parents due to domestic violence and meanwhile slipped into the anonymity of middle age, so her question is less an insult than provocation. Falling under the radar of the patriarchal gaze, I think, feels a lot like respite.

Existing Outside of Patriarchy's Gaze

Film theorist Laura Mulvey's influential work on the male gaze in cinema describes how women's exhibitionist role is coded for erotic and visual impact and connotes "to-be-looked-at-ness" (2014, p. 533). When Kathy Acker searches for her body as it "exists outside its patriarchal definitions" she finds it impossible (1997, p. 166). We are looked at, flesh turned object, whether we like it or not. Mostly I don't like it, but even when we I do, displays of flesh are not the same as an invitation. A hand up a skirt, a grope of a breast, sexual innuendo, catcalls, public masturbation and more: whatever we wear or don't wear, we're said to be "asking for it"—fatally mistaking symptom for cause, according to Jacqueline Rose—and are therefore condemned for provoking our own assault(s). "Harassment is always a sexual demand, but it also carries a more sinister and pathetic injunction: 'You will think about me,'" writes Rose in *On Violence and On Violence Against Women* (2021, p. 37). Those who harass are demanding attention, whether good or bad. To withhold that attention can spark the harasser's homicidal tendencies.

Reading up on objectification theory, I question if it was in my "nature"—if there even is such a thing—to be a man's sexual plaything, and whether I arranged myself as such to affirm what men want to see: high heels and silicon, come-hither sexuality. According to Sally Haslanger (2002), objectification occurs when what's assumed to be in someone's "nature" is attributable to social forces, as opposed to being immutable facts. I've experienced my own sexual appetites as fluid and mutable and I think that's also "natural". In my teens and twenties, driven by hormones, I turned seduction into a pursuit to be won at any cost without regard to my health. I saw myself reflected in man's fantasized images—the ones from *Playboy* or *Penthouse*—and thought that if I called the shots—*put your hand here, your tongue there*—I could beat *them* at their game. But given that patriarchy's influence leaves nothing unmolested, there was no victory and no escape. The performative nature of my sexual persona left me wholly unsatisfied except when the only one watching was me.

I Have the Right to Define Myself

In *The Right to Sex* Amia Srinivasan counters that "a feminism that trades too freely in notions of self-deception is a feminism that risks dominating the subjects it presumes to liberate" (2021, p. 82). I'm reminded of how radical feminist Catharine MacKinnon denies women the right to enjoy and participate in pornography: "What a woman is, is defined in pornographic terms; this is what pornography does" (1987, p. 59). While rejecting MacKinnon's stance on pornography as a civil rights violation and along with it the Andrea Dworkin school of thought—I don't need to be saved from myself—objectification theory helps me deconstruct how what I see on screen and sometimes mimic in real life might have less to do with my desires than with expectations.

For instance: there's a sex tape of me fucking a gorgeous man. (This tape is fully authorised by me, which makes it different from a couple of the others.) In this particular video I appear to be having fun in reverse cowgirl (Who even names these positions?), but I'm just performing for the camera. I'm so busy not-feeling—worrying about whether my thighs are dimpling as they slap against Matt's, whether my sex face is as ugly as my reformer pilates face—that I deprive myself of any authentic physiological or emotional response.

Amia Srinivasan likens porn to a "mimesis-machine, incapable of generating its own novelty" (2021, p. 70). Here I'd fallen into a simulacrum of sex tapes, mirroring pornographic behaviors of actors imitating pornographic behaviors they'd modelled off of other actors. Who would I be as a lover in absence of porn?

Renowned gender theorist Judith Butler describes the performative dimension of sexuality as a "forced reiteration of norms" which is "neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation" but, rather, a ritualized reiteration under and through prohibition, taboo and constraint (2011, p. 59). It wasn't the panoptical sex, but what came before, what happened after the camera stopped rolling, that really turned me on. The sensation of lips on lips, of embrace, of insatiable longing that saw two beings collide in momentary need, obliterating the sky for a moment—an hour, maybe forever—of embodied pleasure. Our bodies clung together, writhing and rhythmic, leaving no room for the digital eye.

The presence of an embodied voyeur, however, with eyes like globes, was something I wanted. I desired being desired when I wanted to be desired, and apart from that I liked being left alone.

Sluts and Whores Like Me

Women like me, prone to exhibitionism maybe, confident and sometimes queer in our sexuality, are called sluts and whores I think out of fear as much as revulsion. We're meant to be sexy but not slutty; we're either too submissive or too controlling (Taylor, 2020). Women's desire is feared, according to French philosopher Luce Irigaray, "as a sort of insatiable hunger, a voracity that will

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swallow you whole" (1985, p. 29). The Macquarie Concise Dictionary (Butler, 2013) defines a slut as an indiscriminate woman with many sexual partners, and a whore as a promiscuous woman or prostitute. A prostitute supposedly debases herself by having sex for financial gain, putting her talents to unworthy use. Whore is also a verb: to whore or consort with whores, to debauch.

Indiscriminate. Unworthy. Debased.

In Grand Theft Auto V players can hire a sex worker in game play, fuck her, then kill her to steal back the money (Gabbiadini et al., 2016).

Witness the glorification of hate crimes in a cyber-incel universe.

We should "know better now than to blame sex workers," writes Elena Gomez, "& most still don't" (2017, p. 101):

> Because so long as there are women who are called whores, there will be women who are trained to believe it is next to death to be one or to be mistaken for one. And so long as that is, men will feel they can leave whores for dead with impunity. (Grant, 2014, p. 127)

We're not sympathetic victims: sex crimes against us generally go unpunished. "Whores are among the most oppressed of women workers" (p. 57) argues psychotherapist-researcher Gail Pheterson, who describes how a woman might lose her civil liberties and human rights "as a result of negotiating her sexuality" instead of giving it for free (1993, p. 43). Today the Nordic Model aims to halt sex work by criminalizing the men who purchase sex, a model which, in contrast to decriminalization, drives sex work underground.

Anyone who is or who has been a sex worker deserves to be heard. Marxist feminist Kollontai (1972) rages against sex work as a soul-emptying practice that cripples one's ability to feel passion or love, forever corrupting and impoverishing the persons involved, but hers is a simplistic view that vilifies the sex worker, denying nuance. Maryse Choisy calls sex work a "provisional marriage between the man-hater and the woman-hater" (1961, p. 30) as if marriage itself were immune to such malignance. The reasons men "buy sex can have as much to do with vulnerability, failure, sorrow, loneliness and fear, as with power," notes Katherine Angel in her powerful work on consent (2021, p. 107).

Postcard from a Five-Star Hotel

I once attended a five-star hotel where I'd been hired to relieve a boy (legal, only a few years younger than me) of his virginity. People wouldn't say that I deflowered him (although there were rose petals on the bed) but, rather, that I'd made him a man. (Funny: that.) The experience was sensual and voluptuous—and why not? Choisy proposes that a "man who pays cannot be potent sexually with a woman he does not despise" (1961, p. 61) but I did not feel despised as such.

Perhaps experiences like these spoiled me: I want to fuck in luxurious places, in the realm of fantasy, with men or women who aim to please.

Often I write about gendered violence, but when I recount my experiences of sexual assault I am not writing about transactional sex: no one who paid for my time has physically abused, coerced or raped me, except maybe the guy who gave me hundreds of dollars to spank me. I'd said yes to spanking, which shot me right back to my childhood trauma. The difference here is consent: I did not suffer posttraumatic stress from the spankings I was paid for.

Cha-ching.

When Those Who Are Meant to Love You Stigmatize You Instead

The only time I truly felt prostituted was when my auntie dragged me up on stage at a political rally in the 1980s. I despised her husband, a small man with a mean temper, and by extension I hated his brother, who stood at the pulpit. I was maybe seven so my protests didn't count. I couldn't put into words at the time how it felt for my body to be used to sell a candidate I would later vote against.

"She acts like a prostitute," I heard that same auntie telling my late grandmother, years after she pushed me onstage.

This memory still creates a visceral tightening in my guts, brings heat to my cheeks; I forget to breathe. The fact that it bothers me still, like it's the worst insult in the world, troubles me even more.

> There is also an alarming air, in some feminists' responses to slut shaming, of assumed distance, that the fault in slut shaming is a sorting error: *No, she is certainly not a "slut"!* (Grant, 2014, p. 77)

No matter how much I intellectualize and deconstruct and try to reclaim in a positive sense words like slut or whore, my reflexive response is to dodge and deflect these invectives. Technically speaking, I identify (or have identified in the past) with each of these descriptors; the trouble, I think, is with the intention of the speaker. The trouble, I also think, is with my puritanical upbringing. Whores are sinners and sinners go to hell, the Bible tells me. The same Bible which, according to author Meggan Watterson (2019), erased the truth of Mary Magdalene from the gospel.

Survival Under Patriarchy

I've transacted my body opportunistically in the past to recover from debt. Paying my bills with sex felt a lesser evil than begging for assistance from family members who looked down upon me for my mental health conditions and life choices. Growing up in the eighties and nineties, everywhere I looked there were men in positions of power. The women I saw on the covers of magazines were pouty-lipped supermodels and movie stars. These often hypersexualized images hinted at how I could succeed under patriarchy, by fashioning myself into a Hollywood bombshell. Ellena Savage observes: "To never engage in sexualized labor is, for a woman, to fail at working under patriarchy" (2019, para. 10). Inga Muscio declares:

There are two ways to make money in a capitalist, patriarchal setting:

(1) Fuck other people over faster and more efficiently than they fuck you over.
(2) Whore. (2018, p. 250)

I've had the pretty-enough privilege of being choosy in terms of what Kollontai calls *mercenary sex* and have escaped many of the dangers that sex workers face. However, I have not escaped the dangers that men pose to all women (cis or trans). Because when we talk about the dangers of sex, it is men who are perpetuating the violence. Ninety-five percent of sexual assault perpetrators are men (ABS, 2021). Their victims include and are not limited to cis women and trans women, cis men and trans men, non-binary; gay, straight, queer, bi, poly, pan and asexual; sex workers and office workers; people with disabilities and those who are able-bodied. They prey on people of all cultural backgrounds; however, Black and Indigenous women are grossly overrepresented as victims of sexual assault, compared to white women; they are also less likely to be believed (NOW, 2018) and more likely to be overlooked by social justice warriors and change makers than their white counterparts.

The question is not *How do I avoid being assaulted?* so much as *How do we get men to stop perpetrating assault?* Taking away sex work doesn't stop the fact that men will rape and murder.

Flasher, Flasher, Read All About It

A memory I feel is significant here: the first time I ever saw a penis.

I was maybe seven or eight, investigating *Babysitter's Club* books at the public library. Mother was probably dropping my brother off at soccer practice—it was the 1980s, era of free-range

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parenting. The library should have been a safe enough space; we thought so at least. But I could barely speak the words to Mother when she returned. I was kind and stupid and naïve enough to retrieve and hand over, more than once, a coin that a middle-aged white man dropped in order to lure me to a position where he could not be seen by anyone but me.

The shiny silver coin fell from my small palm as I turned and sought shelter from the flasher in the Dewey decimals of Dawn and Stacey and Marianne. Already I associated money with male desire, acts of kindness with subterfuge.

In her essay titled "The Problem with Sex Is Capitalism" (2019) Rebecca Solnit points out how it seems to be objectionable to some men that sex—as opposed to rape—must be something that two people do together because they both want to. "Women-as-bodies are sex waiting to happen—to men—and women-as-people are annoying gatekeepers getting between men and female bodies" (p. 92).

When the John Tries To Be Funny

A cranky old business owner said, "Don't quit your day job" when I was singing to myself—a strictly anti-capitalist pursuit, anathema to a man consumed with building empires. He told himself it was free will and not money that kept me occasionally at his side: I'd overheard him bragging about me like I was a new Porsche. I was in a dressing room trying on clothes he wanted to buy for me, to make me fit a certain image. The walls echoed, or maybe it was the brash, nasal intonation of a pompous trophy hunter. It must have been a nice fantasy, if one could afford such a thing; a *Pretty Woman* kind of love story even, if you muddled the plot with a pregnancy of questionable paternity terminated by RU486.

"You do your best work on your back," he said—a cheap-shot line paired with a more expensive one—and I got back on my feet and walked out the door.

I am the bought, never the procurer, but as long as my legs walk, I can amend the terms of the sale. Although this is not that story.

—It is a little bit that story.

What's a Body Worth Anyway?

What's a body worth, I wonder—I mean for men who wish to bribe their way past the gatekeeper? Professor W Kip Viscusi (2021) estimates the value of a statistical life (VSL) to be $11 million USD in America. By comparison, Australia's VSL is $8.7 million USD. Viscusi arrives at the VSL by calculating the "local rate of trade-off between money and small risks of death" (p. 1067), which equates to a value that workers themselves deem acceptable for risk of death, weighed against the risks of mortality. As a dual resident I wonder if I'm worth the average of the two figures, or whether my value shifts according to what soil I stand on.

Let's Play a Tasteless Game!

What if I calculate the worth of my body as sexual object by dividing my VSL by the average number of sexual encounters a person has in a lifetime? I'm only factoring sex into my dodgy equation because patriarchal capitalism dictates that sex (and breeding) is all we're good for and sex pays more than anything else for those with limited options. $8,700,000 VSL % 5,778 average sexual encounters in a lifetime (Moss, 2016) = $1506 per shag. I'm not sure what I'm trying to communicate with this shoddy exercise in statistics except maybe to compare this figure with those of the trade.

The Prurience of Trauma Porn

In the past I have used my body to subsidize my art because artists and writers are notoriously underpaid. Having a Universal Basic Income as advocated by John Lanchester (2019) in the *London Review of Books*, might have allowed me to turn down work that was underpaid, situations that put me at risk, relationships maintained in order to survive: in which case my writing would have a different focus than it does today. Less trauma porn, more...I don't know.

In an essay on sexual abuse documentaries Maya Gurantz describes how Oprah Winfrey, who filmed 217 episodes on child sexual abuse alone—and Phil Donahue before her—trained viewers in the role of witness, making and popularizing the notion that "public vulnerability is both a healing act and a heroically powerful one" (2021, para. 25). Gurantz points out that underneath such sentimentality is "sensation: the prurient erotics of horror, with its mix of titillation and disgust" (para. 32).

As in abuse docs, the villain in my work is not the individual perpetrator; rather it's the systemic apparatus (patriarchy, exploitative capitalism, rigged justice systems, unconscious biases) that facilitated my abuse. The trouble with turning suffering into commodity, Gurantz argues, is that "no individual's therapeutic story-sharing can replace the collective action an unjust world requires for any remedy" (para. 61). But I believe that speaking up, where silence and shame are expected, is a subversive, political act which resists alienation.

Why Rapists Rape

Rape is the ultimate patriarchal weapon used to subjugate and punish women, to "correct" us, to keep us living in fear.

While rape victims aren't responsible for explaining why men rape, my recovery involves biblio- and narrative therapy. Seeking answers, I look ass-backwards to phallic-fixated Freud (1964) who says that sexuality is motivated as much by the fantasy of the forbidden as by the desire to evade threat of punishment for the retrieval of that same forbidden object.

My first rapist—much like Harvey Weinstein—weighed his rape fantasy against the fear of reprisal and decided it was worth it. In a sexist society a woman who is perceived to be a slut is positioned as deserving of rape and exploitation (Duschinsky, 2013).

I never stood a chance.

My second rapist—an ex who was once the love of my life—tried to impregnate me, to lay claim to my body with rape sperm. Rape is an act of colonization, of entitlement, a power move that claims ownership over and strips a person of their humanity.

Where attraction is frustrated, according to Freud, the libido focuses on the image of the child's primary object-choice, then carries out a sensual current of masturbatory activity that strengthens that incestuous fixation. A person might then divide their capacity to love into two distinct categories: the sacred, which is worthy of their love; and the profane, or animal, which they desire but cannot love. Such a person experiences pleasure only "in a psychical *debasement* of the sexual object" (Freud, 1964, p. 183). Perhaps for my rapists I was that despised, debased object.

Which Bodies Are Worthy of Concern?

There's no literal price tag attached to my body: the valuation of body as commodity demands a level of decipherment. Mauss proposes that exchange goods are not just "things-in-and-of-themselves" (1966, p. 291); they are transformative rather than static; they may be of material and emotional value, charged symbolically by their association with power and hierarchy; and are shaped further by social, political, and spatio-temporal forces. In this rotten world a woman's value rises and falls according to her association with patriarchal power. Decisions about who is worthy of moral concern are swayed by unconscious bias: "Given that the objectified are denied both mind and humanity, they may be considered less worthy of moral concern" (Loughnan et al., 2013, p. 456).

Lesley Sharp (2000) touches on historical concerns in relation to the commodified body: slavery and breeding of slaves, domestic and child labor (legalized enslavement), and *body trafficking* of workers of low socioeconomic worth. Sharp notes that the process

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of commodification "render[s] some categories of bodies invisible" (p. 294). My white skin makes me more visible; my mental illness, fluid sexuality and history of addiction and promiscuity make me less visible.

A Plague of Anxieties

What can I say about the fact that I remember every single transgression against me, sexual and otherwise—excluding maybe some memories that I haven't yet recovered; that my instinct is to cut myself off from people in the belief that I am unlovable; that I have an intense and confusing relationship with God, a complicated relationship with my father and a non-existent relationship with half my family; that I have a fear of never making it as a writer, paired with an arbitrary and ever-shifting goalpost of success that's always just out of reach; a fear of poverty and the not-choices it entails; a fear of endangering my child with my storage-cube-size container of neuroses; a fear of relapsing into disassociative behaviors, of institutionalization, of letting anything disturb my now neatly-structured life; and, conversely, a fear of normalcy, of cookie-cutter behavior?

And what can I say about the fact that I've faked every penetrative orgasm I've ever had? Performing satisfaction to reassure heterosexual men that they are virile is far less dangerous than withholding a fictitious orgasm while waiting for a real one, writes MacKinnon (1987), and I agree the threat to penile ego is real. Rebecca Solnit notes how "fury and desire come in a package, all twisted together into something that always threatens to turn *eros* into *thanos*, love into death" (2015, p. 27).

From 2014 to 2019 the Tumblr project *When Women Refuse* tracked violence against women who refused men's sexual advances. When men feel vulnerable or powerless, writes Jess Hill, "it's their *entitlement* to power that fuels their humiliated fury, and drives them to commit twisted, violent acts" (2019, p. 140).

What would it be like to say no without fear of reprisal?

(In)conclusion

I'm fed up with the moral outrage that demands justice for some victims and not others. I want to change the conversation. It's not about vilifying any one individual man: for every wholesome Bri Lee and Chanel Miller who secures a conviction against her rapist, out of 100 perpetrators the other 98 will walk free (RAINN, *nd*). Rape culture allows gendered violence to flourish; it allows women's testimony to be disbelieved, discarded, diminished (Solnit, 2017). And within rape culture, coercive control thrives. Jess Hill compares coercive controllers to magicians working a sleight of hand: they redirect their "partner's attention away from *his* abuse to *her* faults: if she wasn't so *this*, he wouldn't be so *that*" (2019, p. 28). "All too often, what 'he said' matters more," author Roxane Gay writes, "so we just swallow the truth" (2017, p. 45).

Like Jess Hill, Jacqueline Rose (2021) has written convincingly on male entitlement as precursor to violence, and when the UN surveyed 10,000 men they found that over 80% of rapists raped because they felt *entitled* to sex (Fulu et al., 2013). Rose writes: "As if hovering in the ether, [entitlement] relies for its persistence on a refusal to acknowledge that it is even there." Once we discover this deception it becomes impossible to ignore its pervasiveness. Despite my years of hyper-sexualization, I'm not a lesser victim-survivor of sexual assault or domestic abuse than those judged by society to be less object-like and therefore more human than me; to argue otherwise is to shift the burden of responsibility away from the true criminals, and to perpetuate this culture in which victims are blamed and shamed into silence.

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