Autonomy and submission in digital self-exposure and violent exposure of women

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Abstract: *The article discusses the meanings of the experiences of women who have undergone unauthorized exposure to intimacy, focusing on the possibilities and challenges to exercising autonomy in the experience of sexuality. It starts with debates in the fields of feminist political theory and exposure in the digital culture. Field work consisted of in-depth interviews with 17 girls and women who had intimate images disseminated in an unauthorized manner, as well as with 10 health and care professionals who assisted women in this situation. It is observed that the problematization of the various dimensions of desire, and not just the differentiation of violence, is a fruitful way to understand the possibilities of experiencing sexuality by women autonomously, especially in its contemporary manifestations.*
Keywords: *Exposure of intimacy; Sexuality; Autonomy; Desire.*

Autonomia e submissão na autoexposição digital e na exposição violenta de mulheres
Resumo: *O artigo discute os significados das experiências de mulheres que passaram pela exposição não autorizada da intimidade, com foco nas possibilidades e desafios ao exercício da autonomia na vivência da sexualidade. Parte-se dos debates nos campos da teoria política feminista e da exposição na cultura digital. Foi realizado trabalho de campo que consistiu em entrevistas em profundidade com 17 meninas e mulheres que tiveram imagens íntimas divulgadas de modo não autorizado, bem como com dez profissionais da saúde e da assistência que atenderam mulheres nessa situação. Observa-se que a problematização das diversas dimensões do desejo, e não apenas da diferenciação da violência, é um caminho frutífero para a compreensão das possibilidades de vivência da sexualidade por parte das mulheres de forma autônoma, sobretudo em suas manifestações contemporâneas.*
Palavras-chave: *exposição da intimidade; sexualidade; autonomia; desejo.*

Autonomía y sumisión en la auto exposición digital y exposición violenta de mujeres
Resumen: *El artículo discute los significados de las experiencias de mujeres que han pasado por exposición no autorizada de la intimidad, enfocándose en las posibilidades y desafíos para ejercer la autonomía en la experiencia de la sexualidad. El debate se lleva a cabo desde los campos de la teoría política feminista y la exposición en la cultura digital. El trabajo de campo consistió en entrevistas en profundidad a 17 niñas y mujeres a las que se les difundieron imágenes íntimas de manera no autorizada, así como a diez profesionales de la salud y la atención que asistieron a mujeres en esta situación. Se observa que la problematización de las diferentes dimensiones del deseo, y no solo la diferenciación de la violencia, es una forma fructífera de comprender las posibilidades de vivir la sexualidad de las mujeres de manera autónoma, especialmente en sus manifestaciones contemporáneas.*
Palabras clave: *exposición de la intimidad; sexualidad; autonomía; deseo.*

Introduction

There has been considerable debate about the connection between transgression, pleasure and risk in women's erotic relationships (Maria Filomena GREGORI, 2014). The publication *Prazer e Perigo*, by Carole Vance (1984), has been very influential in gender and sexuality studies in Brazil (Regina FACCHINI, 2016; GREGORI, 2014; Júlio SIMÕES, 2016). In response to the conservative tendency to reduce sexuality to gender oppression, the risk of violence and the objectification of women, the study problematizes sexuality as a field that for women simultaneously represents danger, repression, pleasure and discovery, in which it is necessary to contemplate multiple issues, at the risk of disregarding gender inequality or reinforcing women's helplessness by ignoring their potential to take action (VANCE, 1984; SIMÕES, 2016).

Vance (1984) argues that feminism must address female sexuality from the perspective of oppression that manifests itself in violence, but also in the repression of desire, and defend pleasure as a right. Sexuality must therefore be a battleground, and not the domain of a privileged group. However, the author warns of the risk of transforming women's personal statements about their sexual experiences into probabilities or prescriptions about what is best to do or avoid.

This study begins from these initial reflections in order to discuss the practice of women sharing their own erotic digital media, which in English has been called 'sexting', and the situations that involve violence in the unauthorized dissemination of these media, which became a crime in Brazil with the introduction of Federal Law No. 13.718 (BRASIL, 2018). This is an effort to understand the boundaries between the autonomous experience of sexuality and experiences that involve not only violence, but other aspects of women's subjection.

As Yolinliztli Pérez (2017) points out, in comparison to the rest of Latin America the field of Brazilian feminist studies has been characterized over the last decade by problematizing the issue of consent in sexual violence against women. The author argues that the establishment of laws that are based on the definition of consent – as is the case with Brazilian legislation – eclipses the political debate that aims to denaturalize behaviors related to gender roles and power relations. This debate, among other issues, contributes to the understanding that consent does not presume autonomy on the part of women or the absence of violence in relationships, as will be discussed in this work.

This article is organized around the presentation of the methods used in carrying out the fieldwork, followed by debates about women's autonomy in feminist political theory and about exposure in digital culture. Subsequently, female experiences involving the practice of sexting and the unauthorized disclosure of intimacy are discussed, focusing on aspects of the possibility of exercising freedom and one's own desire.

Methods

27 in-depth interviews were carried out via video calls during the second half of 2020. 17 of the interviewees were women who had experienced unauthorized disclosure of intimacy, and the other 10 were health and care professionals who had treated women in this situation. Recruitment to participate in the research was carried out by advertising on social media. A WhatsApp number for the researcher was made available so that women interested in sharing their experiences could get in touch.

The ages of the women who had experienced exposure ranged from 17 to 50 years at the time of the interview, and the health and care professionals were aged between 18 and 62 years. Psychologists, social workers and students were interviewed, members of organizations that offer support to women, whether legal, public security, mental health, private care or through voluntary projects. It was possible to achieve ethnic, racial, socioeconomic and territorial diversity. The interviewees belonged to different color/race categories, as well as different social groups. The women who experienced violence came from 18 cities in 6 Brazilian states (one woman was also exposed in the context of a large city abroad), including state capitals, inland cities, coastal cities, and small and medium-sized metropolitan areas. Among the professionals, 5 municipalities in the same state were covered – the state capital, a small municipality in the metropolitan region and small/medium-sized municipalities in the interior.

The women who had been exposed were asked to describe how their intimate images were produced and disseminated, how this affected them and whether they sought any type of help, whether personal or institutional, such as services offering legal or health support. The interviews with the professionals involved a detailed description of the cases treated, the damage caused, the care provided and the challenges faced with this type of care. The exposed women and professionals were asked for their perspectives on the care and attention given to women who go through this experience, a topic explored in a previous study (Laís PATROCINO; Paula BEVILACQUA, 2021a).

The average duration of the interviews was more than 70 minutes. The interviews were recorded and registered in writing. The records were sent and validated by all the research participants. Content analysis was used (Romeu GOMES, 2001), with units and categories of analysis defined based on previous studies and the questions raised by the participants.

The research procedures had previously been evaluated and approved by the Research Ethics Committee. For the participation of minors, assent forms were signed by a legal guardian. Ethnic and racial descriptions were given based on self-declaration. The names used in the work are fictitious, as a means of protecting the identity of the participants.

Women's autonomy: between defence and distrust

Flávia Biroli (2013a; 2013b) has made a significant contribution to the debate on women's autonomy and democracy by confronting different perspectives in the field of feminist political theory. In the first article (BIROLI, 2013a), the author explores and tries to find ways to overcome, specifically bearing in mind the condition of women, what is considered the classic sociological dilemma; the opposition between the agency and autonomy of social subjects and the coercive forces exerted by the institutions that produce individualities. The aim is to examine to what extent women's behaviors can be considered as a reaction to forms of oppression, but also ways of reproducing them.

In this work, this issue is approached in relation to the practice of sexting by women. The authors questioned to what extent the practice includes autonomy in the experience of sexuality, in the ways of representing oneself, but also submission to androcentric values, especially with regard to the objectification and standardization of the female body.

Biroli (2013a; 2014) highlights the risk involved in focusing on oppression to the detriment of women's autonomy, leading to the devaluation of their experiences and the ways in which norms are redefined, both from a political and a cognitive point of view. On the other hand, the power of oppressive structures and the ways in which they produce adaptive behaviors must also be taken into account. Based on the review carried out by Biroli (2013a), it is possible to oppose perspectives of phenomenological influence that focus on experiences and subjectivities, which are not totalized in social structures and analytical categories such as gender, race and class, and post-critical studies that emphasize the impossibility of pure experiences, prior to sociocultural influences.

Still within the scope of the first perspective, Biroli (2013a) makes reference to studies on maternity, such as the first research into the theory of care for example, which emphasized from a positive point of view the construction of ethics specific to women. In addition to issues related to motherhood and care, the author also cites studies that highlight the possibility of practices focused on standards of beauty autonomously, as being just a matter of choice free from coercion. In this same context, several types of related behavior can be identified that more clearly express the ambiguities between submission and autonomy, among which could be mentioned, in addition to the theme discussed in this study, the relationship between women and funk music in Brazil (Samyra RODRIGUES, 2018).

In opposition to these studies is the argument that the valorisation of traditional roles impedes the consideration of alternative life projects, also bearing in mind that such patterns of identification carry within them modes of oppression and hierarchization. In the same way, Biroli (2013a) highlights the study by Catharine MacKinnon (1987), for whom contexts of asymmetrical gender relations make experiences free from oppression impossible. The dominance of the male perspective in the State and in the cultural industry hinders the definition of women as subjects, as it constitutes subjective references for women themselves. One of the issues central to the author's analysis is sexuality. For MacKinnon (1987), the eroticized mode of domination is experienced as sex. Contrary to the defence of the existence of autonomous behaviors, the author defends precisely the broad process of understanding that they are not in fact autonomous. The basis for transformation would be the awareness that oppressive values are common to women and that they deprive them of their autonomous identity, enabling them to give new meaning to their experiences.

MacKinnon (1987) ridicules the perspective that the free expression of women's sexuality would reduce violence on the grounds that sex would be more available to men and would help to clarify the confusion between sex and violence. For the author, it would be as if the act of accepting or failing to resist nullified the sexual violation. The danger in sexual relations is treated as a fetish, and women's demands are appropriated by men in the production of pornography. As the author states: "Speaking in terms of roles, the one who experiences pleasure in the illusion of freedom and security within the reality of danger is the 'girl'; the one who experiences pleasure within the reality of freedom and security in the illusion of danger is the 'boy" (MacKINNON, 1987, p. 11).

For MacKinnon (1987), sex represented in the hegemonic industry is constituted by violence, which is not external – the universe of sexuality in androcentric culture is violent in itself. In the hegemonic view, it makes no sense to separate sex and violence; from male sexuality, pornography is inferred. The growth of the pornographic industry, observed by the author, corroborated her perspective.

The lack of distinction between sexual manifestation and violence is strongly present in the context of the practice of sexting and the unauthorized disclosure of intimacy, even in the academic-scientific field, an issue debated by the authors in a previous study (PATROCINO; BEVILACQUA, 2021b). Furthermore, there is commercial exploitation by the pornographic industry of erotic media of women exposed, and sometimes produced without authorization, and even in situations of sexual violence, as reported in a study and in journalistic articles (Beatriz LINS, 2019; Megha MOHAN, 2020). Although some pornographic sites claim that they do not post unauthorized media, there does not seem to be any effort to ensure this, culminating in a sequence of rapes against women, whose images also serve commercial purposes. In the context of this research, some women revealed that they feared that their media would be posted on pornographic sites.

According to MacKinnon (1987), the objectification of women is so widespread that stating that women have the possibility of choosing would be a strategy to preserve mental health in the face of the lack of an alternative. For the author, women's sexuality belongs to them just as it does not belong to them, not being an intrinsic value, but the fact that their form is a response to the lack of power, created from oppression and exclusion.

> [...] interpret female sexuality as an expression of the action and autonomy of women, as if sexism did not exist, it was always denigrating, bizarre and reductionist [...] While sexual inequality continues to be unequal and sexual, the attempts to value sexuality as the property of women, possessive as if women owned it, will continue to form part of the act of limiting women to their current definition of what they are. There are fleeting revelations that are really momentary and occasional (although the majority of people believe that they live their sexual lives within them) and the search for equal sexuality without political transformation is equivalent to seeking equality under conditions of inequality (MacKINNON, 1987, p. 22).

In this sense, MacKinnon (1987) argues that using consent as the reference that differentiates sex from violence only serves conformist legal purposes. This issue is debated by Biroli (2013b) in the confrontation of the concept of consent in feminist political theory with neoliberal conceptions. Such perspectives diverge due to the feminist premise that individuals' choices refer to their social positions, as opposed to the liberal conception of autonomy and voluntarism. From this perspective, choices are understood as individual mental calculations that presuppose free choice, without suffering any form of coercion or establishing a relationship with the external context. For feminism, and especially for authors like MacKinnon (1987), consent cannot be assumed autonomously in asymmetrical contexts and relationships of domination and oppression. Furthermore, in democratic societies the establishment of contracts presupposes, at the same time, autonomy to sign them, but its denial in granting rights. This debate also refers to the fact that, in classical contract theories, women were incapable of consenting (BIROLI, 2013b).

Even though MacKinnon's work can be interpreted as a way of reproducing the victimization of women and a disbelief in their ability to understand and manage the mechanisms of oppression (BIROLI, 2013b; 2014), one cannot lose sight of the centrality of her questioning of the power structures that control discourses and give more visibility to some than others, and their effects on the social construction of inequalities and violence (BIROLI, 2013b).

Self-exposure in the digital domain: between conquests and reproductions

And no one understood me, they were surprised that after so many years of seclusion and discipline, I only wanted, only aspired to, freedom and forbidden pleasures. As if prison got used to the prisoner, and after being released, he wanted nothing more than to return to his prisoner's uniform and his nightly exercise in the prison yard!

As Três Marias (Rachel de QUEIROZ, 1973)

The renowned work The Society of the Spectacle, written by Guy Debord (2003) in the 1960s, in the context of capitalist expansion and the media, and consequently of marketing and consumer culture, introduced the idea of the spectacle as the ultimate expression of capitalism, revealed in the social relationship mediated by images. In this relationship, reality is emptied of meaning. There is a previous degradation of 'being' into 'having', which culminates in 'seeming'. Its means is its own end, and its reproduction involves passive social acceptance. This way of life is explained by Debord as follows: "As far as necessity finds itself socially dreamt of, the dream becomes necessary. The spectacle is the bad dream of a chained-up modern society, which ultimately expresses nothing more than its desire to sleep. The spectacle is the guardian

of this sleep" (DEBORD, 2003, p. 21). For the author, there is a direct relationship between the appropriation of this increasingly widespread way of life and the alienation of oneself.

> The spectator's alienation for the benefit of the contemplated object (which is the result of his own unconscious activity) is expressed as follows: the more he contemplates, the less he lives; The more he accepts recognizing himself in the dominant images of necessity, the less he understands his own existence and his own desire. The externality of the spectacle in relation to the man who acts appears in this, his own gestures are no longer his, but those of another who presents them to him. This is why the spectator does not feel at home anywhere, because the spectacle is everywhere (DEBORD, 2003, p. 30).

In addition to the exposure of the image that is intensified with the expansion of internet access, there is the issue of intimacy. Edvaldo Couto (2015) follows on from the work of Walter Benjamim in discussing how the intimacy and privacy of domestic life give way to public life with the historical process of modernization, technologization and consumption. In cyberculture, intimacy is claimed to the point of existing abstractly, despite claims about internet security.

> [...] the happy agonies of the status of the increasingly fictional self on social networks create other intense imprisonments and submissions, probably more tyrannical than those of privacy. It seems that the more people expose themselves and gain visibility, the more vulnerable they become in the public sphere (COUTO, 2015, p. 59).

Amid debates about vulnerability, submission and reproduction of cultural norms, there are analytical perspectives that have considered the potential of using the digital sphere as a communicative tool. In another work, Couto, Joseilda SOUZA e Barbara NEVES (2013), state: "What we realize is that the condition of us all being interpretive cyborgs makes us happily inhabit cyberspace" (COUTO; SOUZA; NEVES, 2013, p. 12). The authors rely on André Lemos' theory and the concept of the interpretative cyborg – which presupposes influence in the digital sphere – and argue that connectivity limits the power of mass culture and opposes passive consumption.

Other political gains are identified in the new ways of asserting oneself and relating through social networks, which concern the strengthening of minority groups. Self-exposure has been analyzed based on the concepts of hypervisibility (Andrew KEEN, 2012; Carla ABREU, 2015) and self-disclosure (ABREU, 2015) which respectively discuss the commodification of people through excessive self-display and the display of intimacy, which ignores the process of providing personal data to companies, and the narratives of intimacy and everyday life aimed at an audience that is not necessarily identified. On the one hand, there is strong criticism of the culture of hypervisibility and a disbelief that the relationships built on social networks can lead to any progress in terms of respect for diversity through the multiplication of identity affirmations – but on the contrary, increasing vulnerability due to exposure, lack of quality communications, intolerance and violence (KEEN, 2012). On the other hand, there is recognition of positive effects in the communication of one's own experiences, especially for socially marginalized groups, in the affirmation of their identities, in political visibility and in intragroup connection (ABREU, 2015).

Other studies have pointed to gains specifically for women in the use of new technologies. For Carla Ganito (2010), cell phone use both reinforces traditional gender roles and transforms them, challenging norms, mediating forms of resistance to oppression and legitimizing the presence of women in the public domain. It is worth considering, however, the risks involved in forms of resistance in the use of feminist technologies to denounce violence and occupy masculinized spaces. It is common to observe, in reports of violence on the internet, the exposure and vulnerability of women while men remain hidden.

Mireille Miller-Young (2007) also highlights autonomy in roles traditionally understood as subordination. The author discusses the ways in which black American women who work in the pornographic industry – leading their own careers through knowledge of new technologies – deconstruct dominant gender and racial patterns, and claim values associated with agency and intellectuality.

With regard to the specific issue of nudity, Paula Sibilia (2014) discusses the changes in social relations that have made it much more present and acceptable – especially women's nudity, now appropriate not only in the market, but in political actions. The practice of exposing nudity has been presented by people in different contexts and in different ways, with attention to those who claim the representation of the real body, as opposed to standards of beauty and technological resources that manipulate images to adapt them to those standards. The author questions how effective it would be to make an impact through exposing nudity, as in a certain way the practice has already been trivialized. This question therefore suggests reflection on the relationship between the condemnation of nudity and its context of production, being strongly related, in the case of unauthorized disclosure of intimate images, to the still persistent condemnation of the manifestation of women's sexuality, as discussed in other works (Luciane

MAZZARDO, 2014; Isabela PETROSILLO, 2016; Rossana PINHEIRO, 2018; Liziane RODRÍGUEZ, 2018; Katrine JOHANSEN; Bodil PEDERSEN; Tine TJØRNHØJ-THOMSEN, 2019).

In the debate about the act of self-photographing, the so-called 'selfie' is understood, from a semiotic perspective, to contain proposals to be negotiated between the sender and the receiver. The practice involves regulating behavioral norms. What is negotiated is not the relationship, but the different perspectives of what is represented. In this sense, the interpretation depends on who sends, who receives and the context in which it is sent (Sumin ZHAO; Michele ZAPPAVIGNA, 2018).

In the same vein, Theresa Senft and Nancy Bayam (2015) defend the multiplicity of perspectives around the analysis of the selfie. In a review of studies from different countries, the authors argue against the pathologizing of the practice and point to some of the meanings they can assume depending on the specific context – they can reinforce hegemonic values or contest them, and can be reappropriated in order to reverse their initial intention, as in the case of the unauthorized disclosure of intimate images of women, which transforms the initially proposed direction of power. This is the topic discussed below.

Between self-exposure and unauthorized exposure of women's intimacy: in search of free and pleasurable experiences

The practice of self-photographing and sharing images, as well as having one's privacy disclosed without authorization, takes on different meanings for women. From the experiences of the women participating in the research, it was observed that this type of media is produced and disseminated under very different conditions.

In the case of unauthorized dissemination of images, as argued by Spencer Sydow and Ana Castro (2017), different modes of violence cannot be reduced to what is commonly called revenge. It would be necessary to ascertain whether or not there is illegality in obtaining and distributing the media, as they can not only be disseminated, but also obtained without authorization, or in threatening situations such as those of so-called 'sextortion'. Sexual extortion involving media can either mean obtaining images as an end in itself, or as a means of threatening rape – both situations were described by women in the context of this research.

Among the experiences of the research participants, the motivations for exposure involved sextortion, revenge, control and condemnation of sexuality, commercialization and the affirmation of masculinity. Some experiences involved not exposing sexuality itself, but other situations such as alcohol consumption or arguments, revealing control and pathologizing of other women's behaviors. Furthermore, the exposure was initiated by people with different connections to women, such as family and friends.

It is worth adding that the production of the media itself can be carried out in an unauthorized manner and even without the knowledge of those who are in the exposure situation – a case also reported in the scope of the research and in another study (LINS, 2019). Furthermore, what matters here as a point of debate is to ask to what extent in situations in which media are produced by women, are their desires and autonomy manifested in these experiences.

It was observed that in many situations the unauthorized dissemination of the media caused the exposed women to reflect on the practice of exposing themselves. However, among professionals who treated adolescents who had been exposed, there were reports that the girls did not perceive themselves as having been targets of violent actions. This fact was also described in the study by Paulo Silva Júnior and Leandro Brito (2020). They reported that what most outraged the management and teachers of a school where intimate photos of girls were published was the fact that, of the nine girls exposed, only one was bothered that her "nudes" had been shared without authorization. A school professional interviewed suggested that among middle-class families there is some discomfort with the issue, which is not the case among working-class families"

Úrsula, black, 36 years old, a psychologist for a public security agency in the state capital, reported the support she had recently provided to four teenagers living on the outskirts of the city, aged around 14, who participated in the recording of an erotic music video without knowledge of its production and dissemination. In the context of the recording, another teenager was raped by approximately seven boys, which was also recorded and publicized. The complaint was made by the teenager, who began to be persecuted. The other exposed teenagers did not consider there to be a problem as they had not been informed about the recording and dissemination of the images, because they had freely participated in the recording.

Tainá, white, 28 years old, a private psychologist from a small town in the interior, had a recent case in which a 15-year-old white teenager had sent around 15 nude photos to a man she was chatting with on the internet and whom she had never seen. Her father, a politician from a neighboring city, was extorted and paid so the photos would not be disseminated. After the episode, the man never tried to contact the teenager again, which was a source of suffering for

her, unlike the appropriation of her photos to extort her father. In Tainá's estimation, the episode represented for the teenager an attempt to break with the infantilization she experienced in the family environment.

Among some women, the fact that they were exposed, despite the damage suffered, did not affect their practice of taking self-photographs. Other reports indicated a change in the relationship as women began to express themselves, especially on social media.

Olga, white, 29 years old, was exposed by her abusive ex-boyfriend who had hacked her internet accounts while living in both a Brazilian state capital and a large city abroad three years before the interview. She spoke publicly on social media about the incident, revealing that after the incident she lost her fear of exposing herself. However, she never took self-photographs again, something that previously had a positive value for her. She also reported negative effects on her relationship with her own body and her relationship with her current partner.

Letícia, white, aged 27, was exposed at the age of 21 in a state capital by a man with whom she was having a relationship and who photographed her during a sexual act without her knowledge. She reported that she has changed the content of what she shares on social media and has also become more restrictive about who can have access to her accounts. Letícia stopped being interested in publishing photos in which her body appeared, which attracted more views and comments from males, and started sharing more images about travel.

The lack of perception of violence was only present in the experiences of adolescents. However, most of them suffer considerable harm from being exposed. According to Adriana, white, 62 years old, a psychologist at a women's shelter in a state capital, the aggravating factor of the exposure of teenagers is the fact that they still have a more fragile emotional makeup.

In the following sections, women's perceptions of their autonomy and desire in the act of exhibiting their images will be discussed. As previously argued, such reflections were influenced by the fact that they were exposed in an unauthorized way.

About Freedom

My weather vane has inside the wide-open wind of Arpoador
Your sunflower has on the outside the hidden Engenho de Dentro of the flower [...]
I know that one depends on the other just to be different, to complete each other
I know that one moves away from the other, suffocating only to get closer
You have a green way of being and I'm a bit red
But the two of them go together in the sinkhole of the mirror.

Catavento and Girassol (Aldir Blanc MENDES, 1993)

Women's autonomy in expressing their sexuality, an issue considered worthy of analysis since the initial research, was also found to be a point of reflection among research participants. Furthermore, autonomy in exercising sexual freedom or in the act of voluntarily exposing oneself was questioned and compared to sexual repression itself.

In Aldir Blanc's song, the behavior of a restrained man is contrasted with that of an expansive woman, so that both behaviors are subsequently presented as a mirror of each other. The two models are thought of here as different possible modes of conduct among women.

Flávia, black, 20 years old, a resident of a small town in the interior, had her cell phone with nude images of her and her girlfriend stolen in 2016. She reported having been very afraid of the media being divulged for around two years, and until then she avoided bringing up the subject with her girlfriend. After the episode, they did not return to producing media and this is due to the fact that, according to Flávia, they had matured and also because of their criticism of the sexualization of black women. She said that she believes we live with illusory and partial freedom.

> And often this freedom that we learn is a disguised freedom. In fact, we are not free, we are holding ourselves back, cutting ourselves off, all the time. I think it's a falsehood, a false concept of freedom. For example, there are people who think that being with several people makes you free, right? In truth no. [...] It could be worse; it could be that we are living a worse life than we are. So, it's, like, less worse, right? It's worse if you don't have any kind of freedom. So, even if it is a freedom that you have in your head that exists. It's like you can't even think about this freedom. Sexual freedom, for example.

Flávia's perspective corroborated the ideas of becoming vulnerable through exposure (COUTO, 2015) and of reproducing hegemonic values (SENFT; BAYAM, 2015). The perception of the reproduction of aesthetic standards was present in other statements. Raquel, white, 18 years old, the resident of a medium-sized city in the interior, runs a voluntary project to support women in violent situations which she started after having been in an abusive relationship at the age of 15. She once had a photo of herself in a bikini displayed on an internet gossip page, whose caption hinted at her desire for sex, but spoke about the girls' efforts to meet aesthetic standards.

> They all appear in all the videos and photos completely shaved, perfect, very 'pornified', it looks like they've just been put through the filter, because they even use their facial expressions. [...]

> And the girls, they really surrender themselves to this, at least most of the girls I know, all of them who are not feminist activists, they try hard all the time to meet this standard, especially those that we take care of. So, the girls we look after send something fatphobic to the [WhatsApp] group.

The girls' behavior and their level of autonomy were analyzed and also differentiated in relation to their reactions after being exposed. A thesis defended for the Postgraduate Program in Communication at the University of Brasília (Bruno CRAESMEYER, 2017) typified three reactions: one that surrenders to the politics of exposure and profits from it, one that acts in defence of voluntary exposure as opposed to violence, and another that acts politically in legal instances.

> The first suggests "vaccinating yourself" – moving forward and internalizing, extinguishing suffering, making it productive and a producer – against these punishments caused by obscene abuse and, in the face of the admission of inevitable exposure as a norm – as Bell postulates (2009) and post-pornographic activism –, voluntarily submitting, enjoying and even profiting from the gaze of others. A preventive political action with economic potential. The second possibility encourages victims to remedy the suffering caused by unauthorized disclosure by "claiming back" sovereignty over their own body image by exposing themselves again, but voluntarily. A reactive political action that aims to demonstrate, to prove, that the "problem" is not nudity or sexuality, but rather the lack of voluntariness. The third possibility consists of acting politically "outside the image", in normative and legal instances and in campaigns to contain the non-consensual circulation of images of other people's sexuality and bodies, whether through education or through criminalization and regulation of the dissemination of this type of image (CRAESMEYER, 2017, p. 98).

The author hierarchizes these reactions, classifying the first as the one that most internalizes free market surveillance, under the guise of activism. Thereza Silva (2018) points precisely in the opposite direction when discussing how financial capitalism appropriates, materially and symbolically, political struggles.

In Paul Preciado's (2011) analysis, the capitalist regime focuses mainly on the production and control of sexuality. The author starts from a Foucauldian perspective on the political control of bodies, and argues that the production of sexuality is transformed into a force for the production of capital. In this sense, sexuality ceases to be just an element of the political management of bodies and also becomes the basis of capitalist production, within the scope of the construction of subjectivities. Despite both adopting Foucault as a reference, unlike Preciado (2011) Craesmeyer's (2017) analysis views the issue of gender as practically non-existent, in addition to presenting true scepticism regarding the possibility of women's freedom to express their sexuality through the self-exposure of their bodies. For Craesmeyer (2017), the forms of reaction to violence involve self-deception and only differ in levels of adaptation to the society of control.

Kiara, black, 25 years old, a resident of the state capital, said that at the age of 18 she had been fired from a FIAT factory where she worked as a mechanic, after a montage of her face with a naked female body was produced and disseminated. She was unable to return to her chosen profession, and took part in a sensual photoshoot at the age of 21 which was posted on social media for some time. Kiara stated that even though the fact that she had produced and displayed the photos was used against her during a political discussion (more precisely, she was mocked for having pubic hair), it was not something remarkable, and in no way did she feel the same suffering as that caused by the persecution and harassment experienced at work. She believes that the outrage over what happened influenced her decision to do the shoot, but not exclusively. Currently, she takes sensual photos of herself and exchanges them with her husband. Her account revealed a high level of reflection and self-awareness. Kiara's experience corresponds to Senft and Bayam's (2015) perspective of contesting hegemonic values, as well as illustrating the issue of appropriation that can break with the initial objective of media production.

Unlike Craesmeyer's (2017) exhaustive analysis, in which from a feminist point of view women's reactions to the exhibition can be understood as indistinct, interviewee Raquel also categorized three types of reaction, but attributing to them a greater potential for lucidity and the exercise of freedom:

> I think there are three reactions for girls, right? One is those who withdraw, who no longer want to appear, out of fear, they can no longer trust. Another is one that happens a lot too, which is like, there are girls who even put it in their biography, like that little description on the internet, like "I'm really a slut". A lot of people post these things, they post this, like, when guys are going to post something, sometimes they post "I'm really a bitch, you can say whatever you want". And there are those who start to get involved with the feminist movement because of this. They understand who they are and, like, they feel free, you know. "If you want to call me a whore, you can. I'm not going to appropriate this name because I don't agree, right, but I'm going to continue doing the things I want to do." So I think these are the three reactions that happen after the girls are exposed, but most people actually become more withdrawn. [...] I even think that "I'm a bitch" is sometimes a step towards feminism, you know, towards liberation, right. Yes, she starts with this act of rebellion "Since you want to call me a slut, that's who I am" and within that she ends up

finding the feminist movement. Until she understands that she doesn't need to declare herself as a slut per se, right, that that's just an invention of society. And then she becomes an activist.

The distinction proposed by Raquel, in addition to recognizing the centrality of feminist thought in supporting women, found greater correlation with the experiences related in the context of the research. Taking the same direction as Ganito (2015), the use of new technologies was considered in the reproduction of traditional roles as well as in forms of resistance. Such reflections do not, however, negate the question about the possibility of exercising freedom by women in the act of exposing themselves. Subsequently, this question will be examined in more depth by taking women's desire, understood in its multiple domains, as a starting point for the answer.

About Desire

Me, now – what an outcome!
I don't even think about you anymore...
But will I ever stop
Remembering that I forgot you?
Do Amoroso Esquecimento (Mario QUINTANA, 1997)

Based on the debate presented in this study, it is assumed that desire manifests subjectivities constituted to a greater or lesser extent by structural patterns, which may correspond to sociocultural models or unconscious thoughts, among other characteristics. In parallel to the definition of consent proposed by Paz Peña and Joana Varon (2019), we can understand desire as a structural issue, constituted in power relations, but which can be conscious, free and also complex, non-continuous and non-binary.

In the accounts given by the exposed women, it is noteworthy that they did not exactly want to produce the media that was subsequently exposed, as some of them stated. Such was the case of Pilar, a 33-year-old black woman, exposed at the age of 23 while living in a small town in the interior. She was filmed in a provocative pose at the suggestion of her then-boyfriend, and the recording was posted online by the man who formatted his computer. Clarice, white, 19 years old, exposed at the age of 14 by her then boyfriend in a small town in the metropolitan region, spoke of a similar feeling.

I wasn't really into it, but I still sent [the photo] because I really liked him, simple as that. [...] Nowadays, I avoid it as much as possible, in fact, when I go to do something, [...] I still check if there is a phone nearby, that sort of thing. I still have that, I'm still very insecure, especially with men.

Daniela, mixed race, 19 years old, a resident of the state capital, was exposed at the age of 14 by a classmate at school with whom she exchanged photos. She was later exposed in the family environment, by her father, who always displayed very repressive and violent behavior. He accessed the photos on his daughter's cell phone and showed them to the family (Daniela's grandmother, aunts and uncles). Her father claimed she was worthless and kicked her out of the house. Daniela went to live with her maternal grandmother.

I don't understand. There are days when I stop and think, when this comes into my head, I say "God, what was I thinking?" I talked to much better looking, more intelligent boys, who I had known for longer, but not sexually, and I went to talk to a boy who, poor thing, goodness.

Adriana provided care to a 19-year-old girl, exposed by her then boyfriend when she wanted to break up with him. The young woman, who worked as a photographic model and had tens of thousands of followers on social media, had nude photos of herself exposed. The young woman's care involved working on self-esteem, self-confidence and life plans. Adriana realized that she wanted to be desired, but didn't necessarily like her boyfriend, as she said:

Then she told me "No, because he said he loved me, he said he liked me.", and I said "Okay, and what did you feel about him?", "Ah, I wanted him to love me". In other words, it's not "I love", but "I wish he loved me".

Similarly, Tainá believes that there is confusion due to the fact that exposure by women is more naturalized, which appears to have greater social permission. Their desire to display themselves becomes related to their desire for acceptance. However, judgment, condemnation and repression remain very strong. Based on experiences observed in her office, she argues that the act of exposing oneself requires a lot of self-confidence, otherwise any negative feedback could weaken women. Tainá narrated the experience of a young woman with very low self-esteem, who meets conventional standards of beauty, and posted a photo of herself on social media in which she was half-naked. Amid positive messages about empowerment, the young woman also received some male "perspectives", which caused her suffering and made her regret posting the photo.

Some experiences reported by women suggested that they were comfortable with the practice of self-photographing and exposing themselves, which involves recognizing and managing both desire and risk. In this respect, the work of Abreu (2015) presented the testimony of a young woman who has a page on a social network where she shares her experiences as a lesbian woman and who admits that she feels afraid because she is too exposed, but maintains her page because it is a way to organize her thoughts and express herself in a fun way, which makes her feel good. Other works analyze women's experiences of photographing their own nudity as autonomous and pleasurable (LINS, 2019), as aesthetic-political production practices related to questioning standards of beauty (SILVA, 2018) and heteronormativity, as well as resistance to situations of violence, promotion of self-esteem and construction of safety networks for sharing media (Luiza SILVA, 2018).

Joana, white, 24 years old, from a small town in the interior, reported that at the age of 18 she had both a naked photo of herself and her diary exposed by a friend. She stated that the betrayal and the exposure of the diary that contained record of her insecurities caused her more suffering than the publication of the photo. Joana said that she has shared a video of her having sex with an ex-boyfriend and another with a couple, and feels a certain insecurity about the possibility of them being disseminated – from time to time she checks whether they have been posted on pornography sites. She believes that this could disrupt her professional life or her relationship with the family of any partner she may have. Joana stated that she continues to exchange photos, but takes care to conceal her identity. Joana also said that although she is currently further from conventional standards of beauty due to the fact that she has gained weight, she feels more comfortable with her body. She demonstrated that she not only recognized the risk, but in a way enjoyed it:

> Maybe the risk [of being exposed] turns me on (laughs). But, yeah, I think that, but I think this has everything to do with my personality, how I've always dealt with sex, having a much more open attitude, open to experiences, open to experimenting and everything like that.

Other research participants reported that they continued the practice of sharing their media after having suffered unauthorized exposure, having incorporated some precautions.

Risk management, among other accounts, was present in the statements made by Amanda, white, 17 years old, a resident of a medium-sized city in the interior, who the previous year had a photo of herself copied from social media and used to promote a brothel. According to her, she posts a lot of photos, but not those in which she appears half-naked:

> I admire myself, because my self-esteem is very high (laughs). So I like to look at myself, right? [...] Keep it to myself, I just show it to him [boyfriend] like, "Look at this" [...] He asks me not to send it because he's afraid it'll leak, he's very aware.

The recognition among adolescents of the risks involved in the practice of sexting and the problematization of violence were also reported in the research by Rodrigo Soares (2014). Based on the experiences reported here, one can think of the dichotomy between repressed and expansive behaviors mirrored by the alienation of desire itself. In this sense, failing to expose oneself for fear of repression or the reversal of the meaning that violence provoked in the woman's relationship with her own body or image, or exposing oneself due to an external demand, be it from one's partner or through the acceptance of others, which does not necessarily correspond to acceptance in itself, are constituted as oppositions belonging to the same model of submissive behavior – be it relationships, social standards or the emotions inherent to these processes.

With regard to political issues that permeate the subjective conformation of desire, it is worth considering the need for affirmation as the antithesis of feeling. As in Mário Quintana's poem, the demand to express the absence of affection reveals its permanence. What is proposed as reflection is the dimension of desire in the face of internalized external demand, which makes room for need. In this sense, it would be essential to think to what extent exposing oneself is an affirmation of sovereignty, on the part of women, over their own bodies – or their affirmation in public space, or as a disruption of beauty standards or affirmation of sexuality – obeys the logic from one's own desire or just from social and political demand. In the terms that have recently been used by social movements, it would deal with the right to exist, to the detriment of just resisting (Jaime PEIXOTO, 2020). As Kiara's story suggests, this distinction is not presented clearly, which does not eliminate the relevance of the question, as a means of understanding one's own desire more deeply.

One cannot lose sight, however, of the ways in which social markers of difference confer privileges, whether they are related to the absence of the need for self-affirmation in the public sphere or the social acceptance of historically hegemonized subjects and bodies. The experiences of the women reported in the research were marked by racist and fatphobic narratives.

The connection with one's own desire appears to be the most precise route to experiencing sexuality autonomously. Understanding desire, constituted in different spheres, is as complex as it

is opportune. The external and social issues that overlap with it need to be considered in a non-imprisoning way. For Audre Lorde (1984), the connection with the erotic is also a path to political action itself. The attempt to control female eroticism occurs precisely because of its power, its potential.

> But when we begin to live from the inside out, connected to the power of the erotic within us and allowing that power to fill and inspire our ways of acting in the world around us, then we begin to be responsible for ourselves in the most profound sense. [...] Our acts against oppression become integral to our being, motivated and empowered from within. In contact with the erotic, I rebel against the acceptance of weakening and of all states of my being that are not my own, that were imposed on me [...] (LORDE, 1984, p. 57).

Final considerations

This article discussed the possibilities of autonomy in the experience of women's sexuality in the practice of self-photographing and exposing their own nudity. The reflections came from debates on autonomy in the field of feminist political theory and on exposure in digital culture, confronted with the experiences of women who had intimate images shared in an unauthorized way and health and care professionals who treated women who had gone through this situation. The problematization of the possibility of women's autonomy discussed in political theory, whether in its affirmation or denial, is complicated by contemporary practices of representing oneself in the digital realm and the possibilities of expressing oneself and reproducing patterns of consumption.

The women's experiences showed a diversity of contexts and meanings, which encompass the experience of autonomy based on pleasure and the exploration of one's own sexuality, and also risk management, as well as manifesting reproductions of hegemonic aesthetic values. The analysis undertaken highlighted the centrality of understanding the multiple dimensions of desire – combined with issues from the social field, for the experience of sexuality in an autonomous way.

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AUTORSHIP CONTRIBUITION

Laís Barbosa Patrocino: contributed to the conception, data collection and analysis, preparation of the manuscript, writing and discussion of the results.

Paula Dias Bevilacqua: contributed to the conception, data analysis, preparation of the manuscript and discussion of the results.

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CONSENT TO USE IMAGE

Not applicable.

APPROVAL BY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Research Ethics Committee of the René Rachou Institute – Fiocruz Minas (CAAE: 8645120.9.0000.5091).

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

Not applicable.