



Critical Criminological Understandings of Adult Pornography and Woman Abuse: New Progressive Directions in Research and Theory¹

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Abstract

There is a small, but growing, social scientific literature on the racist and violent nature of contemporary adult pornography. However, considerably more empirical and theoretical work needs to be done to advance a critical criminological understanding of how such hurtful sexual media contribute to various forms of woman abuse in intimate relationships. The main objective of this article is to briefly review the relevant literature and to suggest a few new progressive empirical and theoretical directions.

Keywords

Pornography; critical criminology; woman abuse; gender; feminism.

Introduction

Critical criminological work on adult pornography consumption and its violent consequences is limited compared to the amount of progressive intellectual attention given to other major social harms, such as racist police practices, mass incarceration, and environmental crime. In fact, criminologists in general 'have not been fleet of foot' in dealing with Internet porn (Atkinson and Rodgers 2014: 1). This is due, in part, to the fact that numerous academics and university/college administrators view pornography as a topic unfit for academic inquiry (Ullen 2014). Nevertheless, this paper is one of a growing group of scholarly articles, book chapters, and monographs on pornography that challenge this orthodox belief. Pornography requires in-depth, interdisciplinary analyses for reasons provided here and in other sources (Kipnis 1996). All the same, there are different learned understandings, some of which sharply disagree with my critical criminological position, one that is in tune with those of anti-pornography radical feminists such as Dines (2010), Funk (2006), and Jensen (2007). It is beyond the scope of this article to reproduce debates between those who find value in adult pornography and those who sharply oppose it. Rather, the main objective is twofold: (1) to briefly review the extant critical criminological literature on the linkage between pornography and woman abuse; and (2) to suggest some new progressive directions in research and theory. It is first necessary to define critical criminology and pornography.

Definition of critical criminology and pornography

Critical criminology

Critical criminology is a polyglot of concepts, theories and interpretations about crime, deviance and social control (Donnermeyer 2012). Even so, the many types of critical criminology can be summed up as perspectives that view the major sources of crime as the unequal class, race/ethnic and gender relations that control our society (DeKeseredy 2011, Young 1988). While variants of critical criminology such as green criminology, left realism, feminism and cultural criminology have different origins, use different research methods and have diverse political beliefs, as Friedrichs (2009) notes, 'The unequal distribution of power or of material resources within contemporary societies provides a unifying point of departure for all strains of critical criminology' (p. 210). Still, 'there is no party line' (Currie 2008: vii).

Another feature all critical criminologists share is passionate opposition to prisons and other draconian means of social control. The primary policy goals are radical structural and cultural changes. Nevertheless, these transitions will not happen soon in the present neo-liberal era, which is why many, if not most, critical scholars and activists propose short-term solutions to crime while simultaneously keeping their eyes on broader transitions.

Two other things bring critical criminologists together. The first is years of rigorous research using a variety of methods including surveys, ethnography, narrative, deconstruction and other qualitative methods (DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2014; Lynch, Michalowski, and Groves 2000). Critical criminologists study a myriad of topics ranging from violence against women in private places, to predatory street victimization, to corporate crime. The additional commonality is the broadening the definition of crime to include poverty, human rights violations, the state's denial of adequate social services (for example, health care), state terrorism, racism, imperialism and corporate crime (Elias 1986; Reiman and Leighton 2013; Schwendinger and Schwendinger 1975).

Of all the scholars who publicly identify themselves as critical criminologists or who could be categorized as such, feminists are the most actively involved in the study of and struggle against pornography. On the one hand, defining feminism is not an easy task and there are at least 12 types of feminism (Renzetti 2012 2013). On the other hand, all leading experts in the field agree with the assertion that 'feminism is not merely about adding women onto the agenda' (Currie and MacLean 1993: 6). Here, I offer Daly and Chesney-Lind's (1988) conceptualization, which is still one of the most widely read and cited offerings in the critical criminological literature. Feminism refers to a 'set of theories about women's oppression and a set of strategies for change' (Daly and Chesney-Lind 1988: 502).

Feminist scholars most involved in pornography work are *radical feminists*, such as Gail Dines (2010) and Robert Jensen (2007). Radical feminists contend that the most important set of social relations in any society is found in patriarchy and that, throughout the world, females are the most oppressed social group while, regardless of their race/ethnicity and social class, men always have more power and privilege (Renzetti 2013). Additionally, pioneering radical feminist scholars Catharine MacKinnon (1983, 1989), Susan Brownmiller (1975), Andrea Dworkin (1981), and Diana Russell (1990) made an argument that many feminists still agree with today: porn is violent, eroticizes male dominance and female submission, and 'thereby reinforces and causes women's subordination' (Bart 1985: 284). Radical feminists also contend that pornography 'lies about women's sexuality' (Lacombe 1988: 41).

While these claims are shared by most anti-porn feminists, there is no consensus about the development and implementation of policies that target porn, and conflicting feminist policy responses have existed for decades. Nonetheless, the early work of radical feminists advanced how pornography is now perceived in many academic and other circles. Yet radical feminism is

frequently criticized for overlooking how gender inequality intersects with other types of inequality, such as racism and social class inequality (Burgess-Proctor 2006; Renzetti 2013). This is true for some radical feminists but the most prominent present-day ones who study porn, such as Dines (2010) and Jensen (2007), cannot be accused of this. On the contrary, race/ethnicity is an integral part of their analyses. Furthermore, there is a group of anti-porn critical criminologists heavily influenced by radical feminism that also addresses some key micro-level variables such as *male peer support* (DeKeseredy and Olsson 2011; DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2013; Hall-Sanchez 2014). Originally developed by me 26 years ago (see DeKeseredy 1988), this concept is defined as the attachments to male peers and the resources that these men provide that encourage and legitimate woman abuse.

Pornography

We now live in a 'post-Playboy world' (Jensen 2007), one featuring the degradation, abuse and humiliation of women in a way never seen before in the mass media. Translated from Greek, 'pornography' means 'writing about prostitutes' (Katz 2006). Not to be confused with erotica, which is 'sexually suggestive or arousing material that is free of sexism, racism, and homophobia and is respectful of all human beings and animals portrayed' (Russell 1993: 3), pornography hurts on numerous levels. Women and men are represented in many different ways in pornography, but two things all pornographic images of and writings about them have in common is that females are characterized as subordinate to males and the primary role of actresses and models is the provision of sex to men (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2013; Funk 2006).

Pornography has noticeably changed over the past few decades due to the Internet. Much, if not most, of the adult pornography easily accessible on this electronic technology is, as Gail Dines (2010: xi) (among many others) defines it 'gonzo – that genre which is ... today one of the biggest money-makers for the industry – which depicts hard core, body-punishing sex in which women are demeaned and debased'. The intent here is not to moralize or to engage in 'Shock Theater'. Hence, explicit examples are not provided. But keep in mind that a common feature of new pornographic videos is painful anal penetration as well as brutal gang rape and men slapping or choking women or pulling their hair while they penetrate them orally, vaginally, and anally (DeKeseredy 2015; Dines and Jensen 2008).

Such images are part-and-parcel of today's adult Internet pornography but violent sexual images are available elsewhere. For instance, Bridges, Wosnitzer, Scharrer, Sun, and Liberman (2010) examined 304 scenes in 50 of the then most popular pornographic DVDs and found that nearly 90 contained physical aggression (mainly spanking, gagging and slapping) and roughly 50 per cent included verbal aggression, primarily name-calling. Males constituted most of the perpetrators and the targets of their physical and verbal aggression were 'overwhelmingly female'. Moreover, female targets often appeared to show pleasure or responded neutrally to male aggression. To make matters worse, as the porn industry grows and attracts an ever growing consumer base, it is generating even more violent materials featuring demeaning and dehumanizing behaviors never before seen (Brosi, Foubert, Bannon, and Yandell (2011). In fact, as Dines states in a 2010 interview with *The Guardian* Journalist Julie Bindel, pornographers 'are all looking for something more extreme, more shocking' (Bindel 2010: 4). Dines also told Bindel in 2010 that she recently interviewed a prominent pornographer. During that time, his latest film was playing in the background and it included a scene of a woman being anally penetrated while kneeling in a coffin.

In response to the common statement 'One can only wonder what is in store next', some critical criminologists, such as Atkinson and Rodgers (2014), point scholars and activists to the rapid emergence of the 'gorno' or 'gore porn' genre of movies, such as *Hostel* and *Saw*. Such films combine sadism, torture and porn, and they generate huge revenues for their producers and

distributors. That there are sequels to the above and similar movies is a powerful commentary on how violent pornography has seeped into mainstream popular culture.

It is not only anti-porn scholars and activists who assert that violent sex is now a normal part of the industry. Even porn producers admit that is the current status quo. Consider Rob Zicari (stage name Rob Black). He once owned Extreme Associates, a company that produced violent porn so graphic that many in the industry ostracized him. In 2009, after a six-year legal battle, he and his wife Janet Romano (who directed porn under the name Lizzey Borden) were sentenced by US federal authorities to one year and a day in prison for distributing obscene materials. Black recently granted an interview with journalist Richard Abowitz (2013) who asked him, 'If I understand, you are saying the things the industry marginalized you for filming before going to jail, mixing violence and sex, that approach is routinely filmed now?' Black answered:

Yes. Not only some: that is what the industry is today. The industry is Extreme Associates. The industry is what I did. By they pushed it even further. They pushed it to the point where you can't defend it. Because what I did was fantasy. I was able to preach it as a movie. It is a guy in a costume. Now you have companies that do it in the guise of BDSM. You put a girl on a dog chain and chain her to a wall and then keep her there for two days and take a cattle prod and electrocute her and do all this under the guise of a documentary. You are taking the element of the movie out. Now, you are doing torture. You are taking the fantasy out. Now all of the sudden it's let's do this under the guise of BDSM. (Black in Abowitz 2013: 1)

Much of today's pornography is also racist. Consider the following titles of videos uncovered during a Google search using the words 'racist porn' on 3 September 2014. My hunt produced 22,000,000 results in 0.40 seconds and two salient examples of the titles listed are *Racist Bitch is Forced to Have Sex with a Black Man* and *Coco gets Interracial Facial*. Not surprisingly, many of the racist videos offer stereotypical images of the 'sexually primitive black male stud' (Jensen 2007: 66). Men and women of color are certainly not the only people to be racially exploited by pornographers. There is much consumer demand for videos featuring Latinas and Asian women. Note these films featured on the widely used site Xvideos.com: *Latina Signs Up to Do a Rough Porn Tape With Some Mean White Guys*, *Sexy Latina Rides a Black Bull in Front of her Husband*, and *My So Asian*. Regardless of a woman's racial/ethnic background, her race makes her appear 'sluttier' than 'regular' white women featured in porn (Dines 2010).

Porn consumers can find almost anything that suits their fancy on the Internet, including teenage boys having sex with female senior citizens and men having sex with women who are seven months pregnant (Vargas-Cooper 2011). True, human beings have had or desired what many would consider to be debased or criminal types of sex for centuries, but Internet porn now allows people to 'flirt openly' with sexual acts that were always desired but were long considered taboo, deviant or against the law. And any group of people is 'ripe for the picking', including rural populations. Thousands of what DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2009) refer to as 'the false images of rural life' are found on countless cyber porn sites. Simply conduct a Google search using the words 'rural gonzo porn'. On 11 September 2012, DeKeseredy, Muzzatti, and Donnermeyer's (2014) hunt uncovered 108,000,000 results, with most of the videos being freely and easily accessible. Examples of the movie titles listed in their search are *Rural Discipline*, *Fuck Rural Milf*, *Raunchy Rural Granny Creamed*, *Rural SW Michigan Milfs*, *Rural Japanese Milfs*, *Rural Southern Wife Gets Ebony Cock*, and *Maturefarm*.

In sum, in a few decades, pornography moved from a lucrative underground business with ties to organized crime to a huge corporate-capitalist industry that operates openly (Jensen 2007). The swift growth of the Internet has also globalized access to pornographic materials on women

and other potentially vulnerable groups in converged online and offline environments. Such media can be diffused to millions of people in only seconds due to faster ways of disseminating digital media productions, and the Internet facilitates access for those seeking pornographic content, whether it is legally recognized or not. What used to be rather difficult to access and a secret phenomenon is now accessible for larger groups and has subsequently become a huge business with operations around the world.

Four years ago, there were over four million pornography sites on the Internet (Dines 2010), with as many as 10,000 added every week since then (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2013). All of this is extremely profitable. Pornography, too, is the 'quietest big business in the world' (Slayden 2010), and it is difficult to accurately determine the growth and value of this industry because its profits are not usually monitored through conventional business authorities (Maddison 2004). Still frequently cited in the extant literature, though, is the statement that worldwide pornography revenues from a variety of sources (for example, Internet, sex shops, videos rented in hotel rooms, and so on) are higher than US\$97 billion annually (Ropelato 2010). This is more than the combined revenues of Microsoft, Google, Amazon, eBay, Yahoo, Apple, Netflix, and Earthlink (DeKeseredy 2015; Zerbisias 2008: l. 3). More recent evidence of the growth of adult pornography is the emergence of amateur online 'tubes', such as YouPorn, XTube, and Porno Tube, all modeled after the widely used and popular YouTube. YouPorn had 15 million users after launching in 2006 and was growing at a monthly rate of 37.5 per cent (Mowlabocus 2010; Slayden 2010). What Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) stated 17 years ago still holds true today: rare are men who are not exposed to pornographic images. Even if people go out of their way to avoid porn, it frequently 'pops up' on people's computer monitors when they are working or 'surfing the web' for information that has nothing to do with sex.

How many people now view adult pornography regularly? To be expected, answers to this question vary depending on the definitions and methods used by researchers in the field. For example, a national representative sample survey of US adults found that 64 per cent of men and 42 per cent of women view pornography at least monthly (Digital Journal 2014). A recent Cosmpolitian.Com (2014) survey of 4,000 men and 4,000 women found that more than 30 per cent of the male and four per cent of female respondents watched porn daily and 71 per cent of men ages 18-24 watch it at least once a month, with 93 per cent of all the respondents identifying themselves as heterosexual. Consider, too, some researchers estimate that 70 per cent of Australian men consume porn online (Elsworthy 2014).

Turning now to youth, a national US study of undergraduate and graduate students ages 18 to 26 uncovered that 69 per cent of the male and 10 per cent of the female participants view pornography at least once a month (Carroll et al. 2008). The consequences of youth, as well as adults, watching gonzo are hardly trivial, which one of the key points of this article. Note the results of a recent qualitative, longitudinal study of young people's experiences with heterosexual anal sex. Conducted in three different sites in England, this project involved individual and group interviews with 130 men and women ages 16 to 18. The main reason respondents gave for having such sex was that men wanted to imitate what they saw in pornography and it often appeared, especially for women, 'painful, risky, and coercive' (Lewis 2014: 1).

Whether or not researchers ever obtain an absolutely accurate estimate of the percentage of people who consume adult pornography, most leading experts on the topic agree with Robert Jensen's contention that 'It's become almost as common as comic books were for you and me' (cited in Gillespie 2008: a. 3). In fact, turning again to youth, studies have shown that almost all boys in Northern Europe have at some point in their lives been exposed to pornography and 42 per cent of Internet users ages 10 to 17 in the US had viewed cyberporn (Hammaren and Johansson 2007; Mossige, Ainsaar, and Svedin 2007; Wolak, Mitchell, and Finkelhor 2007). These are not innocent users who accidentally come across sexually explicit images, voices and

texts. Nor are they constantly bombarded with such material. Rather, they make a conscious effort to locate and choose to consume and distribute pornography, and unfortunately some of the consumers will commit criminal acts, including violently attacking female partners (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2013).

Briefly, it should be mentioned that there are scholars who fundamentally disagree with my interpretation of porn and an unknown number of academics find some value in such media. For example, Weitzer asserts that 'pornography might contribute to the sex education of some or many viewers ... or it might lead to mutually pleasurable sexual experiences for male and female viewers alike' (Weitzer 2011: 667). Paasonen (2010) states that some variants of pornography challenge what Weitzer refers to as 'conventional power relations'. Similarly, some feminists embrace the post-modernist view that pornography can be subversive and liberatory (Williams 1989). Additionally, some sex-positive feminists contend that pornography is just as important to women as to men, and there is nothing inherently degrading to women about such media (McElroy 1995, Strossen 2000). Lehman is another example of a pro-porn scholar. He states:

If positions on pornography are staked out in the 'pro' or 'anti' fashion, I clearly come down on the side of pro-porn. I believe pornography can be complex, meaningful, and pleasurable and that it should be studied to enhance our understanding of sexuality and culture, not to fuel hysteria. (Lehman 2006a: 20)

Many younger female members of the general population also find value in pornography (Attwood 2005; Ciclitira 2002; Hald and Malamuth 2008). This is due, in large part, to their 'internalizing porn ideology, an ideology that often masquerades as advice on how to be hot, rebellious, and cool in order to attract (and hopefully keep) a man'. Related to this problem is that scores of young women, especially North American female undergraduates, accuse anti-porn feminists of 'denying them the free choice to embrace our hypersexualized porn culture' since as 'rising members of the next generation's elite', they see 'no limits or constraints on them as women' (Dines 2010: 100).

Pornography and woman abuse

The term woman abuse here means the physical, sexual and psychological abuse of a woman by her current or former male partner. There is an unsettling truth that even many feminist anti-violence activists and practitioners rarely discuss: pornography plays a key role in women's experiences of male violence in private places. As well, among the large, international group of woman abuse scholars, very few of them research and theorize the connection between porn and intimate adult violence. In the words of Shope, '[t]he paucity of research on the effects of pornography on battered women is disturbing in light of the research findings linking pornography to sexually aggressive behavior, especially among angered men' (Shope 2004: 66). However, things are slowly changing in the social scientific community.

The bulk of early studies were not conducted by critical criminologists, employed experimental designs in laboratory settings, and uncovered that exposure to more graphic and violent images changed people's attitudes toward women and rape (for example, Briere and Malamuth 1983; Linz 1989). Until the 1990s, there was little information on the extent to which graphic sexual imagery affects men's aggressive or violent behavior outside the lab setting. Nonetheless, there were some attempts at imaginative alternative methodology. Feminist journalism scholar Robert Jensen (1995, 1996), for example, used personal histories and narrative accounts of men who used porn as a masturbatory aid, some of whom were sex offenders. In another early attempt to look at 'real world' effects, Demare, Lips and Briere (1993) tied the use of sexually violent pornography to a self-reported likelihood of committing rape or using sexual force. Still,

this only measures a self-reported proclivity, which may or may not be related to actual behavior.

Early 'real world' studies

Diana Russell (1982, 1990) sparked a movement to conduct feminist surveys of the relationship between porn consumption and violence against women. She is the first scholar to develop a large-scale, representative sample survey that included this question: 'Have you ever been upset by anyone trying to get you to do what they'd seen in pornographic pictures, movies or books?' Ten per cent of the 930 women in San Francisco sample answered 'yes' and subsequent Canadian studies that used the same question yielded percentages of 'yes' responses ranging from 8.4 to 24.0 per cent (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998; Harmon and Check 1989; Senn 1993). Moreover, 6.8 per cent of the 1,307 men in DeKeseredy and Schwartz's national representative sample of Canadian college men admitted that they had upset their dating partners by trying to get them to imitate porn.

Some feminist studies show that women who had suffered other types of victimization were also likely to report that they experienced this behavior as abusive. Russell (1990), for example, found that for the women in her sample who were married and had been raped by their husband, the proportion that answered the above question in her survey rose to 24 per cent. Harmon and Check (1989) discovered that women who had been physically abused were three times more likely to be have been upset by being asked to imitate pornography (10.4 per cent) than women who had not been physically abused (3.6 per cent). Additionally, DeKeseredy and Schwartz's (1998) found a significant relationship between being upset by men's attempts to imitate pornographic scenes and sexual victimization. Of those who were sexually abused, 22.3 per cent had also been upset by attempts to get them to imitate pornographic scenarios. Only 5.8 per cent of the women who were not victimized reported being upset by pornography. These statistics are comparable to those obtained by Itzin and Sweet's (1992) report of the British Cosmopolitan Survey.

Again, fully 6.8 per cent of the men in DeKeseredy and Schwartz's study reported that they upset their dating partners by getting them to imitate pornography. The men were more likely to admit to being forcible sexual victimizers if they also admitted to upsetting a woman this way. Almost four times as many upsetters (9.3 per cent) as nonupsetters (2.4 per cent) also admitted to committing a forcible sexual victimization after high school.

Of DeKeseredy and Schwartz's female respondents who reported being physically abused in a dating relationship, 15.4 per cent revealed being upset by pornography. Only 4.5 per cent of those who were not physically victimized reported being upset. One third of all men in their sample who admitted to upsetting a woman with requests to imitate pornography also admitted to physically abusing a woman after high school. Of those who did not admit to upsetting a woman, 17.2 per cent admitted to physical abuse.

Three other relevant studies are worth mentioning here. Bergen (1996) asked a somewhat different question than Russell's (1990) but found that about one third of the marital rape survivors in her sample had husbands who viewed pornography and forced them to act out what they had seen. Sommers and Check (1987) found that women who were in battered women shelters were considerably more likely to report being made upset in this manner than mature undergraduates were. Though different questions were used, Cramer and McFarlane (1994) uncovered support for the finding that battered women have a special problem. In studying battered women who were filing criminal charges against their husbands, they found that 40 per cent of husbands used pornography, and that the use of these materials was significantly associated with the participants being asked or forced to participate in violent acts.

These early feminist studies are commended for extending porn research beyond the artificial realm of the lab, and they produced important results for the era in which they were done. Even so, a significant pitfall in all social scientific work of this kind is that the researcher has no control over the nature of the sexually explicit material, or the definition being applied by the respondent. There is no way an investigator can apply a single definition to pornography or control in any way an individual woman's or man's definition of pornography. This is a perennial problem in pornography research: pornography is commonly conflated into one type and, at the time the above studies were conducted, there was very little written on what McClintock (1995: 115) calls 'porn's kaleidoscopic variorum', or what Burstyn (1987: 163) refers to as the 'large and various discourse we call, all inclusively pornography'. Today, however, there are scholarly books and articles that examine variations in erotica and pornography (for example, Attwood 2010; Lehman 2006b; McNair 2002).

The lack of definitional specificity places the researcher at the mercy of the classifications used by the respondent. Nonetheless, the post-laboratory studies reviewed here were among the first 'real world' projects to reveal that pornography is correlated with sexual and physical violence in adult intimate heterosexual relationships.

Recent research

The Internet as we know it today did not exist when Russell and those who followed in her footsteps conducted their research. Furthermore, pornography did not have anywhere near the degrees of racism and violence that now exist and are destined to increase (Bridges and Anton 2013). Furthermore, it is unclear whether the men who watch contemporary porn are more likely to abuse current or former intimate partners than men who consumed violent sexual materials before the advent of the Internet. Even so, there is ample evidence showing that porn is a key risk factor associated with a myriad of abusive experiences in the lives of many adult and young women (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2013; Shope 2004).

Contemporary critical criminologists were among the first to reveal that most boys who first view pornography do so at the age of 11 (DeKeseredy 2015, Dines 2010) and many grow up to victimize their current and former intimate female partners. Yet a growing body of international research shows that some pre-adolescent, adolescent and high school boys who consume porn actually commit sexual offences and/or engage in sexual harassment at those stages in their lives (Bonino, Ciairano, Rabaglietti, and Cattellino 2006; Burton, Leibowitz, and Howard 2010; Hunter, Figueredo, and Malamuth 2010; Kjellgren, Priebe, Svedin, and Langstrom 2010), a finding not uncovered by those who publicly identify themselves as progressive criminologists but useful all the same. Note, too, that an Italian feminist survey of high school students found that females exposed to psychological violence committed by family members and to sexual violence by any type of perpetrator were significantly more likely to watch pornography, especially violent porn, than females who were not exposed to such abuse (Romito and Beltramini 2011). Research done across the globe, then, support Bridges and Anton's (2013) claim that 'exposure to pornography is particularly problematic for youth because they often lack healthy sexual relationships that counterbalance the degrading and depersonalizing images of sex often depicted in pornography' (Bridges and Anton 2013: 194).

'Real world' recent critical criminological research on adults' experiences with pornography use and its violent consequences is in short supply. The bulk of the empirical work done so far involved feminist scholars gathering data from rape crisis center workers who conducted face-to-face and phone interviews with sexual and physical assault survivors, and from abused women who sought support from battered women's services (Bergen and Bogle 2000; Shope 2004; Simmons, Lehmann, and Collier-Tennison 2008). Collectively, this research reveals a strong association between men's porn consumption and female victimization. For example,

Shope found that abuser use of porn doubled the risk of a physically assaulted woman being sexually assaulted.

More recently, using face-to-face interviews with 43 rural southeast Ohio women who were abused during the period while they wanted to or were trying to end a relationship with a husband or live-in partner, or where such a relationship had already ended, DeKeseredy and colleagues (see DeKeseredy and Joseph 2006; DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2009; DeKeseredy, Schwartz, Fagen, and Hall 2006) found that 65 per cent of these women's estranged partners viewed pornography and 30 per cent of the sample stated that porn was involved in their sexual abuse. As described in greater length in a subsequent section of this paper, Hall-Sanchez's (2013, 2014) exploratory, qualitative, back-talk study strongly suggests that male pornography consumption continues to be connected to rural Ohio men's abusive behavior.

The electronic and violent pornification of women and girls takes many different shapes and forms. One relatively new means is the use of 'revenge porn' web sites and blogs. It is estimated that there are now more than 2,000 such sites and the bulk of the perpetrators are male (Hart 2014). Revenge porn images and videos are made by men with the consent of the women they were intimately involved with, but then distributed online without their consent typically following the termination of a relationship (Salter and Crofts 2014). It is difficult to accurately determine the extent of this problem, but the damage is irreparable given that anything that is posted in cyberspace never really goes away. The same thing can be said about 'sexting' and many, if not most, of the targets are female adolescents (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2013). This involves sharing compromising photos, videos or written information with other people via texts or other electronic media (Klein 2012).

Sexting is form of 'pornographic cyberbullying' and it causes many physical and psychological problems, including suicide as was the case with a young Canadian girl named Rehtaeh Parsons. She was raped by four teenage boys in November 2011 and one of them took a picture of the atrocity and electronically distributed it among her school and community. She died on 17 April 2013 from suicide and this case motivated the Canadian province of Nova Scotia to proclaim the Cyber-Safety Act on 6 August 2013.

Despite porn being heavily involved in the abuse of many women and girls, the research community has not kept pace with this burgeoning problem. New directions in critical criminological research and theory are definitely needed and it is to some suggestions that I now turn.

New directions in research and theory

Given the paucity of research on pornography and violence against women, it is not difficult to suggest new avenues of inquiry, some of which involve going 'back to the future'. For instance, there has yet to be another national representative sample victimization survey of adult women that incorporates questions about their current and former male partners' porn consumption. Smaller-scale representative sample surveys are also conspicuously absent. It is true that 'population surveys, in which random samples of women are interviewed about their experiences of violence using detailed behaviorally specific questions, yield more valid and reliable estimates of the prevalence of these phenomena in the population' (Jacquier, Johnson, and Fisher 2011: 26). Self-report surveys of men, too, are much needed because they yield better data on the factors that motivate men to use porn and harm women (DeKeseredy and Rennison 2013). The lack of survey research on the linkage between porn and both men's and women's experiences with intimate violence is somewhat surprising because there is a sizeable portion of surveys that examine other risk factors associated with woman abuse (for example, separation/divorce, income, male peer support, and so on).

Needless to say, more qualitative studies of men and women are necessary as well. Replicating or slightly revising the personal history and narrative account research done by Jensen (1995, 1996) would be fruitful. In fact, a variety of qualitative methods enhance a critical criminological understanding of how porn is related to woman abuse and some new techniques seem promising. One method in particular – back-talk interviews – at first appears innovative but is rooted in African-American slavery history (Collins 2000; Hall-Sanchez 2014). It meant ‘speaking as an equal to an authority figure. It meant daring to disagree and sometimes it just meant having an opinion’ (hooks 1989: 5). Talking back also involved bearing witness, ‘to bring forth, to claim and proclaim oneself as an intrinsic part of the world’ (Collins 2000: 2). In this current era, back-talk interviews are becoming known as useful means of collecting rich contextual data. Typically used in feminist community-based studies, researchers ‘go back’ to the community to present their results as an attempt to get more feedback from a sample of community members. As Hall-Sanchez, a feminist who recently used this approach puts it, in back-talk studies:

[R]esearchers ‘go back’ to communities, presenting their results to obtain reactions and additional questions/concerns/suggestions for future research. These discussions generate rich qualitative interactive data to supplement a previous or on-going study or as new data to be further analyzed on its own (Wilkinson 1998). Back-talk interviews are empowering to participants, providing an opportunity to exercise a greater role in research processes. Researchers can also reasonably disseminate sensitive issues to potentially diverse and highly politicized audiences, contributing to a more reflexive and socially responsible research culture (Frisina 2006). (Hall-Sanchez 2014: 5)

To date, Hall-Sanchez (2014) is the first feminist criminologist to use this method in a rural woman abuse study. Ten years after DeKeseredy and his colleagues completed their rural Ohio project, she presented their results to a purposive sample of 12 women. Although she did not specifically ask about the influence of pornography, and, a close examination of her interview data with my assistance (see DeKeseredy and Hall-Sanchez 2014) revealed that it was a recurring topic mentioned by some women during discussions about the ways in which their ex-partners’ male peers contributed to their abusive conduct. Dana, for example, said, ‘He always had a fantasy of doing a threesome and talked me into it. Porn was a big factor. He wasn’t always interested in me *per se*. It seemed like it was always with others’. Another respondent, Gina, recalls:

I got called stupid a lot you know and even if it was joking around, you know, it became serious. ‘Oh you’re stupid’ and then it just became name-calling ... ‘Oh, you’re a fuckin retard’. You know it just got worse and like ... then it was like other things he encouraged me to do. Um, him and his friend watched a lot of porn and encouraged me and his friend’s wife to make out so it was like things that he wanted that he was trying to get me to do for his own pleasure, you know. It was like, even if I felt uncomfortable, you know, just drink a little bit more and it will be ok, you know.

More information on Hall-Sanchez’s porn data is provided in another paper (DeKeseredy and Hall-Sanchez 2014). Nevertheless, it is important to note here that what makes her work unique is not only her back-talk methodology and the pornography data she elicited but also that she helped close a major gap in rural patriarchal male peer support research. Oddly enough, although we know that many women murdered by their current and former male partners are killed with guns and that rural areas have higher rates of gun ownership than urban and metropolitan places (Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014; Wendt 2009), male peer support researchers such as DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2009) have paid little attention to hunting-related issues. Since Hall-Sanchez has teamed up with me to do empirical work on the

relationship between porn and violence in rural women's lives, it is logical to assume that her novel research will influence me and other male peer support researchers to do so in the near future.

Pornography is not solely heterosexual in nature and there is a growing body of research on violence in same sex relationships (Bake 2013; Burger 1995; Ristock 2011; Williams 2004). Is pornography a powerful correlate of violence in same sex relationships? Thus far, there are no reliable answers to this question, which is not surprising since much of criminology is heteronormative (Peterson and Panfil 2014). Queer criminology is a new variant of critical criminology and perhaps some greatly needed empirical and theoretical work will be generated by scholars in this field. This is not to say, however, that examining the relationship between porn and violence in LGBT communities should be ghettoized. Critical criminologists of all walks of life potentially have something to say about this issue.

Unfortunately, critical criminological theoretical developments have not kept pace with the empirical literature on the relationship between pornography and woman abuse. Even leading contemporary feminist experts, such as Dines (2010), pay scant attention to theorizing this problem. This is not to say, however, that her work and those of others who share her analysis (for example, Jensen 2007) is completely a-theoretical because it is obviously heavily influenced by radical feminism. Still, the time is now for critical criminological offerings that link broader macro-level forces with micro-level determinants. It is not enough to assert that porn and its consequences are functions of capitalism, racism and patriarchy. How do these problems shape individual behavior and group dynamics? The male peer support theories crafted by DeKeseredy and Olsson (2011) and DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2013) attempt to answer this question. There has never been a study specifically designed to test their perspectives but preliminary evidence provided by DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2013) strongly suggests that the correlation between Internet pornography, male peer support and woman abuse is an emerging problem, one that will only get worse in the near future. Still, considerably more research is necessary and so are actual tests of male peer support models to conclusively determine if this is actually the case.

As a variant of critical criminology, cultural criminology pays much attention to how media images shape public perceptions of social problems, 'thereby reflecting and recreating the unequal social and economic relations that are the hallmark of advanced capitalism' (Muzzatti 2012: 141). What about gender relations and what about porn? Despite offering rich insights into media dynamics and popular culture, cultural criminologists have yet to examine the issues raised in this paper. Yet they are fully capable of doing so and DeKeseredy, Muzzatti, and Donnermeyer's (2014) analysis of the horrification/pornification of rural culture reveals that a rich understanding of highly degrading and grossly distorted media representations of sexuality and male-to-female violence can be obtained by merging cultural criminology's concerns with those of feminists. Hopefully, one of cultural criminology's next steps is to make porn one its central topics of inquiry.

Much critical theoretical food for thought can also be drawn from other types of critical criminologists. For example, though too detailed and complex to summarize in a few sentences, Atkinson and Rodgers' (2014) analysis of Internet pornography and violent video games reveals much utility in revisiting Elias's (1939) 'civilising process theory'. They assert that these technologies:

... provide alluring and experimental landscapes. In these spaces the outward veneer of our culture as intrinsically 'civil' or pacified is seen also to reveal anti-social forms of real and simulated conduct. Such experiences, available through certain strands of gaming and extreme pornography, necessitate a deepened criminological sensibility prepared to discuss physical and imagined forms of

harm as they are enacted within - or bound up with - online and game spaces.
(Atkinson and Rodgers 2014: 2)

Although he does not discuss violence, critical criminologist Simon Winlow (2014) proposes another way of thinking about porn. Guided by Badiou (2009, 2012), a French philosopher heavily influenced by Althusserian Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis, he states that porn consumption:

... reflects a historic drive towards an *atonal* world (Badiou 2009) that lacks the structuring logic of a master signifier capable of imposing meaning on a world of perpetual flux and imponderable diversity. In the sociological sense, it functions as an outcome of selfish individualism: a withdrawal into the cocoon of subjectivity, free from the threats and obligations that pertain to a genuine intersubjective encounter. Contemporary postmodern sexuality is then an increasingly selfish and solitary activity. (Winlow 2014:1968)

Hopefully, the critical criminological theories reviewed here will not be the last of their kind and new ones will soon be crafted. Pornography and violence against women continue to affect the social world in a myriad of ways and in numbers that would 'numb the mind of Einstein' (Lewis cited in Vallee 2007). Hence, the relationship between these two social problems is strong and must be reckoned with empirically and theoretically. It is essential to keep on doing new work in the area because, in the words of Atkinson and Rodgers (2014: 22), new critical avenues of exploration make us 'better equipped to understand' the 'shifts in the connection between ourselves, technologies, corporate interests and social/gender power relations'.

Conclusion

Critical criminological understandings of contemporary porn and its relationship to woman abuse are in a state of infancy and substantially more scholarly and political contributions are needed. Outlined in this paper is a blueprint for moving forward. The recommendations are not exhaustive but are worth pursuing. Yet the ultimate goal is to promote social change. Critical criminology must be distinguished from other criminological discourses by its practice. If the advances suggested in this paper and elsewhere are to take root and assist in the formation of societies determined to curb porn, then it rests with critical criminologists to advance their models for change within practical political settings (Currie, DeKeseredy and MacLean 1990).


To be sure, as Gail Dines observes, the pornography industry is an 'economic juggernaut' and 'we are so steeped in the pornographic mindset that it is difficult to imagine what a world without porn would look like' (Dines 2010: 163). Still, due in large part to the efforts of progressive anti-porn activists and scholars, some radical changes are occurring. For example, in the winter of 2013, Iceland drafted legislation limiting Internet access to violent porn. Iceland already has legislation forbidding the printing and distribution of porn but it does not cover the Internet. The porn industry, too, may contribute to its own collapse. Possibly the producers of violent and racist sexual media might cross a line that results in outraging most people and politicians around the globe, leading to strict regulation and highly punitive responses (Bridges and Jensen 2011). Regardless of what progressive changes happen and when they transpire, critical criminologists involved in the anti-porn movement still 'have a lot of work to do' (Jensen 2007: 184).

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¹ Revised version of a plenary address given at the *National Deviancy Conference*, 25-26 June 2014, at Teesside University, Middlesbrough, UK. I thank Rowland Atkinson, Kerry Carrington, John Foubert, Rus Funk, Steve Hall, Barbara Hart, James Ptacek, Martin Schwartz, Simon Winlow and the anonymous reviewers for their comments and assistance.

Please cite this article as:

DeKeseredy WS (2015) Critical criminological understandings of adult pornography and woman abuse: New progressive directions in research and theory. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 4(4):4-21. DOI: 10.5204/ijcsd.v3i2.184.

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