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Article in *Violence Against Women* · May 2016

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DOI: 10.1177/1077801216648795

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Abstract

Many rural parts of the United States are now “pornified.” There is growing quantitative evidence revealing that rural women are at higher risk of being victimized by intimate violence than their urban and suburban counterparts. In-depth interviews with 55 rural southeast Ohio women who wanted to leave, were trying to leave, or were in the process of leaving, or who have left their male marital/cohabiting partners reveal that pornography is a major component of the problem of rural woman abuse. The main objective of this article is twofold: (a) to present the results of our qualitative study, and (b) to suggest future directions in theoretical and empirical work.

Keywords

pornography, rural, violence, gender, separation/divorce

Violence against women research has certainly mushroomed over the past 40 years. One of the most powerful statements on the proliferation of theoretical, empirical, and policy work in the field is the fact that the peer-reviewed journal *Violence Against Women* is published 14 times a year. As well, articles on a broad range of harms experienced by young and adult women in private places and elsewhere are routinely included in other leading social scientific periodicals, such as *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, and *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*. Indeed, we now know much more than ever before about the extent, distribution, key sources,

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and the physical and psychological outcomes of male-to-female violence in dating, marriage/cohabitation, and during and after separation/divorce. Then again, there is still much we do not know about some emerging issues. One, in particular, is the role of pornography. As Shope (2004) observes, "The 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, particularly among angered men" (p. 66). Furthermore, the limited research done so far on the relationship between sexually explicit media and violence against women primarily involved gathering data from urban women (DeKeseredy, 2015a), despite the fact that, like their urban and suburban counterparts, rural communities are riddled with pornography, and thousands of porn videos found on the Internet feature violent, degrading images of rural people (DeKeseredy, Muzzatti, & Donnermeyer, 2014). Related to this problem is that rural women are at higher risk of experiencing male intimate violence than women living in more densely populated areas (Rennison, DeKeseredy, & Dragiewicz, 2012, 2013).

Preliminary evidence strongly suggests that the linkage between male pornography consumption and violence against women is a major problem in rural communities (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009; Hall-Sanchez, 2014). The main objective of this article is to build on previous relevant rural research by presenting the results of in-depth interviews with 55 rural southeast Ohio women. New directions in theoretical and empirical work are also suggested.

Definition of Pornography

The current era features the degradation, abuse, and humiliation of women never before seen in the mass media. We are not referring to 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, p. 3). Rather, our conceptualization of porn focuses squarely on what the pornography industry coins as "gonzo." Such images and writings are the most profitable in the industry and have two primary things in common. First, females are characterized as subordinate to men and the main role of actresses and models is the provision of sex to men. Second, in the words of Dines (2010), gonzo "depicts hard core, body-punishing sex in which women are demeaned and debased" (p. xi). These images are not rare. Actually, a routine feature of contemporary 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, 2015b).

The consequences of viewing gonzo are hardly trivial. Note the results of a recent qualitative, longitudinal study of young people's experiences with heterosexual anal sex. Conducted at three different sites in England, this project involved individual and group interviews with 130 men and women aged 16-18. 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, p. 1).

Some claim that the above declarations are sketchy characterizations of today's pornography. One example is Weitzer (2011), who contends that the aforementioned

definition and similar ones “present an extremely biased picture of pornography that stands in stark contrast to sound scholarly research” (p. 673). Again, we are not confusing erotica with pornography and there is “sound scholarly research” supporting our perspective. Consider that Bridges, Wosnitzer, Scharrer, Sun, and Liberman (2010) studied 304 scenes in 50 of the then most popular pornographic DVDs and found that nearly 90% of them feature physical aggression (mainly spanking, gagging, and slapping) and roughly 50% include verbal aggression, primarily name-calling. Most of the perpetrators are men, and women were “overwhelmingly” the targets of physical and verbal aggression.

It is not only antiporn scholars and activists who assert that violent sex is now a normal part of the industry. Even porn producers publicly admit that it is the status quo (Abowitz, 2013; DeKeseredy, 2015a ; Dines, 2010). As well, racism is a central element of some of today’s pornography. Consider the following titles of videos uncovered by DeKeseredy (2015a) during a Google search using the words “racist porn” on September 3, 2014. His hunt generated 22,000,000 results in 0.40 s and one salient example of the titles listed is *Racist Bitch Is Forced to Have Sex With a Black Man*. Actually, many of the racist videos offer stereotypical images of the “sexually primitive black male stud” (Jensen, 2007, p. 66). Certainly, men and women of color are not the only people to be racially exploited by the porn industry. Keep in mind these films featured on the widely used site Xvideos.com: *Sexy Latina Rides a Black Bull in Front of Her Husband* and *My So Asian*.

Porn consumers can find practically anything they desire on the Internet. In fact, almost every group of people appears in today’s gonzo. For instance, on September 11, 2012, DeKeseredy et al. (2014) conducted a Google search using the words “rural gonzo porn” and uncovered 108,000,000 results, with most of the videos being freely and easily accessible. Another Google search DeKeseredy et al. conducted on the same day using the words “farm girl porn” generated 16,000,000 results.

Pornography transcends videos, pictures, and adult novels. On top of living in a “post-*Playboy* world” (Jensen, 2007), we also exist in a “striptease culture” (McNair, 2002). The sexual objectification and degradation of women exists in a wide range of contexts, including strip bars, live sex shows, and even advertising. McNair (2002) correctly points out on the back cover of his book that “sex and sexual imagery now permeate every aspect of culture.” Unfortunately, much, if not most, of what he is referring to is harmful and, in many cases, contributes to much pain and suffering, including that uncovered by our study. It supports earlier research showing a strong association between violence against women and perpetrators’ involvement in the sex industry outside of the realm of pornographic media (Simmons, Lehmann, & Collier-Tenison, 2008).

All told, what used to be difficult to obtain and a secret phenomenon is now accessible for larger groups and is a huge industry with operations around the world. The Internet not only facilitates access to previously inaccessible materials but also normalizes violent sexual practices and racism. Even so, it is essential not to conflate pornography into one type and researchers need to be sensitive to what McClintock (1993) calls “porn’s kaleidoscopic variorum” (p. 115), or what Burstyn (1987) refers

to as the “large and various discourse we call, all inclusively, pornography” (p. 163). To be sure, there are racist, sexist, and “hard core” variants of pornography that are not gonzo in style. One major example is what is referred to in the pornography industry as a “feature,” which resembles a Hollywood movie (Bridges & Jensen, 2011). Still, gonzo has “come to dominate the Internet” (Dines, 2010, p. xiii).

Definition of Violence Against Women

One thing that sets this article apart from many others is that we do not use the term *intimate partner violence* because, while deemed by many scholars, practitioners, and activists to be more inclusive than terms such as *woman abuse* and *violence against women*, it is highly problematic for two major reasons. First, regardless of why people use this or other gender-neutral terms (e.g., domestic violence), such language suggests that violence results from ordinary, everyday social interactions in the family or other intimate relationships that have gone wrong and that women are just as responsible for the problem as men (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013; Ellis, 1987; Meloy & Miller, 2011). During the fall of 2014, it was not uncommon to hear people publicly state that professional football player Ray Rice was not entirely to blame for delivering an extremely brutal punch to his fiancée’s face. This claim was buttressed by her public defense of his violent behavior. Using the Baltimore Raven’s Twitter account on May 23, 2014, she said that “she deeply regrets the role that she played that night in the incident.”

Many people who use gender-neutral definitions also assert that women are as violent as men. Despite strong empirical support to the contrary, claims that violence is gender-neutral are increasingly becoming “common sense” in North America (Dragiewicz & DeKeseredy, 2012; Minaker & Snider, 2006). An enormous audience exists for whom Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1994) refer to as “people without data,” whose declarations that women are as violent as men are constantly disseminated by the mass media. It is beyond the scope of this article to review the large empirical literature refuting this assertion¹; nevertheless, this body of knowledge demonstrates, without a doubt, that women are the primary targets of intimate violence in adult and adolescent heterosexual relationships. Thus, the term *violence against women* is offered here.

The definition utilized for the purpose of this study is also broad and includes a wide range of highly injurious behaviors. Women who are the victims of intimate violence are rarely victimized by only physical or sexual assault. Rather, they generally suffer from a variety of male behaviors that include these harms, as well as psychological abuse, economic blackmail, or abuse such as denying the woman money even if she earns a wage, harm to animals and possessions to which she has an attachment, or stalking behavior. For example, of the 43 women who participated in the first stage of the study featured in this article, most (80%) of the women were victimized by two or more of these forms of nonsexual abuse. Also, only a few of the respondents experienced just one of the following types of sexual assault developed by Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski (1987)²:

Sexual Contact includes sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting) arising from menacing verbal pressure, misuse of authority, threats of harm, or actual physical force.

Sexual Coercion includes unwanted sexual intercourse arising from the use of menacing verbal pressure or the misuse of authority.

Attempted rape includes attempted unwanted sexual intercourse arising from the use of or threats of force, or the use of drugs or alcohol.

Rape includes unwanted sexual intercourse arising from the use of or threats of force and other unwanted sex acts (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than the penis) arising from the use of or threat of force, or the use of drugs or alcohol. (p. 166)

Most of the women who participated in this study said that the men who abused them viewed pornography. In addition, a sizable portion of interviewees reported it to be involved in sexually abusive events they experienced. This is more evidence for DeKeseredy et al.'s (2014) claim that the heartland is "pornified" (Paul, 2005).

Method

The study consists of two parts. The first involved secondary analysis of semistructured interview data gleaned during early March 2003 until April 2004 from 43 rural southeast Ohio women who participated in DeKeseredy and colleagues' separation/divorce sexual assault study (see DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009; DeKeseredy, Schwartz, Fagen, & Hall, 2006), hereinafter referred to as ROSA. Because the methods used by the original research team are presented in the above two sources, they are only briefly described here. It is necessary to emphasize, though, that studying any type of woman abuse in rural communities is difficult because they are often characterized by social and geographic isolation, limited job opportunities, lack of social services, absence of public transportation, and the existence of a powerful "ol' boys network" (Carrington, Donnermeyer, & DeKeseredy, 2014; Logan, Stevenson, Evans, & Leukefeld, 2004; Rennison et al., 2013; Websdale, 1998). These barriers, as well as community norms prohibiting women from publicly talking about their experiences and seeking social support (Brownridge, 2009; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2008; Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014), prevent many women from revealing their experiences to researchers. Still, some of these methodological obstacles were minimized in the ROSA study and in Stage 2 of the research.

Techniques like those used by Bowker (1983) and Logan, Cole, Shannon, and Walker (2006) in other parts of the United States generated the sample. For example, the research team placed an advertisement once a week during two different 6-week periods in a free newspaper throughout Athens County, Ohio. Plus, posters about the study were pinned up in public places such as courthouses and were given to practitioners who come into contact with abused women. In addition,

- Two local newspapers gave considerable coverage to the project.
- Ohio University sent out a press release to newspapers and other Ohio-based media.
- Three local radio stations and Ohio University's television station carried public service announcements about the study.
- The director of a local shelter and the principal investigator appeared on a local television news show to discuss the project and broader issues related to it.
- The Ohio Domestic Violence Network and other agencies told interested parties (e.g., rural shelter workers) about the study and helped recruit participants.
- Local shelter staff, a police department social worker, employees of the county sheriff's department, Planned Parenthood, Women's Center staff at a local 2-year college, and employees of the local Sexual Assault Survivor Advocate Program informed possible respondents about the study.
- Criminologist Judith Grant, then at Ohio University, told women who participated in her addiction study about the research.
- Index-like cards with the information provided in the recruiting poster were routinely placed on top of newspaper boxes, both inside stores and on sidewalks in Athens, Ohio.

Two female research assistants carried cellular phones 24 hrs a day to receive calls from women interested in participating in the study. Callers were told the purpose of the study and were then asked a series of screening questions to determine their eligibility to be interviewed. The main criteria were being 18 years of age or older and having ever had any type of unwanted sexual experience when they wanted to end, were trying to end, or after they had ended a relationship with a husband or live-in male partner. Our definition of separation/divorce assault is distinct from most previous studies on the topic because they assume couples must live apart to be separated or divorced.³ Hence, the large number of beatings, rapes, and other attacks that occur when a woman emotionally exits a relationship but remains in the home,⁴ decides to leave her partner, or when she makes an unsuccessful escape from him are not uncovered (DeKeseredy & Rennison, 2013). Further contributing to underreporting is that a woman's decision to leave a relationship may be long and complex (Goetting, 1999). She may feel simultaneously oppressed and trapped by an inability to leave a relationship right now. This may be for financial or economic reasons, or because she was unable to make adequate arrangements to care for her children, or for a variety of other reasons (Davies, 2011; Renzetti, 2011). Consequently, some scholars do not view separation and divorce as purely functions of proximity because exiting a relationship generally takes place over time (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009; Mahoney, 1991; Sev'er, 2002).

If they met the selection criteria, the women were then invited to a semistructured face-to-face interview at a time and place of their choosing, and they were paid US\$25.00 for their time. They were also given US\$7.75 for travel expenses and an index card listing the locations and phone numbers of local support services for survivors. Index or palm cards are much safer than sheets because they minimize the likelihood of abusive ex-partners and others (e.g., ex-partners' male friends) discovering that respondents

shared their abusive experiences with others. Interviewees were also invited to contact the research team at a later time if they had questions and concerns.

The semistructured interview schedule includes general background questions and probed respondents about their perceptions of safety, social network, unwanted sexual experiences, consequences of unwanted separation/divorce assault, experiences with social support providers, policy recommendations, and their plans for the future. Only this question about pornography was asked: "Did the man (or men) who tried and/or made you have unwanted sex when you wanted to leave or after you left him ever make you look at pornography?"

The second stage of the study was done in 2013 and involved back-talk interviews with 12 women harmed by separation/divorce sexual assault and from rural Ohio towns similar to the ROSA study sites. Though the back-talk interview schedule did not include specific questions about pornography, most of the participants reported experiences with various types of it, mirroring several themes uncovered in the ROSA study. The back-talk approach is a recent development in qualitative social sciences (Hall-Sanchez, 2013). Yet, "back-talk" as a display of resistance or form of opposition in narrative has deep roots in African American history (Collins, 2000). It meant "speaking as equal to an authority figure . . . daring to disagree and sometimes it just meant having an opinion" (hooks, 1989, p. 5). As a form of testimony, it meant to "bear witness, to bring forth, to claim and proclaim oneself as an intrinsic part of the world" (Collins, 2000, p. 2). Therefore, the roots of "talking back" date back prior to the era of slavery, yet the use (and validation) of this participatory action component in qualitative research is relatively new.

Back-talk as an independent methodology is beginning to take shape as a recognized methodological tool to obtain new and original data. Back-talk interviews are frequently used in community-based research where researchers "go back" to communities, presenting their results to glean reactions and additional question/concerns/suggestions for future research (Hall-Sanchez, 2014). These discussions generate rich qualitative interactive data to supplement a previous or ongoing study or as new data to be further analyzed on their own (Wilkinson, 1998). Back-talk interviews empower participants, providing opportunities to exercise a greater role in the research processes. Scholars can also responsibly disseminate sensitive issues to potentially diverse and highly politicized audiences, contributing to a more reflexive and socially responsible research culture (Frisina, 2006; Hall-Sanchez, 2013).

On top of collecting supplementary data to update the findings uncovered by the ROSA project, Stage 2 provided a safe space for women to critically "talk back" to the ROSA study findings. The results (including key themes) were presented to the 12 participants, and they were asked to comment based on their own experiences. The sample was recruited using techniques employed in the ROSA study.⁵ Most of the interviews were conducted in a conference room at a local women's shelter ($n = 4$), even though only one woman from the sample had ever received services there. Three interviews were held in a university office and one took place in a participant's home. The shortest interview was more than 1 hr in length and the longest spanned more than 4 hr.

A large qualitative research literature features the term *theoretical saturation* and many articles suggest that purposive sample size be based on this criterion. Yet, until recently, there were “no published guidelines or tests of adequacy for estimating the sample size required to reach saturation” (Morse, 1995, p. 147). Now, sound empirical work demonstrates that data saturation may occur by the time researchers have analyzed 12 interviews. Consistent with West African qualitative reproductive health research done by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), after carefully reading 12 transcripts, new themes rarely emerged during the data analysis process. Since our back-talk sample was fairly homogeneous due to shared experiences and residence, as Guest et al. discovered, “If the goal is to describe a shared perception, belief, or behavior among a relatively homogenous group, then a sample of twelve will likely be sufficient” (p. 76).

Findings

DeKeseredy and his colleagues’ rural study was the first of its kind, but it was unclear then whether rural women in the United States are at higher risk of separation/divorce sexual assault than their urban and suburban counterparts. Using 1992-2009 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data to estimate the percentage of separation/divorce sexual assault in urban, suburban, and rural places, Rennison et al. (2012) empirically confirm that this is the case. In addition, taking into account sexual assault as well as other harms, using NCVS data, Rennison et al. (2013) show that rural separated/divorced women are still at higher risk than those residing in the two other areas. The back-talk component of our study also demonstrates that “fleeing the house of horrors” constitutes a “dangerous exit” in rural communities (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009; Sev’er, 2002).

ROSA Findings

DeKeseredy and colleagues’ analysis of ROSA interviews generated findings distinct from our analysis of their data set. For example, these researchers report that 28 of the 43 women they interviewed stated that their estranged partners viewed pornography, and 12 interviewees revealed that such media was involved in their sexual assaults. Because pornography consumption is often a secretive event, there were likely women in the sample who stated that their ex-partners did not view pornography because they were unaware of the men’s use of sexually explicit material (Bergen & Bogle, 2000). Further contributing to underreporting is that some respondents may not have understood what the researchers meant by the word “pornography.” An important limitation of most empirical work of this kind done to date is that researchers have no control over the nature of the graphic material, or the definition being applied by the respondent. There is no way that the researcher can apply a single definition to pornography, or to control in any way an individual woman’s or man’s definition of it. Nonetheless, our analysis of the ROSA data set reveals more reports of porn consumption and abusive experiences related to it. For instance, we elicited an increase (from 28-32 women)

in the number of women with partners who viewed porn. What's more, there was an increase in the number of women who stated that pornography was involved in their sexual assaults, with more than half of the total sample ($n = 24$) reporting this harm.

Broadening the definition of porn to include other sexually explicit and degrading elements of U.S. culture was one of the most significant factors that helped produce these findings. However, scattered throughout some of the 43 ROSA transcripts was also relevant information on Internet, video, and magazine pornography that was likely not earlier detected. Perhaps this was because ROSA was designed to uncover a broad range of issues related to separation/divorce sexual assault in rural Ohio and pornography consumption was just one area of concern. In addition, it is likely that the research team missed certain behaviors while conducting their analyses because some respondents did not use the word "pornography" in their recollections of abusive experiences.

The secondary analysis of the ROSA study reveals five significant themes: learning about sex through pornography, imitation and comparison, introducing other sexual partners, filming sexual acts without consent, and the broader culture of pornography (e.g., sex work and fetishes). Candace highlights the first theme experienced by three women in the sample:

I met a guy one time out West that I had a sexual experience with that was extremely rough and afterwards he had told me that no one had ever talked to him about sex. He learned from pornography. And so he shaved his balls because he didn't know it was, I mean I know a lot of people do. Someone is learning from a porno as an educational thing?

Loretta's second abusive husband, "the one that's incarcerated right now," frequently used pornography as a teaching tool:

He used it [pornography] a lot. . . . Um, yeah, he liked watching Cinemax. He even had my 16-year-old watching it at night when I didn't know about it. . . . Yeah he would always try to rent videos and I don't like watching them. My boyfriend that I have now likes to watch them but I don't.

Some studies, most of them conducted from the early 1980s to the late 1990s (see DeKeseredy, in press), show that many women have been harmed or upset by their partners' requests or demands to imitate pornographic scenarios, underscoring the second emerging theme: comparison and imitation. Eleven women, like Tina, indicated that their ex-partners would often compare them to women in pornographic materials: "I know he used to complain because I wasn't like the people in the magazines and the movies."

Maggie adds,

My first boyfriend that I was engaged to was big on pornography. And he was always comparing me to the people in the books. And it's you know, what started you know, turning me off before the biting incident is he'd wanna have sex after looking at the porn

book. And I'm like, "Go jack off dude." You know, I'm not in that book okay so why don't you go jack off on that chick in that book because I'm not it. I'm me and if you love me you wouldn't need to look at that. You know what I mean? It's like nowadays it might be a little different. I can look at Playboy and appreciate another woman's body but it's because I'm not feeling threatened by somebody going "you don't measure up to that." You know what I mean?

Lyla is part of another group of participants who revealed the various ways ex-partners would attempt to imitate pornographic scenes. Her ex-husband had "a couple of porn tapes and that 'nudie' stuff on the Internet":

Yea and um, he um, really, really tried when I was drunk to get me to, um, do anal sex. And we did twice and that was not my idea and I can only believe that that came from another source, you know, anyway.

Alison knew her ex-partner viewed violent pornography and describes the familiar language and demeaning behaviors often featured in gonzo videos:

I remember him making me give him oral sex and holding me by the hair and I don't remember if it was after a fight or what. He's done that I don't know how many times. He used to urinate on me and then want sex, I mean after getting hit and stuff. . . . He would talk the whole time he was doing that and saying things like uh, "you're my bitch" or "you like it bitch don't you." And stuff like that. Um, "this is my ass, you know I'll kill for my ass." Stuff like that and it would be just as violent as the beating and basically you just lay there and let it happen.

Jackie's ex-partner used pornographic videos to "prime" her for sex acts:

Yea and we also did the sexual videos. And that was something I'd never done before. Definitely more his idea but after he tells you about it so many times you're like, okay fine. . . . You know? I mean it would be the threesome thing because he was interested in priming me for that. He would always want there to be two men on one woman or something. Yea I know and you know when he first talked about these things it was absolutely appalling and just revolting but after you do it for so long, I mean I guess you know you get less sensitive to it, you're like fine. And then if he did it once he'd want it again and so you know I just, I'm like "no no never again."

Jackie's experiences related to the third theme: introducing other sexual partners. Some interviewees were forced to have group sex or sex with "other people," which is endemic to gonzo. "Other people" ranged from women's partners' male friends to complete strangers and to sex trade workers, with one man even demanding his current wife have sex with his "second Nigerian wife." In total, seven women reported the introduction of other sexual partners. Below is Silvia's experience:

He had ended up being with a man and he would make me watch. . . . When he wanted sex in a group thing or with his buddies or made me have sex with a friend of his. See one

time he made me have sex with a friend of his for him to watch, then he got mad and hit me afterwards. And I didn't quite understand why he got mad.

Jillian revealed this at the end of her interview:

Um, during the relationship he had tried to make me have sex with one of his friends with him present. He would bring, pick up women and bring them home and have sex with them in our home and I was expected to sleep on the couch when that happened. He had open affairs with me there.

Cara is one of four women who was unknowingly videotaped during consensual and nonconsensual sex. Her ex-partner used alcohol to try to "loosen" her up and to make her try new sexual positions. This incident prompted her to leave him:

When I woke up there was like a light on me. He works at the TV station here. . . . Anyways, um, he was videotaping it . . . and that was it, I said this has got to end. And he still carries the video tape around to this day. I have yet to view it.

Denise's ex-husband uses a videotape of a sexual assault to maintain control over her, even after their separation:

He ended up tying me up and blindfolding me and then, without my knowledge, videotaped it. And then after we had split up for good, he left the tape on Bill's car that was at my house and a letter with it saying that it was spread all over town. I contacted the police department and they wanted to watch the tape and I wouldn't give it to them. And then the officer that responded to it called his wife and told her, because this town is a small community and everybody knows everybody and I used to work there. He called and told her and she went and told my best friend because they are neighbors.

She also said,

I think he did that so Bill would stop seeing me and he did stop. I didn't see him again after that day. I think he did it to kind of try to force me back into the relationship. You know, you're going to be embarrassed now. Who's going to want to be with someone who's on a tape and half of the town has seen it?

Turning to the last theme, the overall culture of pornography, we uncovered various nuanced reports from five interviewees about how the broader pornographic culture affects women's lives. Billie's ex-partner, for example, "wasn't really into porn" that she knew of, but throughout the course of her interview, she strived to make sense of his fetishes that ultimately played a major role in her sexually abusive experiences:

He had a few particular fetishes. And uh, you know at first I thought it was okay but then it became really uncomfortable but he wasn't you know, wasn't willing to change that. And I guess maybe a part of me still loved him and maybe wanted to, you know, please him, but it was just, you know, perverse to me. It was like it went against the grain of

everything I ever held, however I ever looked at sex and how it was supposed to be in a relationship. Um, so, but like I said, I mean, I was a completely different person. He totally changed me. It was all an emotional, physical, spiritual thing. It was all twisted up so it is really hard to explain. . . . And, also like, and he was kind of like a masochist type. . . . He became the sadist.

Regardless of what motivates abusive men to consume pornography, secondary analysis of ROSA data brings to the fore some cases of women whose abusive experiences are directly linked to their ex-partners' use of gonzo porn. The violent man in Vanessa's life watched these videos daily and would sexually assault her nearly twice a month, especially if she resisted his sexual advances:

Especially if I wouldn't give him sex like he was putting a guilt trip on me or something . . . Um, he'd put it in and he'd make me stay in the room with him while he watched it, while he was masturbating. . . . He would ejaculate in my hair, on my body. He would take certain clothes, clothing items out of the dresser if I wouldn't give him sex. He would, um, I don't know exactly what he did with it. I had this one real like, um, satiny spaghetti strap shirt and, um, I found it between the bed and the box springs with a girly book and a porn tape and it had cum all over it. So I don't know.

Heather's sexual assaults were routinely the direct result of her ex-partners' pornography consumption:

I was asleep one night and he'd been up watching, I don't know what the hell it was, but it was some kind of skin flick. But ah, he would, when he came to bed he, he woke me up by touching me and all that stuff. He wasn't working at the time and I was working two jobs and I was real tired and I told him to leave me alone and he just, he kept going and um, ended up like shoving, he stuck his fingers inside me and I ended up shoving him out of the bed and I got beat up for that.

Was pornography the direct *cause* of these women's victimization? This question certainly cannot be answered using the ROSA study or quantitative correlational data. The problem is that it might very well be that the same factors that cause a man to abuse women might also cause him to consume pornography (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998; Jensen, 1996). In other words, eliminating pornography might not have an effect on the men's violent conduct. Yet, the data we and other researchers have uncovered show that pornographic media are a component of the problem of violence against women.

Back-Talk Findings

More new examples from the ROSA study could easily be offered here, but the back-talk stage of this study strongly suggests that the connection between pornography and violence against women is still as strong, if not stronger, than when DeKeseredy and his colleagues gathered their data. Of the 12 women interviewed, nine reported that

their abusive experiences were related to their ex-partners' use of pornography. Moreover, most of the women's hurtful experiences mirror the themes discussed earlier. Six interviewees discussed learning about sex through pornography, seven mentioned imitation/comparison, three described the introduction of other sexual partners, three talked about sexual acts filmed without their consent, and three women discussed the influence of the broader pornographic culture. Here, we provide examples of some of these themes.

Evelyn's ex-husband often imitated violent rape scenes filled with degrading and foul language:

Um, forceful, nasty, demeaning. I wouldn't say particularly violent, except that he would pin me down and wouldn't let me get up and he, he was, he had taken martial arts classes and could anticipate every move I made before I moved. . . . It was just horrible . . . like sex would go on and on and on and he couldn't get off until I was uncomfortable and after reading everything I got the this idea that he can't get off unless I'm uncomfortable and it progressed through the marriage to where it wasn't just being uncomfortable, it has to be worse than that. He had to, he, he didn't hit me that often. He did hit me though during the marriage but not like during sex, he didn't smack me around and stuff, um, but he would call me just really foul names and try to make me feel as horrible about myself as I could in the bedroom. It was always a sex thing. You had to feel bad about yourself during sex and you know, until I was screaming at him, "get off of me!" Cussing at him, you know, fighting with him and then he would get off. So, one day I decided, you know, I'm going to test this. I'm going to start right at the beginning and see if it works and it did. He got off before he even got his pants down because I started the fighting even before he got me in the bed and it worked and I knew, I knew that he was sick and this was never going to end.

Evidently, Evelyn's ex-husband also learned about sex through pornography. Asked whether he watched pornography, she replied,

His parents did. He, he would get really mad when somebody had porn on. Not always, every once in a while, he would sit and watch it, but after a while, he would get sick of it and walk out. His parents, when he was little, would go to porn drive-ins with the kids in the back of the station wagon and would sit and watch and make out with the kids in the car! When his mom got divorced, she remarried somebody she worked with and he was a very abusive alcoholic and he would come home and want to have sex with her. And my husband tells me about one day he hid under the couch real quick because, um, he didn't want to get beat up and they ended up having sex on the couch and he had to work really hard to stay quiet under the couch until it was over with. I mean it was just horrible. Some of the stuff, I mean it gets worse than that. I mean it was really bad.

Gail's experience highlights themes of imitation and the addition of "other people" found in the ROSA study:

Just degrading like you know, stupid. I got called stupid a lot you know and even if it was like 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 that 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.

Debbie said that she was not sure whether she was a good fit for the back-talk study because she had no “sex stuff” to talk about. However, throughout the course of the interview, she revealed abuse by multiple men in her past and the influence of pornography, particularly the addition of “other people” into the relationship:

He um he had a fixation of like the Internet and sexual stuff like that on the Internet so he was always on the Internet looking at porn and . . . He would go downstairs. He would go down after he came home from work and sit there until 2, 3, 4, o’clock in the morning and look at pictures and videos or whatever. . . . But I mean later I had found out that he had extra people so . . . That’s the, that’s the thing. I didn’t know that some of it was abuse and I, I mean I do now.

Dana’s ex-partner “always had a fantasy of doing a threesome and talked me into it.” Pornography was a “big factor” in her abusive relationship as “he wasn’t always interested in sex with me per se; it seemed like it was always others.”

Conclusion

The study of contemporary pornography and how it negatively affects rural gender relations and other parts of social life is in a state of infancy. It may be painfully obvious but worth stating nonetheless: Much more empirical and theoretical work is necessary. In an ideal world that includes the large amount of research funds available shortly after the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was passed in 1994, conducting a national U.S. survey of adult women that includes questions about their current and former male partners’ pornography consumption would provide important answers to questions that cannot be answered using qualitative methods like ours. For example, is the relationship between pornography use and violence against women stronger in rural areas than in urban and suburban communities? Regardless of whether national or regional surveys are administered, it is necessary to avoid using the word “pornography” in questions and instead ask detailed behaviorally specific questions, because they generate more valid and reliable estimates (Jacquier, Johnson, & Fisher, 2011).

Smaller scale surveys comparing the hurtful effects of pornography in rural and more densely populated areas are also conspicuously absent. Especially needed are self-report surveys of men because they yield important data on the factors that motivate them to use porn and to assault women (DeKeseredy & Rennison, 2013). The lack of survey research on the linkage between pornography and both men’s and women’s experiences with intimate violence is somewhat surprising because there is a sizable

portion of surveys that examine other risk factors associated with woman abuse (e.g., intimate relationship status, income, male peer support; Maier & Bergen, 2012; Renzetti, Edleson, & Bergen, 2011; White, Koss, & Kazdin, 2011). To the best of our knowledge, there has yet to be any rural qualitative studies of pornography and violence against women that involve interviewing men or participant observations of them. Replicating or slightly revising the personal history and narrative account work of Jensen (1995, 1996) is a useful starting point. So is following in the footsteps of Jensen (2007) and Dines (2010) by interviewing and observing men who attend the Las Vegas Adult Entertainment Expo. There are also participant observation studies of college men watching pornography in groups (Kimmel, 2008; Sanday, 1990), which could be used as models for doing similar research on men in rural contexts.

Theoretical work is in short supply in the pornography and violence against women literature. Contemporary offerings that do exist are primarily grounded in radical feminist analyses prioritizing the role of capitalism, racism, and patriarchy (e.g., Boyle, 2010; Dines, 2010; Jensen, 2007). Still, the bulk of them do not address rural contexts. One exception is DeKeseredy et al.'s (2014) attempt to link radical feminism and cultural criminology in their theoretical work on the horrific and pornification of rural culture. Cultural criminology provides rich insights into media dynamics and popular culture, and it is a school of thought situated within the field of critical criminology (Ferrell, Hayward, & Young, 2008; Muzzatti, 2012). Critical criminologists emphasize the ways in which racial/ethnic, class, and gender inequality shape crime and societal reactions to it (DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2014).

It is necessary, but not enough, to explain the connections between pornography, capitalism, racism, and patriarchy. How do these problems shape individual behavior and group dynamics? Male peer support theories designed by DeKeseredy and Olsson (2011) and DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2013) attempt to answer this question, but they were not specifically crafted to take into account rural realities. Nevertheless, they are relevant because the ROSA study found that some rural survivors' abusive partners consumed pornography with their male friends while drinking excessive amounts of alcohol (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009). Similarly, Hall-Sanchez (2014) finds that the attendant generalized socialization that often accompanies mainly all-male peer rural hunting subcultures is a type of what DeKeseredy (1988) refers to as *informational support* (e.g., verbal encouragement) that influences the construction of hegemonic masculinities and perceptions of women and violence in private contexts.

One of Hall-Sanchez's respondent's experiences exemplifies many components of patriarchal male peer support uncovered by DeKeseredy and his colleagues over the past 25 years⁶:

He would leave on Friday morning and return late Sunday. I would see him pack a few clothes but mostly beer, bullets, and porn. . . . I never understood how all that went together but he would tell me that they would drink, go scout the stuff and set up their spots in the woods, and come back to camp and drink, shoot targets, watch porn, guy talk, play cards, you know the usual guy stuff. They would tell dirty jokes and look at porn. . . . No women allowed and that is how they wanted it. That was a place where they could get

away with demeaning women and get a pat on the back for “putting their women in their place.” I am sure all those guys did the same thing so it’s no wonder Sundays were always bad for me. (p. 9)

There has never been a study specifically designed to test the male peer support theories of DeKeseredy and Olsson and DeKeseredy and Schwartz, but preliminary evidence such as the above and that yielded by the ROSA project shows that the correlation between pornography, male peer support, and woman abuse is an emerging problem, one that we hypothesize will get worse in the near future because sexually explicit media are more affordable, readily available, and easier to access on the Internet than ever before (Dines, 2010). Yet, much more research is required and so are actual tests of male peer support theories to conclusively determine whether this is the case.

In sum, then, we may not know much about the violent consequences of pornography consumption in rural places and elsewhere. Nonetheless, due in large part to the pioneering efforts of Karen Boyle (2010), Gail Dines (2010), and Robert Jensen (2007), what we do know is that, like violence against women, pornography is deeply entrenched in our society. How could it be such a lucrative business if only a small number of people used it (Lehman, 2006)?

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Rowland Atkinson, Bernard Auchter, Katharine Darke, Claire Renzetti, Martin D. Schwartz, and Simon Winlow for their assistance.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Some of the research reported here was funded by National Institute of Justice Grant 2002-WG-BX-0004 and financial assistance provided by the College of Arts and Sciences and the Office of the Vice President of Research at Ohio University.

Notes

1. See DeKeseredy (2011) and DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2011, 2013) for in-depth reviews of key definitional debates in the violence against women literature.
2. See DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2009) and DeKeseredy, Schwartz, Fagen, and Hall (2006) for more information on the abuse experienced by these women.
3. See DeKeseredy (2014) and DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2009) for reviews of these studies.
4. Emotional exiting is a woman’s denial or restriction of sexual relations and other intimate exchanges (Ellis & DeKeseredy, 1997). Emotionally exiting a relationship can be just as dangerous as physically or legally exiting because it also increases the likelihood of male violence and sexual abuse (Block & DeKeseredy, 2007).

5. See Hall-Sanchez (2013, 2014) for more detailed information on the methods used in the back-talk component of this study.
6. See DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2013) for the history of male peer support theory and research informed by it.

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