

Pornographic Lives

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This article argues that narrative accounts are an important source of information about the connection between pornography and violence against women. The article reports on interviews with men about pornography use. When analyzed in conjunction with narrative accounts of women's experiences, these interviews support the feminist anti-pornography critique. The narratives show how pornography can (a) be a factor in shaping a male-dominant view of sexuality, (b) contribute to a user's difficulty in separating sexual fantasy and reality, (c) be used to initiate victims and break down resistance to sex, and (d) provide a training manual for abuse.

I went to a porno bookstore, put a quarter in a slot, and saw this porn movie. It was just a guy coming up from behind a girl and attacking her and raping her. That's when I started having rape fantasies. When I seen that movie, it was like somebody lit a fuse from my childhood on up. When that fuse got to the porn movie, I exploded. I just went for it, went out and raped. It was like a little voice saying, "It's all right, it's all right, go ahead and rape and get your revenge; you'll never get caught. Go out and rip off some girls. It's all right; they even make movies of it."

—T. Beneke (1982, pp. 73-74)

In the contemporary debate over pornography and its effects, words like those of "Chuck," a 28-year-old convicted rapist, often are dismissed as merely anecdotal and of limited value in understanding sexually explicit material (Donnerstein, Linz, & Penrod, 1987; Zillman, 1989). This article argues that narrative accounts are one of our best sources of information about the connection between pornography and violence against women. It reports on 24 interviews conducted with men about their pornography use. When analyzed in conjunction with narrative accounts of women's experiences with pornography, these interviews illuminate and provide support for the feminist anti-pornography critique. The narratives discussed in this article give specific exam-

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ples of how pornography can (a) be an important factor in shaping a male-dominant view of sexuality, (b) contribute to a user's difficulty in separating sexual fantasy and reality, (c) be used to initiate victims and break down their resistance to sexual activity, and (d) provide a training manual for abusers.

THE FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF PORNOGRAPHY

After decades of unproductive sparring between liberals and conservatives, all framed by the moral and legal concept of obscenity, a feminist critique of pornography based on a radical approach to sexuality emerged during the late 1970s and 1980s (Cole, 1989; Dworkin, 1981, 1987, 1988; Jeffreys, 1990; MacKinnon, 1987; Russell, 1993b). Highlighting how pornography sexualizes male dominance and female submission, this critique sees pornography as a kind of sexist hate literature, the expression of a male sexuality rooted in the subordination of women, that endorses the sexual objectification of, and can promote sexual violence against, women. Controversy about this approach focused on an anti-pornography ordinance that identified pornography as "a practice of sex discrimination" and a "systematic practice of exploitation and subordination based on sex that differentially harms and disadvantages women" (Dworkin & MacKinnon, 1988, pp. 138-142). The ordinance met with varied success in several cities but has been rejected by the federal courts.

One of the most important aspects of the political organizing around the ordinance was the creation of a public space for women to talk about how pornography had affected their lives. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, the first city to consider the ordinance, those women spoke in hearings before a city council committee (Organizing Against Pornography, 1983; for other accounts of women's experiences, see Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, 1986; Kelly, 1988; Russell, 1980; Silbert & Pines, 1984). Instead of relying solely on experimental research on the connection between pornography and sexual violence, the anti-pornography organizers asked that attention be paid to the lived experience of women who had been victimized.

The present research is rooted in that radical feminist approach to pornography and sexuality. I argue that instead of privileging

the experimental laboratory research that has been so prominent in the debate over pornography during the past three decades, we should look to richly detailed narrative accounts of women and men that can tell us a great deal about how pornography works in the world. Elsewhere (Jensen, 1994), I have criticized such experimental work. Unlike many critics of these studies, who argue that any connection between pornography and sexual violence found in the lab is probably overstated, I suggest that we should be at least as concerned that lab studies underestimate pornography's role in promoting misogynistic attitudes and behavior (see also Dines-Levy, 1988).

First, these studies are incapable of measuring subtle effects that develop over time. If pornography's main effect is the shaping of attitudes and behavior after repeated exposure, there is no guarantee that studies exposing people to a small amount of pornography over a short time can accurately measure anything. Also, no lab can reproduce the natural setting of the behavior being studied. How is watching a pornographic movie in a university video lab (the experience of experimental subjects) different from viewing it in the living room of a fraternity house where a group of young men might watch a pornographic videotape while drinking beer and urging each other to enjoy the tape? And how does the act of masturbating to pornography, a common male experience, influence the way in which men interpret and are affected by pornography?

If experimental data seem to suggest, for example, that exposure to depictions in which women appear to enjoy being raped can increase men's acceptance of sexual violence against women and increase men's endorsement of that rape myth (Malamuth & Check, 1981), can we assume those effects will be even more pronounced on a man who views that same sexual material in a real-world environment in which male aggression is often encouraged and sanctioned? The problems are compounded if one acknowledges that research, no matter what its claims, can never be impartial and objective and always is value laden. Researchers generally accept a mainstream definition of what is to be considered "normal" sexuality. Whereas the existence of sexual drive and interests is in some ways "natural" or biologically based, the form our sexual practices take is socially constructed, and that construction in this culture is rooted in the politics of gender.

Relying on the majority view to determine what is erotic implicitly endorses the sexual status quo, which means accepting patriarchal definitions.

This point about values often is used by sexual libertarians, who contend that by labeling practices such as sadomasochism "deviant," research is biased. But the critique also has to come from a different angle; in patriarchal society, what has been considered normal sex generally has been what serves to enhance men's pleasure; the line between normal intercourse and deviant rape can be a fine one. Researchers must make value judgments about what is erotic, nonviolent, and normal, and those decisions define what is a deviant, unhealthy, callous, or socially undesirable response to the material. It is not that any specific researcher blunders by letting value judgments in but that such research always makes normative judgments about sexuality.

It is important to be clear about what I suggest narratives can tell us. Such accounts do not prove, in a direct causal sense, that pornography causes sexual violence. They do, however, show how pornography is implicated in the abusive behavior of some men.¹ This article does not contend that all sex abusers use pornography or that all pornography users will become sex abusers; proponents of the feminist anti-pornography critique have never made such simplistic assertions. But the narratives do suggest that for some sex abusers, pornography is an integral part of their abuse (see also Wyre, 1992).

The full value of men's narratives is realized when they are combined with the women's accounts and when we all compare and contrast those accounts with our own experiences with pornography (for one example of this kind of work, see Kimmel, 1990). This endeavor may not provide the "truth" about pornography, but as Lorraine Code (1986) suggests, "there may be no facts of the matter in any absolute sense, either in science or in law, and . . . it really all amounts to telling plausible stories" (p. 599). We can work toward knowing which stories are more plausible than others; rejecting truth need not involve rejecting the possibility of identifying true stories. Donald Polkinghorne (1989) echoes that approach when he acknowledges that an inquiry based in narrative accounts should not claim to have uncovered a single objective account of reality: "The argument does not produce certainty; it produces likelihood" (p. 175).

PORNOGRAPHY USERS AND SEX OFFENDERS

This project included two sets of interviews. In both cases, subjects were anonymous (except for those who volunteered their names; all names in this article are pseudonyms), and the interviews were tape recorded. The first 11 interviews (the "pornography users" group²) were with men who responded to a classified ad in the personals section of the two Minneapolis-St. Paul entertainment weeklies. The ad asked for male interview subjects who "read or view any sexually explicit material." The second set of interviews (the "sex offenders" group) was with 13 residents of the Alpha Human Services sex offender treatment program in Minneapolis.³ After some general observations about the interviews, I focus on several cases in which the links between pornography use and abuse were most clear.

The subjects in both groups were White and came from a variety of class backgrounds and occupations including students, blue-collar workers, and professionals. The average age of the pornography users group was 34 years, with a range of 23 to 52. The average age of the sex offenders group was 36 years, with a range of 21 to 50. In an interpretive study with a small sample, the demographics of the group are not crucial. In general, however, both groups included a fairly even mix of Western religions (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and none), political affiliations (conservative, liberal, and no interest), and marital statuses (single, married, separated, and divorced). The users group included two gay-identified men and one preoperative male-to-female transsexual, and the offenders group included one gay-identified man. The other subjects identified themselves as heterosexual.

Members of the two groups had similar general experiences with pornography. The average age of first viewing for the pornography users group was 10 years, with a range of 3 to 18. The average age for the sex offenders was 12 years, with a range of 8 to 19. In the users group, all but one of the men had seen pornography before graduating from high school; in the offenders group, that was true for all but two men. As adults, all the men in both groups had viewed sexually explicit pornography.⁴

For the most part, there were few differences in history of pornography consumption between the users and the offenders. The men told similar stories about their entry into the world of

pornography, most often through magazines found at home or supplied by friends. The stolen copy of *Playboy* secreted away in a clubhouse or retrieved from dad's drawer was common for men in both groups. The progression from *Playboy* to *Hustler* and more explicit material was also much the same in both groups. The only noticeable difference is that several of the men in the offenders group said they had used overtly violent pornography or child pornography, whereas no men in the users group said they were interested in such material. But in terms of explicitness and frequency of use, both groups had similar ranges of experiences.

The most important difference between the two groups, in addition to the obvious difference in some cases of a history of committing sexual abuse,⁵ is that the stories told by the sex offenders had been filtered through extensive group and individual therapy in the Alpha program. Of specific interest is the program's policy on pornography. Residents are not allowed to keep or use pornography, and such material is confiscated when it arrives. Use of it could result in expulsion from the program, which is a serious sanction; for most of the residents, expulsion would mean a return to jail or prison. In general, pornography is treated as part of a resident's problem in developing a healthy sex life. On rare occasions, counselors present pictures of nude adults to residents who are unable to get beyond fantasizing about children. Such material is intended to illustrate more appropriate sex partners and "age their fantasies." These pictures show full nudity but do not depict sexual activity.

Also, acknowledging the harm done to victims and taking responsibility for it are key elements of Alpha treatment. One aspect of that is known as "running a process": When residents begin to fantasize about abusive behavior, they are taught to take those actions to their logical conclusion and think about the harm that individuals will suffer because of it.

Does this therapy "taint" the interviews with the sex offenders? Of course, the therapy affected how they viewed their pornography use, but that does not mean their perceptions and observations were of no value. First, in the interviews, I was aware of their therapy and tried to get them to go beyond what they thought their counselors would expect them to say. Other than my instinct that I was generally successful at that, I have no way of knowing how honest those subjects were being. Second, not all of the sex

offenders believed that pornography had been an important factor in their abuse, which indicates there was not a general "blame pornography" attitude in the program.

But a more important point is that both sets of interview subjects were working from a well-defined ideology. With the sex offenders, it was a view of pornography shaped by, among other things, that therapy. With the pornography users, it was a view shaped by the general cultural ideology of sexual and expressive freedom, the idea that any sexual activity is by definition liberating.⁶ For the former, it led them to be willing to consider the connections between pornography and their behavior. For the latter, it led them to be generally unwilling to see that possibility. If one considers it likely that the sex offenders have been led to certain conclusions by an ideology acquired in therapy, it is at least equally likely that the pornography users were led to their conclusions by a different ideology acquired from contemporary culture. In short, no one has access to an account of their behavior that has not been refracted through ideology. My job as a researcher is to make judgments about which subjects seemed to be making an honest effort to tell their truth as they see it.

Before concentrating on the stories of several of the men for whom pornography was an important influence on their sexual behavior, it is important to note that most of the pornography users who reported heavy consumption also reported no abusive sexual behavior and that some of the sex offenders reported relatively light consumption and did not see a connection between the pornography and their offenses.

In the pornography users group, only one of the men reported behavior that clearly was abusive, which will be described later. More typical was "Bill," a heterosexual 39-year-old lawyer. He said he began with *Playboy* as a teenager, became a regular viewer of sexually explicit pornographic movies, and used pornographic movies or magazines an average of three times a week. He said all his sexual relationships were with consenting adults and that, although some of his sexual activity mirrored acts he had seen in pornography, he never purposefully tried to act on fantasies he had about bondage. In Bill's view, "There's a lot of people like myself who go in with a coat and tie, very respectable people who use pornography. If our fantasies are carried out, they're carried out only with consenting adults. And we harm no one."

"Pete," a 40-year-old predominantly heterosexual (he reported some sex with men in his past and a continued interest in homosexuality but said he no longer acted on it) office manager, also reported early exposure to pornographic magazines and a long-standing interest in explicit pornographic movies. He said the movies do not spark actual sexual desire in him: "I [have] never sat and watched a movie and thought, 'God, I got to go jump in bed with a woman.' "

In the sex offenders group, "Brian," a heterosexual 50-year-old insurance salesman who had sexually abused his stepdaughter when she was 10 to 15 years old, saw *Playboy* as a teenager and continued to occasionally look at pornographic magazines throughout his adult life. His only experience with explicit pornography—renting a half dozen videos that he watched by himself—came after he had stopped having sex with his stepdaughter. Brian said those videos did shape his fantasies, increase the frequency of masturbation, and have a negative effect on his sexual relationship with his wife, but he saw no connection between his earlier sporadic use of pornography and his abusive behavior.

Similarly, "Jack," a heterosexual 43-year-old electronics technician, saw *Playboy* in high school and continued to buy similar magazines as an adult. He reported seeing about a dozen explicit movies in his adult life, usually at the urging of a friend. "After you've seen one or two, you've seen all of them," he said, explaining his lack of interest. Jack said that he did not want to ignore the possibility that his use of pornography played some role in his sexual abuse of his daughter but that he did not see direct connections.

The other men from the sex offenders group, however, saw some connection between pornography use and abusive acts, even when their use of pornography was not regular or extensive. What follows are more extensive descriptions of and excerpts from my interviews with four of the sex offenders and one of the pornography users. These were cases in which it was most clear that their use of pornography and real-life sexual behavior were linked in some fashion.

CRAIG

"Craig" was a 34-year-old heterosexual lumber worker who had never been married. He grew up in a small town in a rural

area and went as far as the 10th grade in school. He was raised Catholic but no longer considered himself a religious person and had no interest in political issues. Craig had the most violent and abusive sexual history of the men with whom I talked. He had beaten and raped prostitutes, violently raped other women, used drugs and coercion to have sex with teenage girls, and sexually abused young girls.

Craig's first exposure to pornography came at age 7 or 8 when he found a box of *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Hustler* magazines in a hayloft of an abandoned farm. From that point, he continually used those and other magazines that he shoplifted from stores. During his early teens, he began sneaking into an adult bookstore to watch videos. During his later teens, he continued to use magazines, sometimes masturbating to them in his parked car while he watched girls on the street.

At age 18, Craig joined the marines and, at about the same time, began heavy consumption of explicit pornography including violent pornography. He compared the "rush" of violent pornography to similar feelings he experienced taking drugs. Shortly after that, he also began using prostitutes, sometimes paying a higher price to be allowed to tie up the women and whip them. He later repeated that behavior with women who were not prostitutes, beating them up "because towards the last [before his arrest], that was the only way I could get aroused." He said the pornography use and visits to prostitutes were roughly at the same time: "When I got into it heavy, the pornography and the prostitutes kind of fell in together. I believe the pornography came first."

From about age 21 on, Craig's pornography use centered on explicit videotapes he watched at home. He said he liked a variety of sexual acts on the screen but preferred that the men in the movies always be in control, fast-forwarding past scenes of women in control: "It was like it was a threat to me, to have a woman [in control]." He said that was also a factor in his use of bondage pornography: "The control you had, to put the women in any position you wanted, to force her to do anything."

Craig recently had been involved in a long-term relationship, but the woman left him because of his violent behavior. He said he thought some of his ideas for sexual activity, such as his constant desire for women to perform oral sex on him, were sparked at least in part by the pornography he used:

There was a lot of oral sex that I wanted her to perform on me. There were, like, ways that would entice it in the movies, and I tried to use that on her, and it wouldn't work. Sometimes I'd get frustrated, and that's when I started hitting her. . . . I used a lot of force, a lot of direct demands, that in the movies women would just cooperate. And I would demand stuff from her. And if she didn't, I'd start slapping her around.

While in his 20s, Craig also began using child pornography obtained from underground sources. His sexual activity also began to focus more on children, usually girls in their early teens. Eventually, he abused girls as young as age 7. At some point, he began to use pornography and women or girls together: "Towards the end, it was so exhilarating to me to have the pornography and the child at the same time or the woman at the same time . . . and sometimes I have a longing for that feeling, the complete exhilaration, my whole body goes numb I'm so excited."

Craig described his view of women before his arrest as "that they were made for sex, and that's all. I grew up with that attitude. . . . [My older brother] kept saying over and over that women are for sex. Use them and throw them away. I thrived on that."

Craig was reluctant to blame his behavior on pornography, but he emphasized its importance in shaping his sexuality as a child and its continuing influence on him as an adult:

It's like it all stemmed from when I was growing up, watching the movies, pornography. . . . Once I saw the materials, it's like I got new ideas. It's like it reinforced my thinking. . . . But it was my choice to react to it. I don't think the pornography made me do what I did. I made the decision to do it. I could have talked to people and let them know what my thinking was, and I possibly could have got help a lot sooner. But I had to keep this a big secret. I could control this; I'm this super-being.

LARRY

"Larry" was a 41-year-old heterosexual man who had been divorced twice and had two children he had fathered and one stepdaughter. He was a biomedical technician and had two associate degrees. Larry grew up outside a large city and said that as a child he was sexually and mentally abused by his mother and older sister. He was raised Catholic but had been a member of

Lutheran and Baptist churches since then and considered himself Christian. He served in Vietnam as a marine for 2 years and called himself an independent-leaning Democrat. Larry was convicted of sexually abusing his stepdaughter. He also said that much of what he considered to be consensual sex when he was a young adult involved force and the use of women who were drunk or stoned.

Larry's first exposure to sexual material came at age 9 when he found his father's *True Detective* magazine with a picture of a woman bound in bra and panties. He saw *Playboy* and other similar magazines sporadically through his teenage years. He saw his first sexually explicit pornographic movies while in the marines after high school but did not start using pornography heavily until he was out of the service and working. A foreman at his shop introduced him to pornographic novels, especially ones involving bestiality. "And that's when it seemed like my appetite really got out of hand—and it never seemed to be enough," Larry said, describing an escalating use of pornography and an increase of what he called a desire for "deviant" sex.

That phase of his life ended temporarily when he married for a second time. But after losing a job and experiencing an accompanying loss of self-esteem, Larry said he returned to more heavy pornography use. During this period, he began renting and copying sexually explicit videos, amassing a collection of about 15 movies. He said that his wife refused to watch them but that he could manipulate his stepdaughter into watching them, which was part of the process of grooming her for abuse that began when she was 8 years old. He used the tapes to break down her resistance, and he played them while he was abusing her:

[The movies] played a big role because I was fantasizing that I was, that my stepdaughter and myself were actually engaging in the same behavior that was on the tape. So it was more like I was having my own private orgy right there, with the tape, too. And also, it was something for my daughter to concentrate on. It made it more exciting for me.

Elaborating on his use of pornography with his stepdaughter, Larry said the boundaries between the world of pornography and the real world became hazy:

In fact, when I'd be abusing my daughter, I'd be thinking about some women I saw in a video. Because if I was to open my eyes

and see my stepdaughter laying there while I was abusing her, you know, that wouldn't have been very exciting for me. You know, that would bring me back to the painful reality that I'm a child molester, where I'm in this reality of I'm making love or having intercourse with this beautiful woman from the video. The video didn't even come into my mind. It was just this beautiful person who had a beautiful body, and she was willing to do anything I asked.

Larry resisted putting sole or even primary blame for his abusive behavior on pornography. But he did see it as contributing to that abuse. He rejected the possibility that pornography could have been a catharsis:

The pornography actually helped me work into my abuse, I feel. It accelerated that appetite for more. That's what I feel about it. Because, if I wouldn't have been introduced to a lot of this, and got my appetite whetted, then I don't think I'd thought of half the deviant things I've done.

KEVIN

"Kevin" was a 24-year-old single heterosexual man who had most recently worked as a school bus driver. He had attended 1 year of college and 1 year of vocational-technical school after graduating from high school in the suburb where he grew up. He was raised Catholic but did not consider himself religious any longer, and he described himself as a conservative Republican. Kevin was convicted of the sexual abuse of two 6-year-old girls, and he said he had committed several other rapes and acts of sexual abuse.

Kevin had the most extensive and most constant use of pornography of the men interviewed. His first viewing of pornographic material was at age 11 when he and a friend found the friend's father's collection of *Playboy* magazines. From an ad in *Playboy*, he sent away to a mail-order company for 8-millimeter movies, using his name and his friend's address. Kevin said that when he ordered movies, he signed a form stating he was 18 years old. Because his friend's parents were divorced and the mother was often not home, they could use that address for orders and watch the movies there. By the time he was age 14 or 15, he looked old enough to buy magazines, including *Hustler*, in stores. During his high school years, he also began buying explicit videotapes, which he watched both alone and with groups of male friends.

After high school, Kevin began buying sexually explicit magazines and patronizing the 25-cent movie booths at adult bookstores. During recent years, he also had begun calling phone sex lines. At the time of his arrest, he had 50 to 75 magazines, about a dozen videotapes, and a handful of 8-millimeter movies in his closet. He had looked at the magazines every day and had watched a movie at least twice a week. The movies consisted of explicit depictions of sex including group sex and ostensibly lesbian scenes. He described the interaction between men and women in these videotaped movies:

The man would be the boss, and the woman would just do exactly what he said. And it was more of a subtle violence. . . . On the movies, it gives you the impression that if the woman hadn't agreed to what the man said, then he was capable of being very violent. There'd be some slapping and hair pulling and stuff. But not like the ones in 8-millimeter, where they really got some really violent things on there, like smack them over the head.

Kevin said the typical women were

portrayed like they were just sex dolls, or whatever, just laying there on the bed. . . . The man would walk up and the woman would just kind of be brain-dead, do whatever the man said. Either they would just do it, and she would, like it was a reflex. Or he would boss her around, or whatever, and say, "You do this, you do that, bend over, roll over," whatever the case may be.

Kevin said he sometimes bought movies and magazines in discount packs without knowing anything about the content. Although he said he did not seek out violent pornography, he occasionally received such material in those packs and watched it. Those movies included scenes with women tied to beds, with men using whips and handcuffs on them and penetrating them with objects such as pop bottles—"stuff I thought was kind of sick in a way, at the time, but as I got more into it, I got more . . . into it." He described one of those movies:

One that sticks out in my mind right now was really violent. There was pistol whipping and [a man] chained this woman up to a, had her in a doghouse, chained up like a dog in a doghouse, and this guy would come out and stick her head in the dog bowl and then have sex with her from behind. . . . At first I thought it was disgusting, but then as time wore on I did get into it more. I got excited by it more.

In his own sex life during his late teens and early 20s, Kevin relied on manipulative techniques with teenage girls; he traded drugs for sex on several different occasions with four or five girls ranging in age from 10 to 16. He also raped a junior high school girl who had passed out at a party. When he could afford it, he also used prostitutes at a local massage parlor. During this time, he also began looking at younger girls in his neighborhood and fantasizing about them.

Kevin described pornography as his introduction to, and main source of information about, sex:

I think the main thing I got out of it was that sex was good. . . . I also got out of it that women were objects. Women or girls or any female was an object. As long as you got what you wanted, everything was O.K. . . . If I got what I wanted, that was fine. Whatever they did or whatever they felt was their own business. At the time, I didn't really care as long as I got what I wanted out of it, got my jollies out of it.

Kevin said that, at some point, the pornography had started to bore him, which was when he began his abusive behavior. He described the progression of his thinking:

When I was masturbating to these pornography things, I would think about certain girls I had seen on the bus or ones I had sold drugs to, and I would think as I was looking at these pictures in these books, what would it be like to have this girl or whoever doing this, what I'm thinking about. . . . Just masturbating to the thought wasn't getting it for me anymore. I actually had to be a part of it or actually had to do something about it. . . .

I think a lot of it had to do with just, the pictures are pictures. They're not real. And a fantasy is a wish for reality. You're wishing this would be real. And I got to the point where I wanted it, I was so ingrained, I wanted it to be real, that I would start to associate what I was seeing on the picture with someone I knew or had seen or associated with. And then I think it turned from that, I would start to actually really think about, you know, like with the girls I committed the crime with, or other ones I'd see on the bus. Like sometimes after I'd see like a certain load of kids would get off the bus, I'd pick out a couple and I'd watch them or stop and look at the mirror and stare at them and stuff like that. I would think, later on in the day, I'd masturbate to some pornography, I'd just use that picture kind of as a mental, it's kind of a scenery or whatever, and I'd put in my mind, I'd put myself and whoever at the time I was thinking about, in that picture. . . .

And sometimes, even with the pornography and the young girls, I wouldn't be satisfied and I'd go over to the prostitution place and get a woman, and I'd pay her and she'd do whatever I wanted, and I wouldn't get in trouble or wouldn't get caught or she wouldn't say no, or whatever. I could just do whatever I wanted, I could do.

Kevin said he may have become a sex abuser even without his heavy use of pornography but that the pornography was "the straw that broke the camel's back."

BRAD

"Brad" was a heterosexual 34-year-old heating and refrigeration service person who attended a vocational-technical school after high school. He grew up in a rural area, had no religious or political ties, and was separated from his second wife at the time of the interview. Brad said he met his first wife, a Korean woman who was working as a prostitute, while stationed overseas. She came to the United States to continue to work as a prostitute and divorced him. Brad was in the pornography users group but in many ways seemed more dangerous to himself and others than most of the men in the sex offenders group. He was extremely volatile and seemed capable of violence; this was the only interview during which I felt concerned about my own safety.

Brad first saw pornographic magazines at the age of 3 or 4 with his brothers, who also engaged in sex with him. Although he was not clear about some details, he seemed to have continued to use such magazines through his childhood. As an adult, he had been a regular customer of adult bookstores, using the 25-cent movie booths, renting and buying sexually explicit movies and magazines, calling phone-sex lines, and using prostitutes. He also said that he had videotaped sexual acts with his second wife and that he continued to look at those tapes.

Brad said he had been a shy teenager and avoided women. When he left high school and joined the army, he began using pornography, from which he said he got most of his sexual education:

I didn't know nothing about the world, or women, or, just what I read or saw. I was pretty deluded about women, that's for sure. I'm still fucked up about them. Didn't know how to talk to them or nothing, thought I just knew everything from reading everything.

These excerpts from my conversation with Brad reflect the erratic nature of his comments. He alternately seemed to enjoy and detest his life, sometimes referring to himself as a "sex addict" and other times mocking psychologists who had treated him. Pornography was a source of both pleasure and shame for him.

Brad said he had grown to prefer things that were rougher and more unusual. He liked pornography to "show some nasty bitches. Be a little more vulgar about it." But he said that after viewing such material, he felt ashamed: "As soon as the big excitement's over, I just come down."

Brad described his fantasies as "more intense than sex with women" and said he often had trouble controlling his fantasy life. Often, that took the form of thinking of his own life in terms of pornographic scenes and then becoming upset with the resulting fantasy. He described how this affected his relationship with his second wife:

I just freaked her out a few times with some of the stuff I'd dream up, or whatever. I'd fantasize stuff that wasn't true, and I'd get myself so hyped up into believing it and calling up phone sex or reading in magazines or something, reading stories or watching stories or hearing stories about somebody's wife screwing around on him, and I'd think, "Yep, she's doing it to me too." Just my imagination.

Although he had thought about stopping his use of pornography, Brad said he often felt helpless. In the course of discussing that question, he often was unclear about whether he thought his actions were harmful to himself or others, again expressing his ambivalence about his sex practices. He described his use of pornography as "pretty much uncontrollable":

It's like a fucking bee line to the [adult bookstore]. I'll be thinking about something else and driving along, and all of a sudden there the fuck I am, sitting in front of the place. I've felt like, you know, why control it. Just fucking do what you want to do, and whatever. Pretty much constant my whole life. I think sex is fun and sex is good, stuff like that. I don't see anything wrong with that at all.

Brad put much of the blame for his sexual problems on women, suggesting that they flaunt their sexuality and use it against men: "And these women blame men for pornography and all this, and it's the women out there showing us their pussies, you know,

taking all our money like fucking fools." Brad's misogyny was evident throughout the interview, as seen in this exchange:

Q: Generally, what are the strongest emotions you feel connected with pornographic material? Just the real gut-level feelings you have.

A: Hate.

Q: Hate for?

A: Women.

When asked what he usually did after a trip to an adult bookstore, Brad replied, "Just go home and terrorize my wife, maybe," and then laughed.

Brad said the attitude toward women in pornography—which he described as "Fucking bitch, man, that's all they're good for"—mirrored his own feelings toward women:

Pretty much a general attitude against women. [Sex] is about all they're really good for. That's what the movies and books and pornography tries to put across: The fucking woman is shit. That's what I see. See women screwing a couple different guys. And they have little skits, like, you know, the husband is gone and these guys come over and fuck the shit out of her for a few hours, and you know, stuff like that. I have a hard time with my own imagination without looking at all these other weirdos' ideas about things.

Brad said he had never raped a woman but once tried to force a female hitchhiker he picked up to have sex with him. But when she screamed, he let her go. I asked him twice if he thought he was capable of rape. The first time he replied, "I wouldn't do it, but my mind would say, 'Yeah, that sounds exciting.' " The second time he said, "Not unless I was in the wrong mind. In my normal mind, I'm fine, you know. . . . Yeah, I could see myself actually doing something like that."

Brad expressed conflicting opinions and emotions about his sex life and pornography use, but it was clear from his statements that pornography had been a part of a lifetime of his sexual victimization and sexual abuse of women. He had difficulty disengaging from the fantasy world of pornography and often imposed the narratives of pornography on his own life. The anger he felt toward women because of events in his life has been reinforced by the misogyny in pornography. These are tentative conclusions that are hard to feel completely confident of because of Brad's erratic comments. But I have included his story because of the

unrestrained way in which he talked about his experiences and my feeling that woven through that story were important illustrations of how pornography can influence a person.

DAVID

"David" was a 37-year-old man who was married; however, since his arrest, he has come out as gay. He was divorced and had a daughter and a son and had been convicted of abusing the son from infancy. He had worked in sales and marketing and had completed about 3 years of college. He grew up in a large city. He said that after his arrest, he was reevaluating his former commitment to Catholicism and to "ultra-conservative" political beliefs.

At age 12, David saw his first sexual material, a nudist magazine. He also began using *Playboy* magazines that friends had obtained. David said this was about the time he began playing cruel sexual games with his younger brother and sister. Shortly after that time, he saw explicit pornographic magazines that older boys in the neighborhood had. Those magazines were part of the manipulation and coercion that these 17- and 18-year-old boys used to get David to perform oral sex on them: "I remember looking at the magazines and seeing women perform orally on these men, and that's what gave them the idea to have me do that to them." Several years after that, David began molesting male friends while on camping trips, fondling them while they slept in ways that left the friends feeling taken advantage of.

During his early 20s, when he was first married, David stopped using pornography. At about age 24, he started buying gay pornographic magazines, as his fantasy life became completely centered on sex with men. He rejected the violent and sadomasochistic pornography, preferring magazines with no overt violence. By not allowing himself to use the material that depicted force,

that was the way that I gave myself permission, because it didn't involve hurting people. It's part of the denial system I had. Both people wanted to do it, and nobody looked like they were getting hurt. So it was like the gateway into a tremendously hurtful kind of situation.

David said that his fantasizing eventually became focused on the son his wife was carrying and that his use of pornography was fuel for those fantasies:

Prior to [my wife] giving birth to our son, I had masturbated to fantasies of sexually abusing him. So by the time he was born, I had rehearsed over and over in my mind what I wanted to do. And eventually I acted that out. And intermittently I used pornography to keep my sexual thing going. So, by the time he was born, he was a ready-made victim. In my mind, I had done it many times.

Like the other men in the sex offender group, David was reluctant to place blame for his actions on anything or anyone, but he described pornography as "the primary stepping-stone that I took to sexually acting out." He used the concept of boundary violations to explain how he thought pornography had functioned in his life. This way of framing the question of pornography's effects was not part of his therapy at Alpha. David said he had been thinking of this on his own and had not discussed it at length with staff members:

I think what this really is for me, was pornography was a way to begin violating people's boundaries. And it kind of went from there. Where, like when you look at somebody engaging in sex, I think it's a violation of boundaries. That's something that should be private. So, it's like I gave myself permission to voyeur on them. And the more I did that, the more liberties I took to actually act that stuff out. . . . It's a subtle thing. . . . I mean, I didn't realize I was, I didn't even know what boundaries were. I never had any idea of what that was. . . . Well, I brought things into the pornography. There was things in me that, you know, it's like pornography and I [slapping his hands together], we got bound somehow. And I ended up taking permission over a long period of time to violate boundaries, and I think pornography was the beginning of that violation.

In David's case, his early use of pornography was connected both to his own abuse of his siblings and to his abuse at the hands of older boys. In adulthood, pornography was a link in the chain of events that led to his abuse of his son.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of these narratives is not to suggest that a 1- or 2-hour interview can identify the causes of a person's history of sexual violence. My goal is not to focus on the individual and attempt a psychological profile that explains fully their actions. Obviously, many of these men experienced abuse as children,

which played a role in their own abusing, and countless other factors—including the culture's institutionalized misogyny—may have been crucial in leading them to abuse.

However, these interviews can help us identify ways in which pornography is an important factor in the construction of sexuality and gender relations—what men come to see as acceptable, exciting, or necessary sex. Pornography is not the only force in our society constructing sex and gender in these ways, but the use of it is a common experience in the lives of the men interviewed. These interviews identified specific ways in which the use of pornography can be linked to sexual violence. For these men, pornography was an important factor in shaping a male-dominant view of sexuality, and in several cases the material contributed to the men's difficulty in separating fantasy from reality. Pornography also was used by at least one of the men to initiate a victim and break down that young girl's resistance to sexual activity. For several others, it was used as a training manual for abuse, as sexual acts and ideas from pornography were incorporated into their sex lives.

Elsewhere (Jensen, 1994), I have argued that it is politically diversionary and ultimately unproductive to expect that experimental social science research will tell us the truth about the connection between pornography and sexual violence. We would be better served by continuing to look to narrative accounts for help in understanding not only how sexually explicit media but how the whole range of images and representations in our society help shape sexual behavior. This project is a step toward that goal, meant to be read not in isolation from, but together with, narrative accounts of women and to be compared with the reader's own experiences. Such narratives also must be considered in light of analyses of pornographic texts (see Jensen, 1993/1994) and information available about the production of pornography, although because of the nature of the business, little work has been done on production.

This article has taken the view that study of those elements—production, content, and effects—supports the feminist anti-pornography critique. A comment from a veteran actor-writer-director in pornographic movies touches on all those elements. Although Bill Margold takes the position that pornography is essentially harmless, his comments suggest a different conclusion:

My whole reason for being in the [pornography] Industry is to satisfy the desire of the men in the world who basically don't much care for women and want to see the men in my Industry getting even with the women they couldn't have when they were growing up. I strongly believe this, and the Industry hates me for saying it. . . . So we come on a woman's face or somewhat brutalize her sexually: we're getting even for their [the male viewers'] lost dreams. I believe this. I've heard audiences cheer me when I do something foul on screen. When I've strangled a person or sodomized a person or brutalized a person, the audience is cheering my action, and then when I've fulfilled my warped desire, the audience applauds. (quoted in Stoller, 1991, p. 31)

Why do those in the audience applaud? One theme of this article is that answering that question will take a lot of honest talk and careful hearing.

NOTES

1. For a cogent argument on pornography as a causal agent in sexual violence, see Russell (1993a). Although Russell relies on experimental data in a manner I would not, she provides a compelling account of the way in which pornography and violence may be linked.

2. Throughout the article, I generally refer to men's "use" of pornography, rather than their "viewing" of it, to make it more clear that men routinely use pornography as an aid in masturbation. To support that assertion, I would cite these interviews, my informal discussions with other men over the past 7 years of researching pornography, and my own experience with pornography as a child and young man.

3. Those subjects volunteered after my project was explained to them by a staff member. Both the Alpha staff and I made it clear that their participation was voluntary, that I had no connection to the program, and that their responses would not affect their status in the program. The limit on the number of interviews of 13 was arbitrary, and more residents would have been willing to participate. All these interviews were conducted in an office in the Alpha residence facility. My description of the Alpha program in the text that follows is taken from conversations with Carole Nienaber, the program's head counselor at the time of my research.

4. In this article, I use the term "explicit" to include the kind of material that is commonly called "hard-core" or "X-rated" pornography: oral, vaginal, and anal sex presented in graphic detail.

5. I say some cases because several of the men in the pornography users group described behavior that led me to believe they may have committed sex offenses. And, of course, there is no reason to think they told me everything about their sexual histories.

6. This ideology of sexual liberation obviously exists alongside an ideology of repression that views sex as appropriate only in the context of a culturally sanctioned relationship such as a heterosexual marriage. The relative power of each ideology on any individual depends on a variety of factors.

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