Systems of Prostitution and Pornography: Harm, Health, and Gendered Inequalities

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Abstract

This chapter brings together a wide range of literature addressing issues of harm, health, and gendered inequalities with regard to prostitution and pornography (as a form of prostitution), from a variety of localities across the Global North and Global South. After beginning with an overview and summary of psychological and physical harm, violence, and trauma experienced by women in different forms of prostitution, pornography is considered. The issue of pornography is viewed through the lens of production and research on the harms of prostitution, rather than the more common focus on secondary harms created through consumption. The importance of such an approach is emphasized in the final section,

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explaining how conceptualizing *systems of prostitution* and engaging with structural analysis can promote more holistic ways of understanding issues of health and wellbeing for women and girls in conditions of sexual exploitation.

Keywords

Prostitution · Pornography · Violence against women · Gendered violence · Sex work

Introduction

There is extensive evidence and a survivor-led movement demonstrating the ways in which the sex industry harms women's health and wellbeing. This chapter brings together literature on harms around violence and psychological trauma in prostitution, with theorizing around understanding pornography as interlinked to prostitution and, indeed, as a form of prostitution itself. This is important in recognizing social and individual harms across these elements of the sex industry. While harms associated with the consumption of pornography are significant, harms involved with those directly involved in production also need to be considered. Within the broader literature addressed here, the terms 'prostitution' and 'sex work' are used by different authors. In our own work, particularly in respect to sex trade survivors, we consciously and compassionately eschew the term "sex work" (for some further discussion of the associated language issues, specifically with regard to harm, please see: Gupta 2018; Smiley 2019). The term "prostitution" is therefore used throughout this chapter as the default and "sex work" is used only where a direct quote is employed. The chapter concludes with a consideration of systems of prostitution, setting out the need for a structural analysis of the inequalities of power that underpin prostitution and pornography: patriarchy, white supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism. By analyzing the harmful health consequences of prostitution and pornography as outcomes of structural inequalities, this chapter proposes a need to think in more holistic ways than a public health approach (see Pease in this section) and imagine deeper and more far-reaching responses to globalized sexual exploitation of women and girls.

It is documented internationally that the vast majority of people in prostitution are women and girls, with an over-representation of marginalized groups within this, including: Indigenous women, women of color, migrant women, women from ethnic minorities, women in poverty, women subject to domestic violence, homeless women and drug using women (Butler 2016; Cobbina and Oselin 2011; Farley 2020; Farley et al. 2003, 2005; Gupta 2018; Kempadoo 2001; Macy and Graham 2012; Monroe 2005; NWAC 2014; O'Connor and Yonkova 2018; Raphael 2004; Scully 2001; Stark and Hodgson 2004). Almost all sex buyers are male, although only a minority of men buy sex (IBISWorld 2015; Monto 2004; Shively et al. 2012).

It is important to note that systems of prostitution intersect and overlap with practices of domestic and transnational trafficking for sexual exploitation. What can

be defined as trafficking reflects different law and policy regimes, and empirical research often does not use legally accurate definitions (Madden Dempsey 2017). In women's experiences, boundaries between prostitution and trafficking are often not clear cut (O'Connor 2019). While policy positions on how best to address the sex industry are deeply divided, there is consensus that women in the prostitution system (phrased as 'selling sex' in some literature) should not face criminal sanction and should have access to specialist support services and economic alternatives, as needed. It is also important to note that the research and examples discussed here are from a range of localities. As Dewey et al. (2018) observe, there is substantial diversity, in some ways, within overarching systems of prostitution around the world; from differences in legal and policy approaches across jurisdictions, to differences of experience between and within varying forms of prostitution. However, it is also important, as Dewey et al. go on to say, not to focus on difference and specificity of context at the expense of understanding patterns and similarities. It is therefore important not to

> [O]veremphasise the uniqueness of each research site in ways that isolate and compartmentalise forms of knowledge by preventing meaningful comparisons. Such focused intensity risks falling into the kind of paralytic academic solipsism that prohibits the ready translation of empirical research into clear and concise policy recommendations. (Dewey et al. 2018: 7)

As discussed in the sections below, multinational research spanning countries of the Global North and South shows high levels of harm, violence and trauma. This suggests that the core ontology of being bought and sold for sex access is shared by women across geopolitical contexts, while the most negative impacts are experienced by the most socially marginalized women and are compounded by issues such as criminalization, migration regimes, and poor healthcare provision.

Harms of Prostitution

Prior to the 1980s, academic literature focused primarily on the "social harms" of prostitution, that is, potential harms that prostitution might bring to the broader community in the form of threats to the social order or public health (Farley and Kelly 2000). During the 1980s, especially in relevant medical and health literature, there was a shift to emphasize the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the context of prostitution (Farley and Kelly 2000; Puri et al. 2017), an area where there continues to be significant contemporary research (e.g., Adriaenssens and Hendrickx 2012; Quast and Gonzalez 2017; Steen 2019; Swahn et al. 2016; Verscheijden et al. 2015). In line with the prevalence of perspectives that positioned prostitution as a "victimless crime" (c.f. Matthews 2015), during this time, only a very limited number of studies assessed the harms of prostitution from the perspective of survivors and those in systems of prostitution or considered the gendered dimensions (cf. Hoigard and Finstad 1986; Silbert and Pines 1984). However, in the last two decades, studies have begun to more thoroughly document the harms

experienced by prostituted women and girls across a range of localities (e.g., Choi et al. 2009; Coy 2012, 2013; Deer 2012; Ditmore 2014; Farley 2003; Gorkoff and Runner 2003; Guha 2018; Karandikar and Prospero 2010; Kramer 2004; Nixon et al. 2002; Okal et al. 2011; Raphael 2004; Raphael and Shapiro 2002; Tutty and Nixon 2003). A number of powerful first-person accounts from survivors have also been published and a growing survivor-led movement is making visible the dehumanization and violation of prostitution (e.g., Grootboom 2018; Moran 2013; Norma and Tankard-Reist 2016; Sahu et al. 2017). Some of the most striking elements that emerge from this body of literature are the increased likelihood of experiencing a variety of forms of physical and sexual violence, and psychological harms, in particular, post-traumatic stress.

Violence

There can be little doubt about the high prevalence of physical and sexual violence in prostitution across a range of contexts. A systematic review of the available literature on experiences of violence in prostitution, concludes that there is a "high burden of violence against sex workers globally" (Deering et al. 2014: e42), including physical and sexual violence. Studies on the increased likelihood that women in prostitution will experience violence imply that abuse at the hands of pimps and men who purchase sexual access to women is common. As Choi et al. (2009) note:

> A growing literature has repeatedly revealed that physical, sexual, and emotional abuse are common in prostitution, both by pimps and by customers and that the dynamics of control and abuse in prostitution can be similar to that seen in other coercive relationships, such as intimate partner violence. (Choi et al. 2009: 945)

However, women in prostitution can also be increased targets of violence from intimate partners and police (Deering et al. 2014; Dasgupta 2020; Karandikar and Prospero 2010; Kinnell 2013; Nixon et al. 2002; Raphael and Shapiro 2002). Physical and sexual violence and sexual harassment by police, targeted at Black women, women of color and trans women, is documented by research from the USA (Ritchie 2017).These forms of harm have been commonly overlooked in non-feminist literature on prostitution, where the primary risk has often still been seen to be transmission of STIs (Farley and Kelly 2000), although more recent health research has begun to explore the connections between violence and STI transmission (e.g., Decker et al. 2010; Parcesepe et al. 2015). As Nixon et al. (2002: 1036) point out in their ground-breaking study of experiences of sexual violence in prostitution, while STIs are certainly a serious concern, it is not the transmission of disease that was foremost in their participants' accounts: "Violence and abuse were dominant themes in the women's narratives."

That the women in the study by Nixon et al. (2002) consistently spoke of violence, even when they were not directly asked about it, is indicative of the high rates of physical and sexual assault noted in other studies on the experiences of

women in prostitution. In early studies, such as Silbert and Pines (1984), 70% of women in their study of street prostitution in the USA, reported they had been raped and approximately two-thirds had been physically assaulted. Parriotts' (1994) study of prostituted women, also in the USA, similarly found high levels of violence: 85% of participants reported having been raped while in prostitution, 90% reported being physically assaulted, and 50% of the overall sample reported being beaten once a month or more. Such findings indicate extremely high rates of physical violence, considerably higher than those within the general population (Parriott 1994). More recently, and in more varied jurisdictions, there have been findings consistently showing extreme levels of violence: in Korea, 70% of women in prostitution report they have experienced at least one "unexpected and uncontrollable sexual, physical attack" (Choi et al. 2009); in Vancouver (Canada) 90% of women in prostitution report being physically assaulted while in prostitution and 78% report being raped (Farley et al. 2005); in Andhra Pradesh (India), a large study – of more than 1000 women in prostitution – found that 77% reported being raped *in the last six months* (George et al. 2011); 97% of people in prostitution surveyed in Phnom Penh (Cambodia) report having being raped *at least once in the previous year* (Jenkins et al. 2006); and in Kenya – a study with 81 women in prostitution, across multiple locations – found that "almost all participants reported experiencing physical or sexual violence in their working lives" (Okal et al. 2011). Another study of 207 women and girls who had been trafficked primarily for sexual exploitation in Europe found that almost all (95%) had been subject to physical or sexual violence, with 71% experiencing both, and 58% having been injured (Zimmerman et al. 2006). The impacts for women's health were wide-ranging, including physical, sexual, and reproductive consequences and psychological harms.

These findings, from various localities, are corroborated by the most comprehensive study on prostitution and violence available, conducted by Farley and her research team (2003). They surveyed 854 women, girls, men, and transgender people (the majority of those surveyed were women), across nine countries (Canada, Columbia, Germany, Mexico, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, the USA, and Zambia) about their experiences in prostitution. The study reported that 73% of respondents had been physically assaulted and more than half of the overall sample (57%) had been raped in prostitution. To give some further context of frequency and recurrence, approximately a third of the overall sample reported having been raped more than five times while in prostitution (Farley et al. 2003: 43).

It is sometimes argued by critics of this work, most prominently Weitzer (2000, 2005, 2007), that studies on violence against women in prostitution focus too heavily on street prostitution, which Weitzer claims is linked more to violent crime than to "indoor" forms of prostitution, such as brothel and escort prostitution. However, claims that legalized forms of indoor prostitution are inherently safer for those in prostitution have been undermined by other research based in legalized contexts. This work demonstrates that, even in contexts where prostitution / sex work is legal and regulated, it still carries many of the risks associated with illegal street prostitution, such as STIs and violence at the hands of men who purchase sexual access to women (Bindel 2017; Graham 2014; Raymond 2013; Sullivan 2004; Tyler and

Jovanovski 2018) which casts doubt on the possibility of ameliorating these harms through legalizing prostitution or shifting it to indoor environments (Farley 2004). Weitzer (2005) has also criticized a number of feminist researchers, including Farley, for focusing on street prostitution but extrapolating their findings to cover other forms of prostitution. It should be noted that much of Farley's work does, in fact, include women (and girls, men, and transgender people) from several forms of prostitution. Farley et al. (2003: 49) found, for example, that experiences of rape while in prostitution did not substantially differ across various forms of prostitution, including brothel, street, and strip-club prostitution. The authors note that: "Prostitution is multi-traumatic whether its location is in clubs, brothels, hotels / motels / john's homes (also called escort or high class call girl [sic] prostitution) motor vehicles or the streets" (Farley et al. 2003: 60). Monica O'Connor (2019: 46) notes that the silence in literature on "sex work" around "the harm of unwanted sexual intrusion and the evidence on the harmful consequences for women's health of multiple unwanted sexual acts is remarkable." As the following sections illustrate, these harms are documented in settings and contexts around the world.

Finally, the axiomatically most serious health consequence of prostitution is the strikingly disproportionate mortality rate. Studies indicate that the femicide rate for women in prostitution, perpetrated primarily by sex buyers, is significantly higher than for the general population (Brewer et al. 2006; Potterat et al. 2004; Salfati et al. 2008; Ward et al. 1999). Recent literature suggests that, even in legalized contexts – such as Germany – homicide and attempted homicide remain a significant and disproportionate danger to those in the sex trade (Schon and Hoheide 2021). Women in prostitution are also "the single most targeted group of women in serial homicide" (Sorochinski and Salfati 2019: 1791) and Brewer et al. (2006: 1101), writing in the North American context, contend: "Prostitute women [sic] have the highest homicide victimization rate of any set of women ever studied." Managing fear of lethal violence and hypervigilance contributes to the kinds of psychological harm and trauma, outlined in the following section.

Psychological Harms

The claim that all forms of prostitution can be multi-traumatic for prostituted persons is given added weight by studies on psychological harm. As noted by Tschoeke et al. (2019: 242): "worldwide sex work is frequently associated with serious physical and mental health problems." Given the high rates of violence and abuse experienced by prostituted women, it is perhaps not surprising that significant rates of psychological distress have also been found. A number of studies on the experiences of trauma and dissociation for women in prostitution show that it is often a coping mechanism to psychologically survive experiences in prostitution and/or a direct result of physical and sexual violence (see O'Connor 2019 for an overview). A key theme from these studies is that the ontology of being bought for sex – particularly with respect to touch, smell, and bodily invasion – requires women to develop dissociative mechanisms to manage emotional distress ranging from fear, shame, disgust, and

numbness (O'Connor 2019; see also Moran 2013). Farley and colleagues (2005: 244), in their research with 100 women in prostitution in Canada, note: "The physical and emotional violence of prostitution leads to somatic dissociation." It has been noted that further research in this area is needed (Tschoeke et al. 2019), particularly around the intersecting nature of prostitution-related trauma and inequalities based on poverty, racial injustice, colonization, childhood sexual abuse, and other factors (Alschech et al. 2020).

The large, multinational study by Farley et al. (2003) is, again, one of the most comprehensive to date in this area. In that study, 68% of participants met the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) criteria for a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a similar rate to that seen among war veterans who have faced active combat (Farley et al. 2003: 37, 47). The rates of PTSD were found to be similar across various types of prostitution, both legal and illegal, including street prostitution, brothel prostitution, and stripping (Farley et al. 2003: 48–49). Significant rates of PTSD have also been found in a Canadian study of 100 women in prostitution Vancouver (Farley et al. 2005) and an Australian study of 72 women in street prostitution in Sydney (Roxburgh et al. 2006). In the Canadian study, where a substantial over-representation of first nations women was noted, almost three quarters of those interviewed met the DSM criteria for PTSD (Farley et al. 2005). In the Australian study, all but one of the 72 women interviewed reported experiencing trauma and around half of the participants met the DSM criteria for PTSD (Roxburgh et al. 2006). The study of 207 women and girls who had been trafficked found that over half (56%) of women reported signs of PTSD when they reached support services, with extremely high levels of depression and anxiety (Zimmerman et al. 2006).

It has been suggested that such high rates of dissociation and PTSD could be explained by factors other than the experience of prostitution, including childhood sexual abuse. However, Waltman (2012) has pointed out that, in other studies – such as an investigation into the experiences of formerly prostituted persons in Korea (Choi et al. 2009) – prostitution has been found to be strongly related to PTSD symptoms, even when controlling for experiences of childhood sexual abuse (Waltman 2012: 9). Furthermore, such issues around childhood sexual abuse are additionally complicated by the age of entry into prostitution for many women and girls. Juvenile entry into systems of prostitution – sometimes referred to as child commercial sexual exploitation – is fairly routinely documented (Nixon et al. 2002; see also O'Connor and Yonkova 2018). Early research claiming that the average age of entry into prostitution was 13–14 years old (e.g., Silbert and Pines 1984; Weisberg 1985) has been challenged (Weitzer 2007). However, a summary of later work from Marianne Hester and Nicole Westmarland (2004: 55), bringing together findings from various jurisdictions, maintains that "most of the women and men involved in prostitution probably entered prostitution as young people, under the age of 18 or 21". While other studies put forward that at least a significant minority of people in systems of prostitution were first prostituted as children (Bindel et al. 2013; Clarke et al. 2012). Again, it is often those who are most marginalized who are at risk, and underage entry into prostitution has been associated with childhood abuse and

inequalities around education, racism, and poverty (Clarke et al. 2012; Kramer and Berg 2003; O'Connor and Breslin 2020).

Psychological and physical harms are compounded by systemic racism in policing and criminal justice responses. Black women, women of color, and Indigenous women are more likely than white women to be criminalized in the USA, including being more likely to be arrested for carrying condoms (Butler 2016; Ritchie 2017). Many migrant women in the sex industry lack access to basic rights of healthcare and economic support and are at risk of being detained and/or deported (O'Connor and Yonkova 2018). As discussed in more depth in the final section, prostitution, pornography, and violence against women must be analyzed in terms of intersecting inequalities of patriarchy, white supremacy, migration regimes, and legacies of colonization (Butler 2016; Deer 2015; MacKinnon 2011; Smiley 2016).

The Interconnectedness of Pornography and Prostitution

It is important to note that the high levels of violence and trauma, recorded in traditionally recognized forms of prostitution, are generally not considered in public debates about pornography. A picture of endemic violence, rape, and PTSD is not one that fits well with the glamorized version of "porn-chic" that has been prominent in popular media in much of the West in decent decades (Coy et al. 2011; Tyler 2011). Indeed, pornography and prostitution are often, both popularly and legally, conceived as separate entities (Spector 2006a; Whisnant 2004). With pornography, when harms are discussed, the focus has largely been in terms of consumption; harms through the mainstreaming of violent content (e.g., Dines 2010) as well as harms to women through consumption (e.g., use of pornography in intimate partner violence, see Tarzia and Tyler 2020), and broader potential harms to women as a class through the eroticizing of women's subordination and violence against women (e.g., Bart 1985; Itzin 1992). It is also important, however, to consider pornography through the prism of production and as part of the global sex industry, including harms in those in the pornography industry (Tyler 2015). As Karen Boyle (2000) has noted, debates about the negative effects of pornography consumption (otherwise referred to as "effects" research) have largely side-lined discussions about the harms of pornography production. In contrast, this section emphasizes the way in which there are crossovers between pornography and other forms of prostitution before a discussion of harms that can be understood as specific to pornography, in terms of production. These elements are important in better recognizing harms regarding pornography as a form of prostitution.

Pornography as Connected to Other Forms of Prostitution

Since the early 2000s, there has been significant documentation – both within and outside of the academy – of the expansion and normalization of the pornography industry and pornographic content (Boyle 2018; Dines 2010; McNair 2002; Paul

2005; Rich 2001; Tyler and Quek 2016; Williams 2004). Through processes that have become known as the "mainstreaming of pornography" or "pornification" (Tyler and Quek 2016) in the Global North, there was (and is) a burgeoning amount of pornographic content created, particularly in the United States (US). As the pornification trend gained momentum at the turn of the century (before the rise of internet pornography) the US pornography industry was reportedly creating at least 10,000 titles a year (Williams 2004). While the exact worth of the pornography industry remains difficult to ascertain with any great precision, there was widespread agreement around this time that in the US, it grossed more than the Hollywood film and popular music industries combined (McNair 2002; Rich 2001). Since then, new methods of distribution, coupled with new technology, have facilitated increasing consumption and changing patterns of consumption, for example, streaming on smartphones (Lim et al. 2017). Even as this is published, rapid advances in technology will further enable the buying and selling of sexual images and acts (e.g., through online platforms such as OnlyFans), further blurring the differences across and between different types of prostitution.

It is important to understand that, prior to these significant technological changes, connections across various forms of prostitution have been evident. Traditionally recognized forms of prostitution – such as brothel and street prostitution – are often linked, not only to each other, but to other forms of prostitution such as pornography, stripping, "camming" (or other forms of computer-mediated, or increasingly "platform-based" prostitution), and mail-order bride services. As Stark (2006) contends, both legal and illegal strands of the prostitution industry – including pornography – intertwine:

> Women and girls in prostitution rings are often used simultaneously in multiple systems of prostitution. Prostitution ring pimps use women and girls in mainstream venues such as strip clubs as well as underground prostitution venues where attendance is restricted. For instance, there are women who travel the mainstream strip circuit and they are simultaneously used as sex slaves in pornography shoots carried out by prostitution ring pimps. Other women are prostituted in a brothel during the day and used in pornography during the evenings. (Stark 2006: 46)

The movement of women from one form of prostitution to another is also mentioned in other research investigating women's experiences in prostitution (Farley 2020; Farley and Kelly 2000; Raphael and Shapiro 2002; Raymond 1995) and the pornography industry (O'Neal 2016). A study of more than 200 women in prostitution in Chicago, for instance, found that 54% of women who began in street prostitution moved on to other forms of prostitution including escort services, "exotic dancing," and pornography (Raphael and Shapiro 2002: 25). Furthermore, the multinational study from Farley et al. (2003), mentioned above, found that almost half of all those surveyed (49%) reported having had pornography made of them while in other forms of prostitution (Farley et al. 2003: 46) and that 47% of those interviewed reported that they were "upset by an attempt to make them do what had been seen in pornography" (Farley et al. 2003: 46). In addition to women moving from traditionally recognized forms of prostitution to pornography,

according to some of those within the industry, it is also common for women performing in pornography to work simultaneously in other forms of prostitution (Reed 2006; Simpson 2005). Sometimes, to supplement income from pornography, even well-known "porn stars," have been known to work in strip clubs and brothels (Berg 2016; Simpson 2005). In terms of lived experience, it can therefore be difficult to maintain a practical distinction between pornography and traditionally recognized forms of prostitution (Farley 2020). However, there is limited recent empirical research exploring these connections and the role of technological developments in further blurring the distinctions (cf. Berg 2016).

The integration of pornography with other forms of traditionally recognized prostitution is also evidenced through the use of pornography for "grooming" women and girls in prostitution (Giobbe 1990; Raymond 1995; MacKinnon 2006; Stark and Hodgson 2004). The use of pornography is a strategy often used by pimps (Stark and Hodgson 2004) to show women what will be expected of them in prostitution. In research conducted by the prostitution survivors' group WHISPER (Women Harmed in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt), 30% of women interviewed reported that pimps used pornography as a tool to instruct them (Giobbe 1990). Catharine MacKinnon (2006) also notes that the use of pornography as "seasoning" was mentioned by a number of prostituted women during the hearings into the anti-pornography ordinances in the US. She mentions one woman in particular who "told how pornography was used to train and season young girls in prostitution and how men would bring photographs of women in pornography being abused and say, in effect, "I want you to do this," and demand that the acts being inflicted on the women in the materials be specifically duplicated (MacKinnon 2006: 251). Such testimony also suggests that men who purchase sexual access to women in prostitution attempt to use pornography as a kind of instruction manual. A recent study of prostitution in Ireland, drawing on a wide range of sources including data from support services, case studies, interviews with practitioners, and analysis of the Escort Ireland website, reports that "[a]nother common fantasy that buyers demand is the 'porn star experience' (PSE), where women are required to perform the behaviours and sex acts typically seen in pornography" (O'Connor and Breslin 2020: 93). There are a variety of ways, therefore, that pornography and other forms of prostitution can be conceived of as mutually reinforcing (Tyler 2015).

Pornography as a Form of Prostitution

Spector (2006a: 9) states that in mainstream approaches to prostitution – both those that are pro-prostitution and those that favor restrictions – the focus remains on the individual woman in prostitution, while in approaches to pornography there is an observable shift away from this individual-centered approach, and instead the "social value of expressive liberty" is emphasized. In arguing for the social value of protecting pornography as expression, the focus shifts from production and the "rights" of the individuals involved in production, to the "rights" of consumers (Spector 2006b: 430). As Spector shows, this is a serious inconsistency which

creates flawed analyses of pornography in which the "individual worker" fades from view completely, "as if no pornography were live-actor pornography at all'"(2006b: 435).

However, when considering pornography from the position of production – that is understanding that real people performed real acts in order for it to be produced – it becomes difficult to see how theorizing on pornography has become so abstracted from prostitution, particularly given the increasingly amorphous use of "sex work" in the wider academic and popular literature (Tyler 2015). Whisnant addresses this issue directly in "Confronting Pornography: Some conceptual basics" and argues that "[p]ornography is the documentation of prostitution" (Whisnant 2004: 19). By way of example, Whisnant provides the following hypothetical scenario:

> Suppose Fred is making money by selling Gertrude's sex act to Harvey and reaping part or all of the proceeds. In short, Fred is a pimp. It then occurs to him that with this new technological innovation called the camera (or video camera, or webcam, etc.) he could sell Gertrude's sex act not just once, to Harvey, but many thousands of times to many thousands of different men...The structure, logic, and purpose of Fred's activity have not changed. He is still a pimp. He has simply become more savvy and enterprising...The basic elements of Gertrude's experience, similarly, have not changed: she is still exchanging sex acts for money. The only member of our original trio now having a significantly different experience is Harvey, who now has his sexual experience 'with' (at, on) Gertrude at some technological remove. He may like it this way or he may not, but keep in mind that he is getting the goods at a much lower price, with greater anonymity, and with the added benefit of not having to see himself as a john. (Whisnant 2004: 20)

Whisnant also counteracts the claim that pornography is qualitatively different from prostitution because men are paid for sex in pornography, too: "So essentially, a male prostitute has entered the scene and is now participating alongside the female prostitute. But what of it? The basic structure of pimp, prostitute, and customer remains intact" (2004: 20). Therefore, it is arguable, that the only significant change between the original form of prostitution and the finished product of pornography is the experience of the consumer. Considering pornography from the production side makes it look a lot more like prostitution than something which should be considered as entirely separate (Tyler 2015).

A number of writers and theorists, particularly those employing radical feminist analyses, have highlighted the similarities between pornography and prostitution, and have, moreover, argued that pornography *is* prostitution (Dines and Jensen 2006; Dines et al. 1998; Farley et al. 2003; MacKinnon 2006; Russell 1993; Whisnant 2004). Dines and Jensen (2006), arguing along the same lines as Whisnant (2004), state that "[w]hile pornography has never been treated as prostitution by the law, it's fundamentally the same exchange. The fact that sex is mediated through a magazine or movie doesn't change that, nor does that fact that women sometimes use pornography. The fundamentals remain: Men pay to use women for sexual pleasure" (Dines and Jensen 2006, n.p.). Farley puts it more simply: "Pornography is a specific form of prostitution, in which prostitution occurs and is documented" (Farley 2003: xiv). Russell (1993) maintains the focus on what happens to the women in

prostitution: "Does it really make sense that an act of prostitution in front of a camera is more acceptable than the same act performed in private. . .These women are not simulating sex. They are literally being fucked. . ." (Russell 1993: 18).

It is worth noting that the understanding that pornography *is* prostitution is also common to a number of works written by those from within the sex industry (e.g., Almodovar 2006; Lords 2004; Reed 2006). For instance, Almodovar (2006: 151), a self-described "retired prostitute" and "sex worker rights advocate" argues that a camera is the only difference between pornography and prostitution, even referring to pornography as "prostitution on camera". Furthermore, Almodovar (2006: 158) notes that while she disagrees with many aspects of a radical feminist understanding of prostitution, "I do agree with these [radical] feminists that pornography and prostitution are one and the same." That such differing perspectives converge on this particular issue is powerful evidence in support of the value of understanding pornography, and the harms of pornography, through the prism of systems of prostitution. In doing this, it forces a consideration of the above harms as potentially concomitant and provides a way to think about similar issues of violence and trauma that women in pornography might also experience.

Experiences of Abuse in Pornography Production

There are very limited studies on the experiences of harm and trauma in the pornography industry (Waltman 2012; Tyler 2015; cf. Choi et al. 2009). Given the comparison and connections in the sections above, however, there are a variety of reasons to understand that certain harms – such as exposure to physical and sexual violence as well as severe psychological stress – are spread across forms of prostitution, including pornography production. As Waltman (2012: 8) posits: "testimonial evidence on violence, coercion and trauma during pornography production . . . mirror both quantitative and qualitative data on these subjects in the lives of prostituted women around the world." Furthermore, there are examples from first person accounts and industry reporting that indicate that experiences of harm, particularly around violence and sexual violence, are not uncommon.

Increasing numbers of women, particularly those based in the US pornography industry, have spoken about their experiences of abuse and assault while on set. Sometimes this has been in the form of memoir, as is the case with Jenna Jameson (2004; for commentary see: Dines 2010; Tyler 2011) – one of the most famous "porn stars" of the early 2000s – and, at others, in pornography industry publications (e.g., Ross 2000, 2004) and mainstream media publications (e.g., Amis 2001; Gira Grant 2015; Snow 2017). In such accounts, women have publicly provided descriptions of rape by male pornography performers (at times encouraged or intended by directors for the purposes of producing content), choking by directors, deception negating consent in terms of sex acts to be performed, physical harms, and psychological trauma. There is a consistent theme that emerges of a culture within the pornography industry where these kinds of harms are normalized and/or frequently accepted; an issue brought to greater public attention in the recent reporting of multiple sexual

assault and rape charges against Ron Jeremy, arguably the most prominent figure in US pornography production over several decades (Jacobs 2020). As Boyle (2000: 193) concludes from such evidence: "the testimonies of women who have been harmed in the production and consumption of pornography demonstrate a strong link between pornography and violence."

The brutality of the treatment described in these public accounts is significantly at odds with the glamourized version of pornography prominent in popular culture. It has, however, been acknowledged in industry publications, such as *Adult Video News* (*AVN*), particularly since the rise of so-called gonzo pornography, which saw a significant increase in more "extreme" and violent content in the 2000s (Dines 2010; Jensen 2007). The following two accounts, for example, were published in *AVN*:

> He was allowed to hit hard, choke hard and to pull hair hard. There were times when he slapped me so hard that he left a mark. He choked me while lifting me off the ground. He shoved my face into the cement floor. He threw me over his shoulder, cutting off my air. Choking me was one of the worst things...He was hurting the girls. He was given the green light to hurt the women for the effect of the video. (Starr quoted in Ross 2000, n.p.)
>
> This is porn but they dig so deep into the person's head - this is supposed to be degrading. . .They want you to cry. They want you to really, really cry. They want you to have an emotional breakdown right there. They want to see it all and then they want to fuck you while you're crying. They will literally beat you up in the process. . .I got punched in the ribs. I am completely bruised up. . . . (Hunter quoted in Ross 2004, n.p.)

In research documenting the experiences of women in prostitution, such incidents tend to be recognized as part of broader patterns of abuse, but in the context of pornography they are often cast as "isolated incidents," seemingly unconnected to the functioning of the pornography industry itself (Waltman 2012). However, these examples from pornography production do need to be seen in the context of broader patterns of documented abuse that women experience in other parts of the sex industry (Waltman 2012) and can be seen to mirror women's experiences found in studies of violence against women in prostitution as detailed above. It is possible, therefore, for such experiences to be understood as part of a continuum of violence against women (Kelly 1988), perpetrated through different forms of prostitution.

Pornography and Harms of Distribution

Positioning pornography as a form of prostitution, and considering harms through the prism of production, also raises a consideration that subsequent distribution of pornography can cause additional kinds of harm to those who have been used in its making. Russell (1993: 18–19) has claimed, for example, that "because this abuse is photographed for public consumption, and because the women being photographed invariably have no control over what happens to the pictures, movies, or videos for the rest of their lives, the harm suffered by prostitutes [sic] who are used to make pornography is often significantly more severe." Moreover, drawing on studies regarding the psychological harms experienced by women in systems of prostitution,

Waltman (2012: 9) asserts that pornography, "as a specific branch of prostitution, is particularly vicious and cruel to women." To conceptualize pornography as a form of prostitution, and one that may carry additional types of harm for the women involved in its making, is not to suggest that there are forms of prostitution that are not harmful. It is also not intended to open an argument about the relative merits or of one form of prostitution over the other. Rather it is important to address claims that pornography as a form of "indoor prostitution" is either harmless, or clearly less harmful than other forms of prostitution (e.g., Johnson 2002; McElroy 1995; Weitzer 2005).

Again, there are insights to be gained from those who have made public accounts of their time in the pornography industry. For instance, Jameson (2004) – mentioned above – in her autobiography, remarks on the stress and fear associated with being recognized. As she describes:

> Most girls get their first experience in gonzo films – in which they're taken to a crappy studio apartment in Mission Hills and penetrated in every hole possible by some abusive asshole who thinks her name is Bitch. And these girls...go home afterward and pledge never to do it again because it was such a terrible experience. But, unfortunately, they can't take that experience back, so they live the rest of their days in fear that their relatives, their co-workers, or their children will find out, which they inevitably do. (Jameson as quoted in Dines 2010: 39)

There are points within the autobiography where Jameson recounts the experience of pornography production as unpleasant and at times as abusive, but here she also emphasizes that there is an additional threat, or potential harm, because a record of that experience has been created. Furthermore, the record has been created specifically for the purpose of sale and distribution and cannot be erased after someone has chosen to exit the industry. These conditions, coupled with high rates of pornography consumption, suggest the fear of being recognized or "found out" is well-founded. There are similarities with the ongoing fears and harms documented in more recent research dealing with elements of image-based sexual abuse (IBSA), also sometimes referred to as "revenge pornography" (e.g., McGlynn et al. 2021).

Unlike the recent literature on IBSA, however, questions of harms associated with pornography production and distribution are not especially new. Writing from a radical feminist perspective, for example, MacKinnon was challenging readers to think about the harms of pornography, from the perspective of women used in production, back in the early 1990s:

> You hear the camera clicking or whirring as you are being hurt, keeping in time to the rhythm of your pain. You always know that the pictures are out there somewhere, sold or traded or shown around or just kept in a drawer. In them, what was done to you is immortal. He has them; someone, anyone, has seen you there, that way. This is unbearable. What he felt as he watched you as he used you is always being done again and lived again, and felt again though the pictures. . . . (MacKinnon 1993: 4)

But overlapping with the contemporary concerns about IBSA, the potential for the ongoing nature of harm is highlighted in MacKinnon's analysis. In this case, she

emphasizes that women – even after exiting the sex industry – bear the burden of knowing that the record of their time in the industry can still be viewed by others.

In commenting on the analysis put forward by MacKinnon, Tanya Horeck (2004: 83) notes "how technologies of vision not only replay and repeat women's original trauma, but produce a new dimension of pain". And as Tyler (2015: 121) draws out, this "new dimension of pain" can also involve the distress of knowing, not only that the pornographic images are still circulating, but also knowing that they may be used in the prostitution of others. It is not uncommon for pornography to be used by pimps as part of a process of "grooming" or "training" girls and women for prostitution (Giobbe 1990; Raymond 1995; MacKinnon 2006), as noted earlier, and the use of pornography can be a strategy used by pimps and johns (Stark and Hodgson 2004) to show women what will be expected of them. Reflecting on this cycle of abuse, one sex trade survivor is quoted by Christine Stark and Carol Hodgson, explaining how these connections weigh on her:

> The man who prostituted me showed me pictures of what he was going to do to me and he would "practice" on me what was happening in the picture. That's how I learned what to do for the trick. The hard thing is, I know the pornography he made of me is being used to hurt others. (quoted in Stark and Hodgson 2004: 21)

Circumstances such as this might also contribute to the distress or multi-traumatic experience of pornography production for some survivors. Indeed, the previously cited study from Farley et al. (2003) regarding psychological distress and prostitution found that women involved in pornography production "had significantly more severe symptoms of PTSD than did women who did not have pornography made of them" (Farley 2007: 146).

Therefore, for a range of reasons outlined in the above sub-sections, a clear distinction between prostitution and pornography as contexts for, and forms of, sexual exploitation, is difficult to maintain both conceptually and experientially. Pornography can be understood as a system of prostitution and the cross-cutting evidence on harms requires analyses that connect the impacts of such violation on women as a class. One way of bringing these aspects together, and developing relevant structural analyses, is through thinking about systems of prostitution.

Understanding Systems of Prostitution

The weight of evidence across different studies indicates that violence is integral to prostitution, with similar experiences in the production of pornography, and that the extensive psychological harms and trauma experienced by women and girls reflect the dehumanization of being bought and sold for sex. A radical feminist approach to theorizing from women's lived experience of prostitution builds from these insights to contend that prostitution exists on what Liz Kelly (1988) has conceptualized as the "continuum of violence against women," with a wide range of impacts for women's health and wellbeing. Radical feminist analyses of prostitution tend to be centered

around the issue of harm, both the harm done directly to women in systems of prostitution and the harm done to women as a class through the existence of systems of prostitution (Barry 1995). These analyses often emphasizes the violence that many women in prostitution suffer at the hands of pimps and johns, but the harm caused through the prostitution acts themselves is also a focal point (Coy et al. 2019; Barry 1995; Farley et al. 2003; Jeffreys 1997; Raymond 2013). That is to say, acts of prostitution are seen as harmful in and of themselves, even if there is no additional physical violence. The sex required in systems of prostitution is seen as objectifying and dehumanizing (Barry 1995; Tyler 2012), and as a violation of women's human rights (Farley et al. 2003; Jeffreys 1997; Raymond 1995). Once prostitution is understood as violence, analytic attention turns to the ways in which both prostitution and pornography, as with all violence against women, are "systemic" and "systematic," "in the context of poverty, imperialism, colonialism and racism" (MacKinnon 2006: 29; see also: Gupta 2017). This recognition underpins Stark and Hodgson (2004) conceptualization of "systems of prostitution."

A radical feminist analysis considers prostitution within the structural context of patriarchy, and it is the structural inequalities between men and women under patriarchy that are considered to make prostitution possible (Dworkin 1993; Miriam 2005). It is crucial to understand how systems of prostitution also rely on racial and economic inequalities and that these intersect with the inequalities women as a class experience vis-à-vis men as a class (e.g., Butler 2016; Carter and Giobbe 1999; Nelson 1993): what bell hooks (2013) terms "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy." Racism and sexism in pornography, for example, interact in pornography in ways that reflect colonial dynamics of white supremacy and "patriarchal capitalism," where profit is made from exploitation and commodification of Black women's bodies (Benard 2016; Butler 2016). Writing with reference to trafficking of Native women in the US, Sarah Deer (2015) notes that prostitution has "colonial roots" in that "the legacy of relocation, chronic poverty and historical trauma significantly reduces the opportunities available to Native women and make them vulnerable to prostitution and sex trafficking" (p. 75). While Cheryl Nelson Butler (2016: 103) draws on critical race feminism to analyze prostitution and trafficking in the US, demonstrating how "race, gender, age and class biases systematically push people of colour into prostitution and close shut the escape paths." Framing engagement in pornography and prostitution in terms of women's agency decontextualizes both systems and the unequal historical and contemporary power dynamics that they are rooted in. While individual women may experience a sense of agency from being involved in systems of prostitution, focusing on individual choice obscures the contexts such as patriarchal capitalism and white supremacy (Barry 1995; Benard 2016). Akeia A.F. Benard and Sarah Deer both also highlight the role of white men (and women) as colonizers who institutionalized the sexual exploitation of women of color. At a transnational level, these power dynamics are evident in sex tourism, resting on the sexualization of young women of color by privileged Western men and the economic inequalities of globalized patriarchy (Rosario Sanchez 2015). Samhita Mukhopadhyay (2008: 157) summarizes these dynamics by referring to the prostitution system as the "entertain white men" industry.

Conclusion

What this means for our understanding of violence against women and health in systems of prostitution is multi-faceted. As Butler (2016) identifies, lack of access to health care is itself an aspect of class oppression and poverty that shapes how women are economically coerced into prostitution. The over-representation of minoritized women, women of color, and migrant women in systems of prostitution further demonstrates that the most socially marginalized women and girls are most likely to be exploited in systems of prostitution and are subject to the most negative consequences (Nelson 1993; Butler 2016; Gupta 2017). In the short-term, health services and specialist support services should be delivered in ways that are accessible to women irrespective of citizenship status and take into account that women's experiences and needs differ according to social location (Zimmerman et al. 2006). The extensive evidence base on how systems of prostitution harm women's health and wellbeing demonstrates the need for more far-reaching responses. Sexual exploitation undermines women's bodily integrity and rights to live free from violence, core elements of sexual health and human rights (Benard 2016). Psychological trauma limits women's capacity to achieve potential and seriously diminishes quality of life. Prevention of such harms is therefore imperative. Prevention must be grounded in addressing the underlying inequalities that fuel systems of prostitution and, furthermore, must acknowledge the centrality of male sexual entitlement and demand for sexual access to women's bodies through all forms of prostitution, including pornography.

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