Thinking Sociologically About Image-Based Sexual Abuse: The Contribution of Male Peer Support Theory

Walter S. DeKeseredy1 and Martin D. Schwartz2

Abstract
Often referred to by journalists, policy makers, and the general public as revenge porn, image-based sexual abuse is starting to garner serious legal and social scientific attention. However, theoretical developments have thus far not kept pace with the growing empirical and legal literature on this electronic variant of woman abuse. Further, this problem cannot adequately be explained by gender-blind theories, as there is a strong relationship between gender and women’s risk of being harmed by image-based sexual abuse by current and former intimate male partners. Thus, the main objective of this article is to address this concern by applying male peer support theory.

Keywords
image-based sexual abuse, separation/divorce, male peer support, gender

There is no question that the major advances in technology and cyber technology in recent years have radically affected the map of crime. A body of interdisciplinary knowledge provides ample empirical support for the claim that “technology is persistently used as either a facilitator or as the arena for crime perpetration, from facilitating illegal prescription drugs to collection of donations under false pretenses” (Vargas Martin, Garcia-Ruiz, & Edwards, 2011, p. xxi). Yet, until recently, the bulk of the research on the “dark side” of new technologies either ignored or overlooked the fact that various technologies are now tools used by many men to exert control and power over their current and former intimate female partners (Navarro, Clevenger, & Marcum, 2016). As well, leading experts on violence against women only started to address this problem in the past few years. In fairness, though, as Goodmark (2011) puts it, “When the first domestic violence and stalking laws were passed, no one could have foreseen how technology would facilitate abuse, stalking, and harassment” (p. 195).

Unfortunately, there will be newer electronic means of inflicting pain in the near future, and researchers will probably never be able to keep up with the ever growing and changing technologies. Of central concern in this article is one, in particular, that is causing much pain and suffering in this current era—image-based sexual abuse. Often referred to by journalists, policy makers, and members of the general public as revenge porn, there is a huge audience for such imagery. A growing cadre of scholars, especially in Australia (e.g., Powell & Henry, 2015), are starting to collect rich social scientific data on its extent, distribution, and consequences. However, to date, there is a conspicuous absence of sociological theoretical work on image-based sexual abuse and other electronic forms of woman abuse. What has been done thus far has mainly examined the explanatory value of what many call gender-blind criminological perspectives (Reyns, Henson, & Holt, 2016), such as Cohen and Felson’s (1979) routine activity theory and Gottfredson and Hirschi’s (1990) general theory of crime. That there is a strong relationship between gender and women’s risk of being targeted by image-based sexual abuse cannot be adequately accounted for through the use of “male stream” theories like these ones (DeKeseredy, Dragiewicz, & Schwartz, 2017; Messerschmidt, 1993). Hence, the main objective of this article is to address this problem by applying male peer support theory, a perspective that is heavily...
influenced by feminist schools of thought and the masculinities literature.

**Image-Based Sexual Abuse: Definition, Extent, and Distribution**

Again, image-based sexual abuse is often referred to as revenge porn. It is also termed in some academic and legal circles as *nonconsensual pornography* or *involuntary pornography* (Franks, 2014). The rationale for using the term image-based sexual abuse is informed by the work of McGlynn and Rackley (2016). First, as these feminist legal scholars correctly point out, it is not only ex-partners seeking revenge who nonconsensually share sexual images. There are also people who do so for a variety of other reasons, such as to make money, for a “joke,” or for no particular reason at all. McGlynn and Rackley additionally note that the term revenge porn puts too much emphasis on the perpetrators’ motives at the expense of the damage done to victims. Consider, too, that images created without prior consent are also often shared. One prime example is the case of a highly publicized sexual assault in Steubenville, OH. Two high school football players were convicted of raping a girl, while she was drunk after attending several parties held on August 11, 2012, right before the new school year began. What brought the incident to light was the posting of videos and photographs of the incident on YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook by those who were there. It was news and “grist for the rumor mill” throughout the area by the next day (DeKeseredy, Muzzatti, & Donnermeyer, 2014).

This incident tells us much about the role of *male peer support*, which is attachments to male peers and the resources that these men provide that encourage and legitimate woman abuse (DeKeseredy, 1988). For example, other males at the party did nothing to stop the rape and filming of it. Additionally, football in this area of economic decline is placed on a high pedestal, and there are tight-knit relationships between the sheriff and other community leaders with the football coach, team, and parents of the players. Keep in mind, too, the reaction of several young college-aged men, one of whom was enrolled at The Ohio State University and from the same county where the Steubenville incident occurred. Caught on a cell phone camera video by a friend, while he was drunk at a party, he laughingly proclaimed, “They raped her harder than that cop raped Marsellus Wallace in *Pulp Fiction*. Have you seen that?” He then proceeded to concoct several other analogies, making fun of the incident as if it was the replay of a football game telecast. Referring to this young man’s insensitive quips as a form of comedy, another partygoer tosses out the compliment, “He comes up with theme so fast.” That video also went viral, adding another layer of shame to the Steubenville case (DeKeseredy et al., 2014).

For McGlynn and Rackley (2016), the concept of image-based sexual abuse also emphasizes the connection between the nonconsensual use of private sexual images and other forms of sexual violence such as what the aforementioned young woman endured. Similar to the pioneering conceptual work of Kelly (1998, 2012), McGlynn and Rackley situate image-based sexual abuse on the continuum of sexual violence, alongside other forms of abuse attacking women’s sexual autonomy, identities and integrity. Labeling and understanding these practices as sexual offences is also vital to ensuring appropriate support and protections for victims, such as the need to reform the law to grant victims anonymity to encourage them to come forward to report practices to the police. (p. 1)

Regardless of which term or definition one prefers, the images and videos we are examining here are typically made by men with the consent of the women they were intimately involved with, but then distributed online without their consent following women’s termination of a relationship (Salter & Crofts, 2015).

Image-based sexual abuse websites and blogs first appeared on the Internet in 2000 and started to gain U.S. national attention in 2010 following the creation of *IsAnyoneUp.com*. In their history of revenge porn, Lamphere and Pikciunas (2016) note, The creator, Hunter Moore, a 25-year-old man from Sacramento, California, began the website which featured sexually explicit photos, a link to the person in the photo’s Facebook, Twitter, and/or Tumbler, as well as personal information about the person. The site allowed anonymous submissions of photos of any person to its database, and at one point it had reached a rate of over 30 million views per month. (p. 148)

Leading experts in the field, such as La Trobe University’s Dr. Nicola Henry, state that there is a “massive potential audience for revenge porn” (cited in Marriner, 2015, p. 1). Most of the websites, though, are underground and people “trade” nonconsensual sexual images for bitcoins. Also referred to a cryptocurrency, briefly, bitcoin is a form of digital currency and is decentralized. In other words, no single bank or institution controls the bitcoin currency. Moreover, users can hold multiple bitcoin addresses that are not linked to names, addresses, or other personally identifying information (CoinDesk, 2015).

Few studies to date have actually measured the extent of image-based sexual abuse (Crisafi, Mullins, & Jasinski, 2016), but it is estimated that there are now more than 3,000 online sites and the bulk of the perpetrators who post on them are male ex-husbands, ex-boyfriends, and ex-lovers (*The Economist*, 2014; Lamphere & Pikciunas, 2016). Further, McAfee Security’s (2013) *Love, Relationships, and Technology Survey* uncovered that 1 in the 10 ex-partners threatened to post sexually explicit pictures of their former partners online, and 60% of these threats were carried out. Further, an internal evaluation of 1,244 people done by the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative found that over 50% of victims stated that their naked pictures appeared next to their full name and social network profile. Over 20% of victims reported that their e-mail addresses and telephone numbers appeared next to their photos, and over 80%...
of victims experienced severe emotional distress and anxiety (Citron & Franks, 2014).

Another relevant study is worth briefly mentioning here because it is international in scope. Powell and Henry (2015) surveyed nearly 3,000 Australians (1,481 women and 1,451 men) aged 18–54 and found that 1 in 10 stated that someone had posted online or sent to others nude or seminude pictures of them without their permission, and 9.6% reported that someone threatened to post such images or to send them to others. Some cautionary notes, however, are required. The researchers state that their survey was not specifically designed to focus on image-based sexual abuse, and thus there is no way of knowing the motives behind the threats and actual sharing. Nor are Powell and Henry able to determine whether the images were shared by a current or former intimate partner, relative, friend, acquaintance, or stranger. It is also unknown whether the images were accompanied by personal or identifying information for the purpose of humiliating or harassing victims.

The harm done by image-based sexual abuse is often irreparable as demonstrated by Holly Jacobs’s experiences. She is the founder of the advocacy group End Revenge Porn, and her ex-boyfriend hacked into her Facebook profile and posted sexually explicit images for relatives and friends to see prior to disseminating more material through revenge porn websites and e-mailing material to her employers (Miller, 2013). Revenge porn sites were then used by groups of men to harass and abuse Jacobs (Salter & Crofts, 2015). She stated on her website:

Due to this act, I have had to legally change my name, stop publishing in my field (I am a Ph.D. student), stop networking (giving presentations, going to conferences), change my email address four times and my phone number three times, change jobs, and explain to human resources at my school that I am not a sexual predator on campus. (Cited in Salter & Crofts, 2015, p. 236)

Sexting is now a common practice, and it, too, can be a method of engaging in image-based sexual abuse. Sexting involves sharing compromising photos, videos, or written information with other people via texts or other electronic means (Klein, 2012). Generally, though, it is done with a smartphone or tablet (Lamphere & Pikciunas, 2016; Weins, 2014). In most cases, the original aim of the person sending out the photos, particularly for adolescents, is to share flirty or sex-themed pictures with intimate friends, under the presumption that they will not be shared. This is usually exactly what happens, but sometimes the recipient is not as trustworthy as the sender hoped, and the photo gets shared with others. Our major concern in this article is the vicious and purposeful attempt to ruin the life of the sender, often in revenge for breaking up the relationship, by posting such photos widely or on sites that not only make them widely available (worldwide to boot) but also identify the image by name, e-mail address, or other information that allows predators and trolls on the Internet to directly contact and harass the original sender. This new technology is causing lifelong damage for numerous people (Shariff & DeMartini, 2016).

Sexting is a relatively new behavior. Although Brown, Keller, and Stern (2009) assert that it can be dated back to an earlier era when images were taken and printed out with the instant Polaroid camera, others insist that the earliest published report on sexting dates back to a 2004 article in the Canadian national newspaper The Globe and Mail. It concerned a story about a sexually explicit text message shared between famous professional soccer player David Beckham and his assistant (Lamphere & Pikciunas, 2016). With a phenomenon as recent as this, there certainly are no reliable estimates yet of the number of women who are harmed by sexting. Since the primary mechanism to take and send these photos are the suddenly ubiquitous cell phones with cameras, the pervasive use of sexting had to wait until cell phones came into wide use. However, another reason why we do not know much about adult sexting is that research so far on the subject has focussed on the prevalence of youth and young adult sexting. This social scientific literature, however, is fast growing (Jaishankar, 2009; Reed, Tolman, & Ward, 2016; Shariff & DeMartini, 2016). Still, there is so little known today that extensive research will be necessary before we have a solid basis for discussion.

The problem of image-based sexual abuse will likely get worse. There is no particular reason to believe that men are reducing their use of sexist, racist, or homophobic comments or verbal attacks. Certainly, this is nothing new. Men have been making these remarks in public, whether in bars or pubs, in the workplace, or in any other meeting ground (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013). The difference is that today the same comments can gain a wider audience than a few men who happen to be present. Hundreds or thousands of people can read comments, and comments and images can stay on the Internet for the foreseeable future. With the constant stream of new technologies, it is easy for gender-related offenses inflicted by some new inventions to take place.

Why do men use image-based sexual violence? More data than what were presented here are needed to help answer this question. We also need sound theories not only for scientific reasons but also to inform effective policies. In the words of Lewin (1951), the founder of modern social psychology, “There is nothing so practical as good theory” (p. 169). We contend that male peer support theory is applicable, given that variants of this perspective are successfully used to explain other forms of woman abuse, including sexual assault in dating and during and after separation/divorce (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013).

**Male Peer Support Theory**

Disseminating image-based sexual abuse is a means of “doing masculinity” in a culturally specific way (Messerschmidt, 1993). Moreover, masculinities studies show us that the decision to be violent to women and others is affected by gender, class, and race/ethnic relations that structure the resources available to accomplish what men feel provides their masculine
identities. Hegemonic or dominant masculine discourses and practices, including the abuse of women, are learned through personal and impersonal interactions with significant others such as teachers, journalists, parents, entertainers, and politicians (Connell, 1995; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2005). Yet the all-male patriarchal subculture is one of the most important agents of socialization (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013). Membership in such a peer group, regardless of its social class or race/ethnic composition, promotes and legitimates the image-based sexual abuse of women.

Male peer support theory was originally developed by DeKeseredy (1988) to explain why some men, due to their attachments to patriarchal and abusive male peers, viewed some college female dating partners as appropriate targets for physical, sexual, and psychological assaults. However, this perspective was also too focused on social psychological factors, and hence DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1993) revised it to take into account broader social forces. They assert that abusive patriarchal men situated in a patriarchal rape-supportive culture have male friends with similar beliefs and values who act to develop and then reinforce beliefs and values that promote the abuse of women, and in particular those women who represented a threat to male patriarchal authority (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). These men provide attachments to other abusive men, and resources that involve specific verbal and emotional support. This includes a vocabulary of motive that defines some women as legitimate objects of abuse and sexual assault. Nearly 30 years of international quantitative and qualitative research (as outlined in DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013) in a variety of contexts confirms that male peer support allows men to feel normal and justified when committing violence against current and former intimate partners.

Although the relationship between male peer support and woman abuse is fairly complex, a relatively new body of sociological knowledge strongly indicates that the pornography industry and pornography consumption is a major part of the equation. Pornography reflects, amplifies, and provides support for sexist attitudes and values, and hence DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1993) revised it to take into account broader social forces. They assert that abusive patriarchal men situated in a patriarchal rape-supportive culture have male friends with similar beliefs and values who act to develop and then reinforce beliefs and values that promote the abuse of women, and in particular those women who represented a threat to male patriarchal authority (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). These men provide attachments to other abusive men, and resources that involve specific verbal and emotional support. This includes a vocabulary of motive that defines some women as legitimate objects of abuse and sexual assault. Nearly 30 years of international quantitative and qualitative research (as outlined in DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013) in a variety of contexts confirms that male peer support allows men to feel normal and justified when committing violence against current and former intimate partners.

The Pornography Industry and Pornography Consumption

Recent studies show that pornography plays a major role in separation/divorce sexual assault (DeKeseredy, Dragiewicz, & Schwartz, 2017; DeKeseredy & Hall-Sanchez, 2016; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009; Hall-Sanchez, 2014). It is also related to the abuse of women in ongoing heterosexual relationships such as marriage (Bergen & Bogle, 2000; DeKeseredy & Corsianos, 2016). We are not referring to erotica that is “sexually suggestive or arousing material that is free of sexism, racism, and homophobia and is respectful of all human beings and animals portrayed” (Russell, 1993, p. 3). Rather, the conceptualization of porn that informs our empirical and theoretical work on the topic focuses squarely on what the pornography industry coins as “gonzo.” Such images and writings are the most profitable in the industry and have two primary things in common. First, females are characterized as subordinate to men, and the main role of actresses and models is the provision of sex to men. Second, in the words of Dines (2010), gonzo “depicts hard core, body-punishing sex in which women are demeaned and debased” (p. xi). These images are not rare. Actually, a routine feature of contemporary gonzo videos is painful anal penetration as well as brutal gang rape and men slapping or choking women or pulling their hair while they penetrate them orally, vaginally, and anally (DeKeseredy, 2015).

Bridges, Wosnitzer, Scharrer, Sun, and Liberman’s (2010) study of 304 scenes in 50 of the most popular pornography DVDs confirms the claim that gonzo is now mainstream porn. Nearly 90% contained physical aggression (mainly spanking, gagging, and slapping), and roughly 50% included verbal aggression, primarily name-calling. Not surprisingly, males constituted most of the perpetrators and the targets of their physical and verbal aggression were “overwhelmingly female.” Furthermore, the female targets often showed pleasure or responded neutrally to male aggression. What makes the data uncovered by Bridges et al. more troubling is research showing that the porn industry is rapidly producing more extreme violent and racist materials including those that are blatantly racist and that include underage actors (Brosi, Foubert, Bannon, & Yandell, 2011; DeKeseredy & Corsianos, 2016).

A common gonzo theme is revenge porn sex. A Google search using this term uncovered 2,730,000 results on April 4, 2016, with many of the videos being freely and easily accessible. A few examples of the titles uncovered in this search are Submit Your Bitch, Cheerleader Revenge, Hubbie Revenge, and Revenge Time. Some porn scholars even argue that a substantial amount of other types of porn videos are also “exercises in revenge” (DeKeseredy & Corsianos, 2016; Dines, 2010; Jensen, 2007). Based on his interviews with young men who watch porn, Kimmel (2008) argues that the following captures the mind-set of many of them: “You don’t have sex with women because you desire them: sex is the weapon by which you get even with them, or, even humiliate them” (p. 182). He adds, They’re not getting mad; they’re vicariously getting even. Getting back at a world that deprives them of power and control, getting even with those haughty women who deny them sex even while they invite desire, getting back at the bitches and “hos” who, in the cosmology of Guyland, have all the power. (p. 188)

Actually, porn consumers can find practically anything they desire on the Internet and almost every group of people appears in today’s gonzos. For instance, on September 11, 2012, DeKeseredy, Muzzatti, and Donnermeyer (2014) conducted a Google search using the words “rural gonzo porn” and uncovered 108,000,000 results, with most of the videos also being freely and easily accessible. Another Google search, DeKeseredy et al. conducted on the same day using the words “farm girl porn” generated 16,000,000 results.
In sum, pornography has moved in a few decades from a lucrative underground business with ties to organized crime to a huge corporate-capitalist industry that operates openly and that is an integral part of a rape-supportive culture (DeKeseredy et al., in press; Jensen, 2007). The rapid growth of the Internet has also globalized access to violent and degrading pornographic materials on women and other potentially vulnerable groups in converged online and off-line environments. Such media can be diffused to millions of people in only seconds due to faster ways of disseminating digital media productions, and the Internet facilitates access for those seeking pornographic content whether it is legally recognized or not (DeKeseredy & Corsianos, 2016). What used to be rather difficult to obtain and a secret phenomenon is now accessible for larger groups and has subsequently become a huge business with operations around the world. The Internet not only facilitates access previously inaccessible materials, but it also buttresses social patriarchy and helps create an environment that normalizes hurtful sexuality, racism, and even seeking revenge on female ex-partners (Boyle, 2010; Dines, 2010; Shariff & DeMartini, 2016).

A few studies found that the contribution of pornography to woman abuse in intimate heterosexual relationships is related to male peer support (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998; 2009; Hall-Sanchez, 2014; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1998). Further, some men learn to sexually objectify women through their exposure to pornographic media (DeKeseredy & Corsianos, 2016; Dines, 2010). This is what Kimmel (2008) found in his research on “guys” (men between the ages of 16 and 26): “Guys tend to like the extreme stuff, the double penetration and humiliating scenes; they watch it together, in groups of guys, and they make fun of the women in the scene.” Kimmel also found that,

They get angry. Each time I happened on a group of guys engaged in group pornography consumption, they spent a good deal of time jiving with each other about what they’d like to do to the girl on the screen, calling her a whore and a bitch and cheering on the several men who will proceed to penetrate her simultaneously. (p. 187)

Male proprietoriness is also associated with male peer support (DeKeseredy, Rogness, & Schwartz, 2004; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009), and this concept is defined as “the tendency [of men] to think of women as sexual and reproductive ‘property’ they can own and exchange” (Wilson & Daly, 1992, p. 85). What is more, portraying women as male reproductive property is part and parcel of much of today’s pornography. Consider what Dines (2010) read in an ad for the site Gag Me Then Fuck Me,

Do you know what we say to things like romance and foreplay? We say fuck off! This is not another site with half-erect weenies trying to impress bold sluts. We take gorgeous young bitches and do what every man would REALLY like to do. We make them gag till their makeup starts running, and then they get all other holes sore—vaginal, anal, double penetration, anything brutal involving a cock and an orifice. And then we give them the sticky bath! (p. xix, emphasis in original)

We could easily provide more contemporary examples from thousands of porn sites that portray women as completely subservient to their husbands, boyfriends, and to other types of men. Note the site owned and operated by the Pornhub Network titled I Own You Bitch, which features hundreds of gonzos riddled with men treating women as their sexual property. Does watching such videos influence men to engage in image-based sexual abuse? This is an empirical question that can only be answered empirically, but, again, there are studies showing that men’s consumption of Internet pornography in general is related to various types of woman abuse.

**Off-Line and Online Male Peer Support Processes**

There are a variety of sociological and social psychological processes by which male peers influence men to victimize women, but the main point made by male peer support theorists is that such all-male groups encourage, justify, and support the abuse of women by their members to repair “damaged patriarchal masculinity” caused by current or former female partners (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2015; Messerschmidt, 1993; Raphael, 2001). In the case of women who exit relationships, male peer support motivates men to “lash out against the women...they can no longer control” (Bourgois, 1995, p. 214), and image-based sexual abuse is an effective way to do so. Sometimes it is seen as an option if these women cannot be physically located or if their location is known but the offenders are legally or economically precluded from seeing them face-to-face or communicating with them through electronic or other means (e.g., letters). For example, some vindictive men may post naked pictures of their ex-partners on social media sites because they received a restraining order or their ex-partners may live in distant countries. Others may have the same desire for humiliation, degradation, and control as many rapists but find that this can be accomplished electronically in addition to physically.

In off-line environments, there are various types of male peer support, but arguably the most powerful form is *informational support*, that is, guidance and advice that influences men to abuse women. Male peer support theory sees such informational support as a motivational factor, allowing men to develop proabuse attitudes and behaviors as a result of the encouragement and support of other males, if not the broader culture at large. Not only do many abusive men’s peers support verbally and publicly that sexual assault and other forms of abuse are legitimate means of maintaining patriarchal authority and control, they also serve as role models because many of them physically, sexually, and psychologically harm their own intimate partners (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013).

This can take a number of different paths. For example, if a patriarchal man’s peers see him as a failure with women because his partner wants to leave or has left him, he might be ridiculed because he “can’t control his woman”
Sexualization, Media, & Society

(DeKeseredy et al., 2004). Hence, like many college men who rape women and who post sexually explicit pictures of former female partners, he is more likely to assault her to regain status among his peers. Similar to other men who use a myriad of tactics to abuse female strangers, acquaintances, or dates, the image-based sexual assaults committed by men during or after the process of separation/divorce may have much more to do with the need to sustain status among their peers than a longing to regain a loving relationship or revenge (Godenzi, Schwartz, & DeKeseredy, 2001).

DeKeseredy and Olsson (2011) and DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2013) point to the fact that some men abuse women in a variety of ways but do not directly interact with abusive or sexist peers on face-to-face basis. This is not to say, though, that they are not influenced to victimize women by male peers. We are not seeing the rapid development of patriarchal online communities with members who never come into face-to-face contact with each other but frequently exchange written, audio, and visual communication with their peers (DeKeseredy & Corsianos, 2016). Kimmel’s (2008) research into online communications summarized below provides evidence of one variant of this subculture:

[O]nline chat rooms are, by their nature, spaces of social interaction among men. These chat rooms are the closest thing to a pornographic locker room in which bonding is often accomplished by competing with the other guys. In the online chat rooms, a description of a violent sexual encounter might be followed by another user’s “Oh yeah, well, last night I did this to the woman I was with . . .” which would be followed by another response designed to top even that. The competition can become heated—and violent—rather quickly. What we had stumbled on was the “homosocial” element in heterosexual porn viewing, the way in which anything, including intimacy with a member of the opposite sex, can be turned into a competitive moment with other guys. (p. 187)

There are, of course, other types of online male peer support subcultures including groups of men who use revenge pornography sites, some of whom “catalyze a campaign of harassment” against women they dislike or who try to stop their misogynist activities (Salter & Crofts, 2015, p. 239). As well, websites maintained by conservative men’s and fathers’ rights (FR) groups may encourage abusive men to hurt their ex-partners by portraying image-based sexual abuse and physical violence as acceptable solutions to their problems (Crisafi et al., 2016; DeKeseredy et al., in press). Below is what Paul Elam, founder of A Voice for Men, stated in one of his blogs:

There are women, and plenty of them, for which a solid ass kicking would be the least they deserve. The real question here is not whether these women deserve the business of a right hook, they obviously do, and some of them deserve one hard enough to leave them in an unconscious, innocuous pile on the ground if it serves to protect the innocent from imminent harm. The real question is whether men deserve to be able to physically defend themselves from assault . . . from a woman. (Cited in Kimmel, 2013, p. 118)

Certainly, we are not the only feminist scholars who point to the dangers of websites maintained by groups like Elam’s. Based on her in-depth ethnographic analysis, Dragiewicz (2011) concludes,

The use of FR web sites as places for like-minded men to seek out and receive peer support for violence-supportive attitudes is a serious concern for those interested in decreasing domestic violence, especially when we recognize their similarity to batterer accounts. The compatibility of FR commentary on the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) with patriarchal peer support for violence should not go unnoticed. (p. 137)

Conclusion

Sociological theories of online female victimization are in short supply. What is more, as stated previously, those that have been applied to this emerging problem are gender-blind because these criminological offerings were not specifically designed to address the gendered nature of online harms, such as image-based sexual abuse. Thus, of the very limited theoretical work done so far, male peer support theory seems the most promising. As well, considerable empirical support for our claim that male peer support and pornography consumption are both related to woman abuse were uncovered by separation/divorce sexual assault studies done by DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2009), DeKeseredy and Hall-Sanchez (2016), and Hall-Sanchez (2014).

If male peer support is strongly correlated with various types of woman abuse, what reason is there to believe that it would not be associated with image-based sexual abuse? As Dragiewicz (2011) concluded in her brief review of the scholarly evidence for male peer support for violence against women,

Studies have documented the influence of patriarchal peer support for men’s violence at the mesosystem level in a variety of contexts, including studies of battered wives, dating violence, batterer narratives, campus sexual assault, separation assault, and woman abuse in representative random samples. (p. 113)

Male peer support for woman abuse seems to be ubiquitous and definitely has a long history. The data gathered to date tell us much, but there are still many unanswered questions and new avenues to explore, including the connection between male peer support and the online victimization.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Some of the research reported here was funded by National Institute of Justice Grant 2002-WG-BX-0004 and financial assistance provided by the
Notes
1. See http://www.endrevengeporn.org/my-letter-to-legislators.html. This page, though, no longer exists.
2. The mesosystem is a level of influence included in ecological models of violence (Carlson, 1984; Heise, 1998; World Health Organization, 2002). Other levels included are individual, interpersonal, community, and culture. Dragiewicz (2011) asserts that “the mesosystem is the more important part of the ecological model because it describes the cumulative interaction of all of the other levels upon a person” (p. 20).

References
Bergen, R. K., & Bogle, K. A. (2000). Exploring the connection between pornography and sexual violence. *Violence and Victims, 15*, 227–234.

Boyle, K. (Ed.). (2010). *Everyday pornography*. London, England: Routledge.

Bridges, A. J., Wosnitzer, R., Scharrer, E., Sun, C., & Liberman, R. (2010). Aggression and sexual behavior in best-selling pornography videos: A content analysis. *Violence Against Women, 16*, 1065–1085.

Brodi, M., Foubert, J. D., Bannon, R. S., & Yandell, G. (2011). Effects of sorority members’ pornography use on bystander intervention in a sexual assault situation and rape myth acceptance. *Oracle, 6*, 26–35.

Brown, J. D., Keller, S., & Stern, S. (2009). Sex, sexuality, sexting, and sexed: Adolescents and the media. *The Prevention Researcher, 26*, 12–16.

Bourgois, P. (1995). *In search of respect: Selling crack in El Barrio*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Carlson, B. E. (1984). Causes and maintenance of domestic violence: An ecological analysis. *Social Services Review, 58*, 569–587.

Citron, D. K., & Franks, M. A. (2014). Criminalizing revenge porn. *Wake Forest Law Review, 49*, 345–391.

Cohen, L. E., & Felson, M. (1979). Social change and crime rate trends: A routine activity approach. *American Sociological Review, 44*, 588–608.

CoinDesk. (2015, March 1). *What is bitcoin?* Retrieved from http://www.coindesk.com/information/what-is-bitcoin/

Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Crisafi, D. N., Mullins, A. R., & Jasinski, J. L. (2016). The rise of the “virtual predator”: Technology and the expanding reach of intimate partner abuse. In J. N. Navarro, S. Clevenger, & C. D. Marcum (Eds.), *The intersection between intimate partner abuse, technology, and cybercrime: Examining the virtual enemy* (pp. 95–123). Durham, NC: Carolina University Press.

DeKeseredy, W. S. (1988). Woman abuse in dating relationships: The relevance of social support theory. *Journal of Family Violence, 3*, 1–13.

DeKeseredy, W. S. (2015). Critical criminological understandings of adult pornography and woman abuse: New progressive directions in research and theory. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy, 4*, 4–21.

DeKeseredy, W. S., & Corsianos, M. (2016). *Violence against women in pornography*. New York, NY: Routledge.

DeKeseredy, W. S., Dragejwicz, M., & Schwartz, M. D. (in press). *Abusive endings: Separation/divorce violence against women*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

DeKeseredy, W. S., Dragejwicz, M., & Schwartz, M. D. (2017). *Abusive endings: Separation and divorce violence against women*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

DeKeseredy, W. S., & Hall-Sanchez, A. (2016). Adult pornography and violence against women in the heartland: Results from a rural southeast Ohio study. *Violence Against Women*. doi:10.177/1077801216648795

DeKeseredy, W. S., Muzzatti, S. L., & Donnemeyer, J. F. (2014). Mad men in bib overalls: Media’s hijacking and pornification of rural culture. *Critical Criminology, 22*, 179–197.

DeKeseredy, W. S., & Olsson, P. (2011). Adult pornography, male peer support, and violence against women: The contribution of the “dark side” of the internet. In M. Vargas Martin, M. Garcia-Ruiz, & A. Edwards (Eds.), *Technology for facilitating humanity and combating social deviations: Interdisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 34–50). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

DeKeseredy, W. S., Rogness, M., & Schwartz, M. D. (2004). Separation/divorce sexual assault: The current state of social scientific knowledge. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 9*, 675–691.

DeKeseredy, W. S., & Schwartz, M. D. (1993). Male peer support and woman abuse: An expansion of DeKeseredy’s model. *Sociological Spectrum, 13*, 393–413.

DeKeseredy, W. S., & Schwartz, M. D. (1998). *Woman abuse on campus: Results from the Canadian national survey*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

DeKeseredy, W. S., & Schwartz, M. D. (2005). Masculinities and interpersonal violence. In M. S. Kimmel, J. Hearn, & R. W. Connell (Eds.), *Handbook of studies on men and masculinities* (pp. 353–366). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

DeKeseredy, W. S., & Schwartz, M. D. (2009). *Dangerous exits: Escaping abusive relationships in rural America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

DeKeseredy, W. S., & Schwartz, M. D. (2013). Male peer support and violence against women: The history and verification of a theory. *Boston, MA: Northeastern University.*

Dines, G. (2010). *Pornland: How porn has hijacked our sexuality*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Dragiewicz, M. (2011). *Equality with a vengeance: Men’s rights groups, battered women, and antifeminist backlash*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.

Franks, M. A. (2014). *Drafting an effective “revenge porn” law: A guide for legislators*. Retrieved from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2468823

Godenzi, A., Schwartz, M. D., & DeKeseredy, W. S. (2001). Toward a gendered social bond/male peer support theory of university woman abuse. *Critical Criminology, 10*, 1–16.

Goodmark, L. (2011). State, national, and international legal initiatives to address violence against women: A survey. In C. M. Rennzetti, J. L. Edleson, & R. Kennedy Bergen (Eds.), *Sourcebook on violence against women* (2nd ed., pp. 191–208). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
