Social Work and Pornography

Social Work and Pornography: Some
Ethical Considerations

Introduction

In the UK, recent high-profile cases where men convicted of murder were found to have viewed either child or extreme pornography have brought the subject into the spotlight, prompting high profile political and activist campaigns calling for restrictions to be placed on access to online pornography. Opening up discussion of this subject within social work becomes important, as social workers are increasingly called upon to become involved in providing court reports or undertaking risk assessments in respect of those whose pornography use brings them to the attention of criminal or civil authorities. A brief survey of the literature on social work and pornography points to the influence of particular feminist perspectives (e.g. Mullender, 2002). Another strand reveals a clinical orientation and a tendency to relate pornography to risk and harm (e.g. Calder, 2004). Both of these positions identify pornography as something reprehensible and act to close down discussion. We argue here following Cornell (2000) that the parameters of debates about pornography need to be expanded. Specifically the subject requires to be explored in the light of ethical frameworks and principles.

This article offers a preliminary exploration of an ethics of pornography (given its ubiquity, the focus is primarily on internet pornography). It was prompted, initially, by an encounter one of us had whilst teaching ethics to social work students, where discussion of the rights and wrongs of pornography elicited contributions ranging from it being 'wrong' because it was illegal, to feminist concerns that it objectified women, to it being 'a right' in pursuit of a healthy

sex life. The article attempts to tease out these positions. Several questions frame our approach: what are we talking about? How should pornography be understood from an ethical perspective? For example, does it do harm, either directly, or indirectly by objectifying women? Alternatively, can and should it be considered a right? What is and should be social work's role in relation to pornography? We conclude that while one may have moral reservations regarding pornography, a classical liberal presumption against restrictions on free expression ought to be the baseline upon which further discussion might proceed.

What are we talking about?

Cornell notes that pornography can be defined so broadly as to include 'all sexually explicit material, whether written or visual, no matter how it was produced and for what purpose' (2000: 2). By such a standard, a sex education text might be considered a form of pornography. In fact, it is almost impossible to separate out the subject of pornography from how we feel about it; it can variously be described as 'erotica' on the one hand and 'sexual abuse' on the other. It is also socially and culturally context-specific; works of art that depict the nude form may be viewed as acceptable whereas depictions of women's breasts on page 3 of the *Sun* newspaper or in so-called 'lads' mags' may not. There is, moreover, a huge variation within pornography, from what might be regarded by most observers as mildly titillating to images of extreme, violent or (what might be considered to be) unusual sexual expression; finding a catch-all definition that social work can make use of is, as a result, fundamentally problematic. Definitional difficulties notwithstanding, there is no doubt that pornography is widely available and used.

Incidence and prevalence of pornography
Hacking (1992) asserts that for a problem to be studied, it ought to be amenable to questions of incidence and prevalence. Pornography is quite evidently prevalent:

Whatever else it is, pornography is big business. With around 420 million webpages devoted to X-rated content, 700 million DVD rentals, and more than 13,000 hardcore films released each year, the worldwide annual revenue of the porn industry has been estimated at 97 billion dollars. People spend more on pornography every year than they do on movie tickets and more than they do on all the performing arts combined' (Maes and Levinson, 2012: 1).

Sums of money spent on pornography do not begin to take into account access what is freely available on the internet. Figures suggest that over 30% of internet traffic is pornography related; more of the internet is taken up with porn than with Google and e-mail combined (*Digital Journal*, 2012). Much of what is freely available on the internet reflects changing online technology with the evolution of Web 2.0, which has led to an explosion in social media and self-generated content. One expression of this has been a massive growth of 'home-made', 'amateur' or 'reality porn' and of 'sexting', where people post online images or videos of themselves and their partners engaged in sexual acts. The sheer scale and the seemingly voluntary nature of such developments assume a particular relevance in this discussion in that many of the arguments against the use of pornography operate on the basis that it is a minority interest, at odds with mainstream (respectable) opinion. The facts and the figures would suggest otherwise. Moreover, acceptance of adult pornography is widespread across societies (Diamond, 2010), perhaps reflecting a generational aspect. A study with a sample of 813, 18 to 26 year old U.S. college students (Carrol et al, 2009) revealed that roughly two thirds (67%) of young men and one half (49%) of young women agreed that viewing pornography is acceptable, whereas nearly 9 out of 10 (87%) young men and nearly one third (31%) of young women reported using pornography.

These figures, presumably, relate to adult pornography and while one may find this distasteful, it is not illegal. Child pornography takes us into a very different arena. Some things, according to Hacking (1991), are indisputably evil; there is no defense that might be imagined for instances of young children being abused for adult sexual gratification and Jenkins (2001) cautions that such crime is indeed real and highly organised. The trouble is, that the taboo surrounding the subject means that most of us have little idea

of what is being spoken about when we hear talk of 'child pornography' and our thoughts are drawn towards some of the more lurid examples that we hear of in the media. In fact, prosecutions for possession of child pornography involve a range of images from 'everyday and perhaps accidental pictures involving either no overt erotic content, or minimal content (such as showing a child's underwear) at one extreme, to pictures showing actual rape and penetration of a child, or other gross acts of obscenity at the other' (Quayle, 2009: 6). Besides, the fact that the international definition of a child is anyone under the age of 18 would suggest that viewing self-generated images of a sexually and intellectually mature 17-year-old could be seen as deviant 'in the same way as viewing a 3-year-old child who is tied up and being hurt' (2009: 8). It is hard to argue any moral equivalence between the two, but, Hacking argues that, in a climate of anxiety over children and sex, they become lumped together 'under one unreflective but powerful emblem' in this case, "child pornography", which merely serves 'mindlessly to identify the evil enemy in our midst' (1991: 286/285). The reality is that much pornography operates in this messy borderland, which makes clear-cut distinctions between what is legal or illegal, right or wrong, difficult (Adler, 2008). This takes us to discussion of how we might understand pornography ethically.

Ethical considerations: the liberal position

Historically, a right to view pornography has been linked with a classical liberal position deriving from the work of J.S. Mill and guaranteeing freedom of expression. Mill presumed against the state's legitimacy 'to prescribe opinions to (people), and determine what doctrines or what arguments they shall be allowed to hear' (1859). A similar right to freedom of speech and expression is enshrined in the First Amendment to the American Constitution and subsequently in much human rights legislation. Clark (2000) argues that the predominant value base of the western developed world and, indeed, of social work, derives from such classic liberal precepts. He identifies self-determination as expressing a fundamental freedom – that individuals have the ability and moral right to make their own decision about the course of their

lives, what might be termed 'agency'. Conversely, preventing them from making and enacting choices is considered morally undesirable (Clark, 2000).

The philosopher Ronald Dworkin (1981) applies a liberal position to questions of pornography, arguing that people may have rights to what others might consider wrong. The consequences, he claims, of trying to censor or otherwise suppress pornography strike at the heart of liberal democracy; people ought to be free to do the wrong thing, so long as there is no harm involved. Under human rights law they ought to be able to do so in privacy without undue state intrusion. The liberal position hinges around presumptions of autonomy and consent; individuals, unless there is good reason to conclude otherwise on the grounds of coercion, immaturity or mental decline, are presumed to have the capacity to enter freely into social exchanges. Notwithstanding the difficulties and ambiguities of defining a child, as touched on above, this makes decisions on child sexual abuse straightforward.

Such decisions are more nuanced in respect of adults. Consent assumes free exchange, while in reality a number of structural factors can militate against this. It may be argued that some women are forced into pornography through economic necessity. Such cases could legitimately be subject to a Marxist critique of commodification and exploitation. Furthermore, some feminists argue that the patriarchal basis of society by its very nature commodifies and exploits women and that pornography is an expression of this. A Kantian corollary to Marxist objections might posit that those who appear in pornography are used by those who view such material merely as means to the end of the viewer's sexual arousal, a position that is not morally justifiable. We will return to this but, stay with the liberal position for the time being, Mill (1859) argued that: '[T]he only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his *(sic)* will, is to prevent harm to others'. Subsequent legal developments have sought to include obscenity alongside harm as justifying the curtailment of free expression. We consider each justification for censorship in turn.

<u>Pornography and harm</u>

5

As noted above, a liberal position posits that the only justification for curtailing free expression is that of harm. Pornography can be argued to be harmful in two main ways: the first pragmatic and the second ideological.

The first argument and the one being foregrounded in current political campaigns to restrict the availability of pornography is based on what might be thought of as a commonsense assumption that pornography leads to subsequent violent sexual acts, an assumption encapsulated in the feminist dictum 'pornography is the theory - rape is the practice' (Morgan, 1977: 169). There is, in fact, scant evidence of a clear 'cause and effect' relationship between viewing pornography and contact sexual offending (Feder-Kittay, 1988;, Diamond, 2010). Kutchinsky's (1991) study of four countries that liberalised pornography showed that there was no increase in rape statistics in any of them. Similarly, McElroy (1997) points out that in Japan, where pornography depicting graphic and brutal violence is widely accessible, rape is considerably lower per capita than in the U.S., where such porn is restricted. More recently, Cooke (2012) argues that there still is no adequate evidence to support any causal link and that the relevant causal mechanism has yet to be discovered. In fact, 'soft-core' pornography has been found to be 'negatively associated with the likelihood of rape and actual rape behaviour' (Duschinsky 2012: 70). Diamond (2010) goes further and suggests, in a review of the evidence, that there is an inverse relationship between the availability of pornography and contact sex crimes across the board.

Just as it is difficult to support any direct link between pornography and subsequent contact crime, there is also 'surprisingly little data' to support the idea that watching pornography involving children actually leads to their sexual abuse (Quayle, 2009: 9). Howitt and Sheldon (2007) and Quayle (2009) question any simple link between fantasy and action in such cases. In fact, U.S. figures indicate strong emerging evidence of a dramatic reduction in contact sex crime against children at the same time that we are led to believe that there is an explosion of online child pornography (Finkelhor and Jones, 2012). More generally, if watching pornography did lead to the acting out of fantasies then, given the scale of its use, we would indeed be facing an

epidemic of sexual crimes across society. We are not. Crimes of sex and violence, in fact, show a steady decline in recent years (Office for National Statistics, 2012).

There is a caveat to be aware of. Malamuth, argues that while 'Exposure to pornography does not have negative effects on attitudes supporting violence against women … for the majority of men', violent pornography 'does have a negative effect on an important sub-set of men, namely those who have other risk factors for committing sexual aggression.' (Analysis 24 June 2013) see also Malamuth et al, 2000). Seto et al (2001) make a similar point, arguing that individuals who are predisposed to sexually offend are more likely to show an effect of pornography exposure. This is an important distinction, suggesting that those with pre-existing tendencies towards violent sexual acts might seek out aggressive pornography to rehearse their fantasies, rather than pornography causing these desires in the first place. Such offenders might also find it convenient to identify the internet as an explanation/excuse for their own behavior; it is after all, a very familiar 'cultural cliché' at present (Brown 2000).

There is another way in which pornography, especially internet pornography, might be argued to be harmful. Proponents of a harm discourse might point to the potential for adverse future consequences for those taking part in pornographic scenes should images remain available online into the future, raising the prospect that any initial violation or act of youthful folly continues to be revisited upon those engaged in pornographic activity. This shifts the focus of concern away from actual or probabilistic risk into the realm of possibilistic risk (Furedi, 2009). It is, however, impossible to know the likely future consequences of actions taken in sound mind in the present and seeking to proscribe these on the basis of a future unknown denies agency and might be considered unjustified paternalism.

Pornography as harmful to women

The ideological objection to pornography relates to its assumed harm to women as a group, reflecting what has become the currently ascendant

7

feminist perspective. This position has its roots in the radical or 'second wave' feminism associated with Canadian Law Professor Catherine MacKinnon and American activist Andrea Dworkin. This literature takes a binary position, identifying women as the objects of pornography and men its consumers. Radical feminists argue that pornography is degrading, and that in and of itself, it is an act of sexual violence (McElroy, 1997). Dworkin argues that the term 'sex industry' is simply a 'euphemism for the sexual enslavement of women' (2004: 138). From this perspective, women cannot be said to properly consent to participate in the sex industry and that any such consent is merely the product of 'false consciousness' and illustrative of an oppressive patriarchal society. Mackinnon explains further:

> 'Pornography, in the feminist view, is a form of forced sex, a practice of sexual politics, an institution of gender inequality. In this perspective, pornography is not harmless fantasy or a corrupt and confused misrepresentation of an otherwise natural and healthy sexuality. Along with the rape and prostitution in which it participates, pornography institutionalizes male supremacy, which fuses the eroticization of dominance and submission with the social construction of male and female' (2000: 171).

Nussbaum (2004) credits Mackinnon and Dworkin with shifting the debate on pornography away from obscenity and towards foregrounding its exploitative consequences for women. This view has gained a particular dominance in current debates, to the point that it can be assumed to be 'the' feminist position.

There is, however, a range of feminist perspectives around pornography. Liberal and postmodern perspectives question whether pornography is necessarily exploitative or harmful to women. Feder Kittay (1988) suggests that pornography offers a medium 'to explode the sexually conventional' and as such, holds out transformative possibilities in respect of female sexuality. These possibilities, she argues, 'must be protected by feminists and all who aim for a progressive vision' (1988: 130). Another high profile feminist, Judith Butler, questions the prosecution of pornography offences, arguing that

increased censorship does little to further the battle to stop violence against women; instead it 'criminalizes many individuals who wish to view such material but do not cause harm to others' (1997: 69). From this perspective, positions that construct pornography as necessarily harmful to women merely serve to maintain and perpetuate 'moralistic and stereotypical constructions of female sexuality and female desire' (Carline, 2011: 320).

Furthermore, the scale and variety of material available challenges assumptions of pornography as perpetuating a particular stylised image of women. If nothing else, the internet confronts us with the fact that human sexuality is diverse. Indeed, it might be argued that the internet has democratised sexuality, catering for every hue, shape and size of sexual preference and predilection, including a large market in gay and lesbian pornography. Moreover, the scale of self-generated pornography fundamentally changes the complexion of earlier debates, challenging default assumptions of harm and exploitation, either individually or to women as a group and locates the subject within the sphere of sexual self-expression. As such, it renders Kantian concerns about ends and means problematic; if those posting images of themselves do so with free will and, possibly, for some sexual motivation of their own, then just who is using whom becomes something of a moot point. Passonen argues that the internet, in this respect, has 'blurred the boundaries' between producers and consumers of porn, and led to a challenging of the familiar debates around pornography, sexism and abuse (2010: 1297). She concludes:

> 'Rather than simulations of desire or repetition of old porn conventions, netporn is read as an expression of people's preferences and kinks: rather than exploitative consumers, users are seen to hook into this economy of desires as the audience desired by the performers and producers' (2010: 1308).

Pornography as obscenity

The inclusion of obscenity as a justification for curtailing what might be thought to be liberal freedoms of expression derives from Lord Devlin's 'The Enforcement of Morals' (1958), described by Nussbaum as 'an influential work

of conservative political thought' (2004: 4). Devlin's argument is that a society has the right to protect and preserve itself from expressions that a reasonable man might find obscene or disgusting, even if it causes no harm. This is 'the man on the Clapham omnibus' test of public morality (Nussbaum, 2004). The problem, of course, is that the views of the man on the Clapham omnibus are notoriously subjective. A celebrated case in law led Justice Potter Stewart in the U.S. Supreme Court in 1964 to declare in respect of whether material presented to him was obscene or not, 'I know it when I see it'. The moral majority argument also presumes that the man on the Clapham omnibus is being truthful about his viewing habits. Given the scale of pornography use one might conclude that he may not be.

But, disgust is not just individually subjective; what a society might find disgusting at one point in time may, very quickly, be considered mainstream. Cole Porter tells us that 'In olden days a glimpse of stocking was looked on a something shocking'. While it may seem fatuous to equate a glimpse of stocking with 'extreme' pornography, this is exactly the point. Glimpses of stocking in the Victorian and Edwardian eras were considered as scandalous and as much a threat to social order as pornography is now. D.H. Lawrence's novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* was proscribed from its publication in 1928 until a court case in the 1960s. In 1953 alone, the police seized 30,000 smutty seaside postcards (Jones, 2012). Homosexuality was persecuted and homosexual men hounded and jailed until relatively recently and the thought of homosexual acts elicited moral outrage every bit as visceral as pornography does today. Yet, times change and societies across the world are now at various stages of legislating for gay marriage. The trouble with attempts to legally regulate or proscribe sexual practices is that the law invariably ends up playing 'catch up' with rapidly shifting sexual mores. The result is that it may act repressively and capriciously upon those caught up in its ambit and ultimately retreat in ignominy as a new sexual order beds in.

Nussbaum, while sympathetic to MacKinnon and Dworkin's arguments about pornography's positioning of women and to prohibition on this basis, nevertheless, makes a spirited case that disgust should not compromise

fundamental freedoms nor should it provide a justification in law, however distasteful we may find particular behaviours. It is, she argues, 'an utter red herring in the law of pornography' (2004: 75). But the problem with using disgust as a justification to attack pornography goes deeper than philosophical objection. Much of what is played out in the public sphere in relation pornography reflects deep-seated societal and psychic conflicts about sex. Pornography, especially perhaps that which cannot be explained away by exploitation but is freely entered into, puts sex 'out there'. It confronts us with those baser, more animal aspects of what it is to be human that we would rather for the most part were kept hidden. 'We are bothered by sex because it is a fundamentally disruptive, overwhelming and demented force, strongly at odds with the majority of our ambitions and all but incapable of being discretely integrated within civilised society', argues de Botton (2013: 5). We react to being confronted by the animal sides of our nature by seeking to distance ourselves from it and in so doing we merely hide from humanity (Nussbaum, 2004). More worryingly, however, we project our unease onto others, identifying them as 'evil' to our own 'good'. '(P)roperties pertinent to the subject's own fear of animality are projected onto a less powerful group, and that group becomes a vehicle for the dominant group's anxiety about itself' (Nussbaum, 2004: 336). The internet sex offender, in this sense, has become a trope for individual and societal anxieties about sex. And, of course, such disgust has been institutionalised in law, consequences of which include disproportionate legal responses.

New Labour New moralising

Current dominant expressions of feminism bear strong resonances with the political agenda around questions of public morality, which was a hallmark of politics in the UK following the election of a New Labour government in 1997. Butler and Drakeford (2001) argue that New Labour brought an explicit moral (or moralising) agenda to politics, betraying what has been described as an impulse 'to micromanage people's lives and to intrude the law into spheres generally marked out as private in a liberal polity' (Petley, 2009: 430). This tendency was played out in a legal arena in England and Wales in the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008, which sought to criminalise and

regulate extreme pornography, defined as acts that were likely to be life-threatening or injurious to a person's genitals or involved acts of bestiality but also, tellingly, that such depictions be deemed 'grossly offensive, disgusting or otherwise of an obscene character' (Johnson, 2010: 148). In this latter case, the legislation shifts the discourse beyond that of harm towards moral evaluation. In this sense, the government explicitly appropriated radical feminist perspectives, contending that 'extreme pornography' and prostitution cause harm and are gendered, involving men's violence to, and exploitation of, women. The government's intention was to 'reduce the demand for such material and to send a clear message that it has no place in our society' (Home Office, 2008: i).

Having been seriously criticised in an initial consultation over the illiberal implications of this legislation, the government commissioned a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) to make a case for the linkage between pornography and harm (Itzin et al., 2007). The report of the REA gave the government the 'evidence' it required to bolster its case. Carline (2011) describes the quality of this evidence as risible, relying on 'largely discredited' research divorced from the British context and conducted before the internet was even widely available. She argues that the Labour Government used the vulnerability of women to promote an explicitly moral agenda, writing:

> 'It is disconcerting that the Government argued a need to restrict consensual adult sexual activity but failed to adequately substantiate this contention. Moreover, it was unethical to argue that the reforms were necessary to prevent violence to women when the evidence suggests that such results are unlikely' (2011: 324).

Political incursions into debates on pornography betray a neoconservative impulse that finds common cause with the demands of the religious right. It is instructive to note the influence of fundamentalist Christian groupings such as Premier Christian Media and Safer Media for a Safer Society in campaigns to restrict internet access. Neoconservatism and radical feminism come together in common cause on this issue if, arguably, from different standpoints. Their positions fail to acknowledge the diverse array of sexualities, including the

gay, lesbian and queer sexualities that are expressed through pornography. Politicians, across party lines, thus use a justification of harm to defend a position that is rooted in unreflective moralising and in what they imagine (erroneously, if the usage figures are to be believed) to be populist impulses towards censorship. This position serves to stick political discourse on this matter in what feels like a strangely old-fashioned and unenlightened place.

Social work and pornography

Most social work discussion of pornography up to now has been located within the arenas of violence against women and child protection, both of which have been influenced by particular feminist perspectives. The profession's allegiance to feminism has generally been closer to radical feminisms than to liberal or postmodern feminisms. For example, Mullender (2002) lists pornography alongside physical, sexual and emotional abuse and the abuse of women within relationships as issues that demand attention in social work policy and theorising. This has become a powerful default position, which can lead social workers to assume without question that pornography (and sex work more generally) is abusive and harmful, rather than something people might not only choose to engage in, but may even have a right to. Locating social work's responses to pornography within such a narrow interpretation of feminism actually diminishes the rich body of feminist thought that exists beyond the 'second wave' (Orme, 2003). Such dominant views of pornography impose a powerful normalising voice. While claiming to speak for 'women', they simultaneously silence the voices of those who are involved in pornography. This same tendency was (and is) apparent in previous (and current) campaigns against prostitution. Writing about nineteenth century social purity campaigners, Sloan and Whab assert:

> 'The religious reformers' approach to prostitution excluded the voices and perspectives of prostitutes and thus obscured the possibility that women were not victims and that women might exercise agency in choosing to engage in sex work' (2000: 458).

One result of this is that 'those women who consider the sex industry to be legitimate are in the very least silenced or, more problematically, censured for being irresponsible and thus potentially damaging the women's movement' (McClintock, 1993: 7).

Widening the ethical lens

Reviewing the arguments so far, we conclude that (contrary to our own more general ethical inclinations which would acknowledge the limitations of liberalism), a classical liberal position should remain the bedrock for social work's response to pornography. Both justifications for censorship, harm and obscenity, have been found to be problematic. While there may be instances of individual harm (and that fact alone might legitimately prompt one to reach decisions to refrain from pornography use), the case for specifically gendered or wider societal harm is increasingly difficult to sustain; in fact, the available data, if anything, points in another direction.

A liberal position would also, we believe, be consistent with social work codes of ethics or practice. Under the heading 'Respecting the right to self-determination' the International Federation of Social Workers Statement of Ethical Principles (2012) says that 'Social workers should respect and promote people's right to make their own choices and decisions, irrespective of their values and life choices, provided this does not threaten the rights and legitimate interests of others'. Such statements may merely highlight the limitations of existing codes, reflecting as they do an uneasy mix of liberal individualism and utilitarianism. Nevertheless, as they stand, one would be entitled to wonder on what grounds social workers might object to pornography use.

While we argue that pornography, or at least adult pornography, should not be censored, it does not follow that it is morally unproblematic. However, arguments against its use require a widening of the lens through which social work approaches the subject, beyond dominant assumptions of harm and exploitation, not least because of Adler's observation that 'In the escalating

1

war against pornography, pornography has already won'. (2008: 1). Social work needs to learn to live with this reality and to do so in ways that preserve an ethical rather than a moralising, crusading or pathologising concern at its heart. And there may be particular ethical considerations that social workers might consider in coming to a position on pornography.

Whan (1986), for instance, argues that social work ought to be oriented to an Aristotelian ideal of the good or flourishing life. In this regard, it might be argued that some pornography (or maybe erotica) could be argued to be affirming of human sexuality. However, it becomes difficult to align what is offered on the various 'adult' channels that form part of the most basic TV package or what is available in any cursory glance at the internet to any conception of the good. Sites that seem to promote rape (see McGlynn and Ward, 2009) offend against what might be thought to be good or affirming of the better angels of our nature. It becomes difficult to reconcile the use of such material with the Aristotelian idea of the virtuous person. But, once again, the absence of a strong argument indicating harm resulting from such availability makes it difficult to justify its proscription.

Ultimately, moral positions on pornography perhaps need to come down to a personalised morality rather than recourse to imposed moral codes or moralising political initiatives. Beilharz, following Bauman however, argues that the prospect of moral autonomy can prove too much for some; 'morality or conventionalism is substituted for ethics … and in turn moralizing or hectoring replaces morality, or else morality gives way to law: we let the magistrates and black letter law books tell us how to live (2000: 123). The current political climate in relation to pornography seems intent on handing sexual matters that in most cases really ought to come down to personal choice over to the magistrates and to black letter law.

It could be argued that social work has often found it easier to follow the rules and to side with the forces of approved morality on questions of sex than to properly engage with its ethical complexities. Its track record in this regard is not particularly good; a persistent strand in its makeup seems to lead it to

police the sexualities of those it works with. Its roots are closely linked to the Victorian sexual purity movement (Cree, 1995). Throughout much of its history it considered homosexuality to be aberrant (McLaughlin, 2010). In the late 1980s it was complicit in fuelling subsequently discredited satanic ritual abuse panics (Clapton, 1993). Issues around sex in the profession too often become 'obscured by emotion, rhetoric and claims for truth'. (Myers, 2008: 203). We should take care that current attitudes towards pornography do not merely replicate previous episodes in social work's history; the same fears and moralising and the same impulse towards a 'rescue mode' risk being played out online. The implication of this, as in previous incarnations of the rescue mentality, is that the problems faced by children and families become reduced to questions of moralising or taste and cease to be matters of poverty, overcrowding, unemployment, benefits cuts and the host of very real structural issues that blight their lives.

Implications for practice

Pornography is one of those subjects that might serve as something of a weather vein, pointing to the role that social work might play in society. It seems to us that there are perhaps three possible directions it might take. Firstly, social workers might adopt a stance opposed to pornography. For many, this will be a legitimate position reflecting strongly held personal views about human dignity, the nature of sexual expression or lingering concerns around the possibility of exploitation or harm. While each of these rationales is undoubtedly valid at a personal level, if institutionalized, this approach runs the risk of siding social work with the forces of approved sexual morality. And, as pornography becomes increasingly pathologised and appropriated within metanarratives of protection the risk is that the profession becomes ever more 'annexed to the central police task' (Garrett, 2004: 90).

An alternative position might be to accept the diversity of human sexuality and to assert the potential of pornography to offer alternative expressions of sexuality that challenge the normative and conventional. From this perspective, social workers might wish to align themselves with service user

groups that support sex workers; at very least, they should listen with respect to their voices, rather than impose a received moral standpoint.

An third position might be a more agnostic one, acknowledging the free choice of consenting adults to engage in pornography, irrespective of one's personal views on the matter, a simple case of asserting Ronald Dworkin's argument that people should be free to make what others might consider to be the wrong choices. This might actually free up social workers to focus on the 'social' aspects of their role and to address structural constraints on their clients' lives, which become marginalised when the profession is waylaid by a societal obsession with sex and sex abuse .

Whatever position social workers take they need to realise that this is a deeply moralised subject where truth-claims need to be opened to scrutiny (Myers, 2008). Specifically, assumptions around the linkage between pornography use and contact sexual offending need to be exposed to the cold light of evidence. To take this argument further, the profession might have a role in asking just what it is that men (invariably) are being prosecuted for. This might follow though to asking questions about current assumptions of risk and risk assessment and focusing a sceptical gaze on assessments made by others, including the police and psychologists.

We conclude by reprising Feder-Kittay's argument that in debates around pornography 'we require not less speech but more speech' (1988: 129). Specifically, it is important to recognise that there is a variety of experiences of pornography and that not all of these are exploitative or damaging. Indeed, most, it would seem, are freely entered into. We cannot turn back the tide on this reality. Rather, social work needs to hear and validate the range of voices of those who might be involved in pornography at whatever level. It may also consider a wider role in challenging the forces of illiberalism that are being unleashed in the current political climate, where arguments of harm and vulnerability are employed, illegitimately, we would argue, to impose a particular sexual and moral order.

References

Adler, A (2008) All Porn All the Time. *N.Y.U. Review of Law and Social Change,* Vol. 31, p. 695, 2007; NYU Law School, Public Law Research Paper No. 08-06. Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=1104657

Atwood, F and Smith, C (2010) Extreme Concern: Regulating 'Dangerous Pictures' in the United Kingdom *Journal of Law and Society,* 37 (1) 171-88

Bauman, Z. (2003) *Liquid Love: on the Frailty of Human Bonds*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Beilharz, P. (2000) Zygmunt Bauman: Dialectic of Modernity, London: Sage

Brown, W. (2000) 'The mirror of pornography', reprinted in Cornell, D. (ed.) *Feminism and Pornography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Butler, I. & Drakeford, M. (2001) **'**Which Blair Project? Communitarianism, Social Authoritarianism and Social Work**'**, *Journal of Social Work,* Vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 7_24

Carroll, J. S., Padilla-Walker, L. M., Nelson, L. J., Olson, C. D., Barry, C. M. and Madsen, S. D. (2008), 'Generation XXX: pornography acceptance and use among emerging adults', *Journal of Adolescent Research,* 23: 1, 6–30.

Calder, M. (2004) *Child Sexual Abuse and the Internet: Tackling the New Frontier,* edited by Martin C. Calder, Russell House Publishing, Dorset,

Carline, A. (2011) **'**Criminal justice, extreme pornography and prostitution: Protecting women or promoting morality?' *Sexualities* 14 (3) 312-333.

Clapton, G. (1993) *The Satanic Abuse Controversy: Social Workers and the Social Work Press,* London: University of North London Press.

Clark, C. (2000) *Social Works Ethics: Politics, Principles and Practice,* Basingstoke: Palgrave, MacMillan

Cornell, D. (2000) Introduction, in Cornell, D. (ed.) *Feminism and Pornography,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cree, V. E. (1995) *From Public Streets to Private Lives: The changing task of social work,* Aldershot, Avebury

Diamond, M. (2010) Pornography, Public Acceptance and Sex Related Crime: A Review, *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry,* 32 (2009) 304-314; corrected with Corrigendum IJLP 33 (2010) 197-199

de Botton, A. (2012) How to think more about sex, London: MacMillan

Digital Journal (2012) *Pornography: 'Everybody' is watching it, statistics say'* http://digitaljournal.com/article/322668#ixzz2UVNhIdEz accessed May 28th 2013

Duschinsky, R (2012) 'The 2010 UK Home Office ‘Sexualisation of Young People’ Review: A Discursive Policy Analysis' *Journal of Social Policy* ,41 (04) pp 715-731

Dworkin, A. (1981) *Pornography: Men Possessing Women,* London: The Women's Press.

Dworkin A. (2004) Pornography, prostitution, and a beautiful and tragic recent history. In: Stark C. and Whisnant R. (eds) *Not For Sale: Feminists Resisting Prostitution and Pornography.* North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 137–145.

Dworkin, R. (1981) Is there a right to pornography?, *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies,* 1 (2): 177-212.

Feder-Kittay, E. (1988): The greater danger — pornography, social science and women's rights: Reply to Brannigan and Goldenberg, *Social Epistemology: A Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Policy*, 2:2, 117-133

Finkelhor, D and Jones, L. (2012) Have Sexual Abuse and Physical Abuse Declined Since the 1990s?

http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV267_Have%20SA%20%20PA%20Decline_FACT%20SHEET_11-7-12.pdf accesses 3rd June 2013

Furedi, F. (2009) precautionary culture and the rise of possibilistic risk assessment *Erasmus Law Review* 2 (2)

Garrett, P.M (2004) 'Talking Child Protection: The Police and Social Workers 'Working Together', *Journal of Social Work* 4 (1) pp. 77-97

Hacking, (1991) The Making and Molding of Child Abuse. *Critical Inquiry* vol 17 (2): 253-288.

Hacking, I. (1992) 'World-Making by Kind-Making: Child Abuse for Example'in Douglas M. and Hull D. (eds) How Classification Works: *Nelson Goodman among the Social Sciences*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 180–238.

Johnson, P. (2010) 'Law, Morality and Disgust: The Regulation of 'Extreme Pornography' in England and Wales' *Social & Legal Studies* 19(2) 147–163

Jones, N (2012) 'This censored isle', New Statesman http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/politics/2012/08/censored-isle accessed 17th July 2013

International Federation of Social Workers (2012) Statement of Ethical Principles available http://ifsw.org/policies/statement-of-ethical-principles/ accessed 4th Dec 2013

Itzin, C. Tacket, A. and Kelly, L. (2007) *The evidence of harm to adults relating to exposure to extreme pornographic material: a rapid evidence assessment (REA)*, London: Ministry of Justice

Jenkins, P (2001) *Beyond Tolerance: Child Pornography on the Internet*, New York: New York University Press

Karaian, L. (2012) Lolita speaks: 'Sexting,' teenage girls and the law, *Crime, Media, Culture* 8 (1): 57-73

Kutchinsky, B (1991) Pornography and rape: theory and practice? Evidence from crime data in four countries where pornography is easily available. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 14(1-2):47-64]

McClintock, A. (1993) Sex workers and sex work: Introduction. Social Text 37: 1–10.

McElroy, W. (1997) *XXX: A Women's Right to Pornography*, New York, NY: St Martin's Press.

McGlynn, C. & Ward, I. (2009). Pornography, Pragmatism and Proscription *Journal of Law and Society* **36**(3): 327-351.

Mackinnon, C. (2000) 'Only words', reprinted in Cornell, D. (ed.) *Feminism and Pornography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McLaughlin, K (2010) 'The Social Worker versus the General Social Care Council: An Analysis of Care Standards Tribunal Hearings and Decisions', *British Journal of Social Work*, 40 (1): 311-327.

Maes, H and Levinson, J. (2012) 'Introduction' in H. Maes and J. Levinson (2012) (eds) *Art and Pornography: Philosophical Essays* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McLaughlin, K. (2012) Surviving Identity: Vulnerability and the Psychology of Recognition, London: Routledge.

Malamuth, N.M., Addison, T. and Koss, M. (2000) Pornography and sexual aggression: are their reliable effects and can we understand them? *Annual Review of Sex Research* 11: 26-91.

Mill, J.S. (1859) *On Liberty* available as e-book

http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/m/mill/john_stuart/m645o/

Accessed 17th July 2013

Morgan, R. (1977), *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist,* London: Random House, p169

Mullender, A. (2002) *Rethinking Domestic Violence: The Social Work and Probation Response,* 2nd edition, London: Routledge

Myers, S (2008) 'Revisiting Lancaster: More Things that Every Social Work Student Should Know', *Social Work Education*, 27 (2): 203-211.

Nussbaum, M. (2006) *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law,* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Office for national statistics crime figures

http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/period-ending-december-2012/sty-crime-in-england-and-wales--year-ending-december-2012.html accessed 23rd July 2013

Orme, J. (2003) 'It's Feminist Because I Say So!' Feminism, Social Work and Critical Practice in the UK. *Qualitative Social Work* 2 (2): 131–153.

Passonen, S. (2010) Labors of love: netporn, Web 2.0 and the meanings of amateurism, *New Media and Society*, 12 (8): 1297-1312.

Petley, J. (2009) Pornography, Panopticism and the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008, *Sociology Compass* 3(3): 417–432.

Quayle, E. (2009) Abuse images of children: identifying gaps in our knowledge.Draft paper for G8 Symposium, UNC, 6-7 April, 2009

Seto, M.C., Maric, A. and Barbaree, H.E. (2001) The role of pornography in the etiology of sexual aggression, *Aggressive and Violent Behaviour*, 6: 35-53.

Sloan, L. and Wahab, S. (2000) 'Feminist Voices on Sex Work: Implications for Social Work', *Affilia* 15 (4): 457-479.

Whan, M. (1986) 'On the nature of practice', *British Journal of Social Work*, 16 (2), pp 243–50.