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Walter S. DeKeseredy

West Virginia University, walter.dekeseredy@mail.wvu.edu

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Contemporary Issues in Left Realism

Walter S DeKeseredy¹

West Virginia University, USA; Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Abstract

Using Roger Matthews' (2014) book *Realist Criminology* as a launching pad, this article points to some timely issues that warrant attention from Left Realism. Special attention is devoted to rebuilding the Left realist movement and to some new empirical directions, such as critical studies of policing, adult Internet pornography, and rural women and girls in conflict with the law.

Keywords

Gender; Indigenous communities; Left Realism; policing; pornography.

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Introduction

Left Realism does not have many followers today, which is partially why, as John Lea (2016) points out in his contribution to this special issue, 'its demise has been frequently pronounced from various points of the political spectrum'. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide empirical evidence of its thriving existence since Lea achieves this goal in his offering, as do Roger Matthews' (2014) *Realist Criminology* and a number of scholarly book chapters and journal articles published elsewhere, including those that appear in the September 2010 special issue of *Crime, Law and Social Change* (Vol. 54, No. 2) edited by Martin Schwartz and me. As well, people like me who continue to embrace Left Realism may be getting older but we are not simply clinging to the past and reproducing material published in major works such as Lea and Young's (1984) *What is to be Done About Law and Order?* and Elliott Currie's (1985) *Confronting Crime: An American Challenge*. Left realist politics, however, have changed little over the years in the sense that realists are still committed to pushing for major structural, cultural, and political transitions while simultaneously advancing short-term policies that 'chip away' at destructive broader social forces such as patriarchal capitalism (Messerschmidt 1986).

It is essential to again quote a passage from John Lea's aforementioned article: 'Left Realism is able to investigate a diversity of situations, embracing crime, other forms of harm, warfare and armed conflict starting out from a single comparative framework' (Lea 2016: 62). The main objective of this piece, then, is to support Lea's claim, using Matthews' *Realist Criminology* as a springboard, by pointing to some new empirical directions in realist criminology.

Rebuilding the movement

Left Realism's original goal was to fill the left-wing void on predatory street crime. Prior to the early- to mid-1980s writings of Jock Young, John Lea, Ian Taylor, Elliott Currie, and a handful of other progressives (for example, Michalowski 1983), the bulk of critical or radical criminologists working during that period ignored the causes and possible control of crime committed by members of the working class against other members of the working class. It was almost as if they feared they would lose their credentials as critical criminologists. Of course, there are exceptions to this sweeping generalization, chief among them being the critical studies of violence against women, children, and members of various ethnic groups. Even so, this general failure to acknowledge working class crime came at a great price to the Left. It allowed right-wing politicians in several countries to claim opposition to street crime as their own issue, giving them the room to generate ideological support for harsh 'law and order' policies, such as lengthy prison terms.

From the above time period right up to this current era, Matthews and his realist colleagues based mainly in the United Kingdom, the US and Canada created a movement to remedy this situation, but members of this project continue to, for the most part, work in silos. Prior to the publication of the above special issue of *Crime, Law and Social Change*, there was, to the best of my knowledge, no collection of readings similar to those put together by Matthews and Young (1986, 1992) and Young and Matthews (1992). Furthermore, we have not seen another Left realist conference similar to that organized in Vancouver, British Columbia in May 1990 by John Lowman and Brian MacLean.² Nor, prior to Matthews' (2014) offering, were there follow-ups to Lea and Young's (1984) *What is to Be Done About Law and Order?* and Currie's (1985) *Confronting Crime*.

Interpersonal violence among the working class and disenfranchised ethnic groups was a new area of critical criminological inquiry at the time Lea and Young (1984) and Currie (1985) produced their books. Some progressives, including myself (see DeKeseredy 2011), argue that this is still the case today except for the types of research mentioned previously (for example, male-to-female violence in private settings). The study of crimes of the powerful, cultural criminology, green criminology, moral panics about terrorism and immigration, and racist

police practices now dominate the critical criminological agenda. Many feminists, though, continue to examine woman abuse, women and girls in conflict of the law, and patriarchal means of social control, with less than a handful of them affiliated with Left Realism (primarily me and Martin Schwartz).

What is to be done? Lea (2016; see this issue) is correct to point out that Left Realism can contribute to the study and prevention of harms such as environmental pollution, money laundering, and other crimes of the powerful. But it always could attend to 'crimes at the top' as demonstrated decades ago by Basran, Gill and MacLean (1995), DeKeseredy and Goff (1992), Pearce (1992), and Pearce and Tombs (1992). Lea (2016: 54) also states that a 'reinvigorated Left Realism' should address terrorism, which was one of Gibbs' (2010) main goals. In fact, Left Realism has proven itself to be applicable to a wide range of what Lea (2016: 54) defines as 'expanding criminalities', including rural crime (DeKeseredy and Donnermeyer 2008; Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014) and anti-feminist fathers' rights group activism (Dragiewicz 2010). Plus, Elliott Currie (2007) reminded us about the importance of developing a 'public criminology' prior to the publication of Matthews' (2014) book.

What worries me as a long-time Left realist is not realism's ability to address the expanding criminalities identified by Lea and others (for example, South 2014). Rather, my greatest concern is its political and intellectual sustainability, as well as rebuilding the international camaraderie that characterized the realist project from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s. Moreover, despite decreasing rates of street crime as noted by Matthews (2014) and others (for example, Karman 2000), those at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder still worry much about violence and drugs in their communities and women and children continue to be plagued by intimate violence in 'numbers that would numb the mind of Einstein' (Lewis cited in Vallee 2007: 22). Thus, it is my hope, too, that Left Realism does not abandon its focus on predatory street crimes and violence in private places and does not help return critical criminology to a period in which working class crime was generally perceived by the Left as a moral panic fuelled by conservatives to garner support for more draconian means of social control. Additionally, theorizing the 'crime drop' does little, if anything to alleviate the 'truly disadvantaged's' well-founded fear of being victimized and it will definitely not help reduce intimate violence (Wilson 1987). I could not agree more with Currie's (2012: 474) claim that there is 'the troubling absence of social movements within the advanced industrial world that are sufficiently powerful and cohesive enough to mount an effective political challenge to the intensification of global economic and social policies that exacerbate violence'.

Ian Taylor and Jock Young, two pioneers in Left Realism, passed away recently. The remaining cohort is getting older and some members are slowly retreating from participating in long-term projects as they move into retirement. So, the first step toward a truly reinvigorated Left Realism is to recruit 'new blood'. However, the growth in membership should not be tantamount to the creation of 'an old boys club'. Keep in mind that, except for articles written by Jennifer Gibbs (2010) and Molly Dragiewicz (2010), the most recent Left realist publications continue to be produced by men, albeit two of them – me and Martin Schwartz – are unequivocally feminists. Furthermore, there is a notable absence of Left realist intellectual and political contributions made by Indigenous people and members of other racial/ethnic categories. Additionally, there is a notable lack of Left realist work emerging from LGBTIQ communities.

There may be several other groups that can enhance a Left realist understanding of contemporary social problems. For that reason, at every public or virtual gathering of realist scholars, 'we should always be conscious of who is not there and that we are not hearing those perspectives' (Gilfus et al. 1999: 1207). This is not to say that Left Realism, or any other critical criminological school of thought for that matter, should be expected to attend to the concerns of

every social group that exists on this planet. In spite of that, Left Realism must be more inclusive to truly advance and grow in strength.

Returning to the crime drop, which is covered in Matthews' (2014) book and in his contribution to this issue (2016), which crimes are dropping and which are not? Also, are some crimes that historically received selective inattention from the critical criminological community increasing? Matthews mentions the Crime Survey for England and Wales, which prompted me to raise these questions. Victimization surveys like this one are routinely conducted around the world, with the US National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) and the International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS) arguably being the most widely known. Left realists, such as Jones, MacLean and Young (1986), were among the first to point out that studies like these primarily use narrow, legalistic definitions of crime and only attempt to capture the experiences of 'identifiable' or 'ideal victims' (Carrabine et al. 2009; DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2011; Walklate 1989).

The ICVS is a prime example of such a problematic survey, despite van Dijk and Shaw's (2009: 261) claim that it is 'without a doubt the most advanced survey instrument for measuring the extent, nature, and responses to conventional crime across different societies'. Widely used to support the assertion that crime has dropped around the world, it primarily measures what van Dijk (2008), one of the ICVS principal investigators, defines as 'common crimes' (for example, burglary, theft of personal property, theft of a bicycle) and thus numerous offences that cause a substantial amount of social harm and physical pain and that have major mental health consequences are typically not counted, such as the creation of cyber criminal markets and the 'real world' harm done to women by their violent male intimate partners who view pornography (DeKeseredy 2017; Kotze and Temple 2014; Pakes 2012).

The US National Violence Against Women Survey is another case in point (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). Some scholars and practitioners may interpret this study to be the US federal government's progressive response to feminist demands for taking woman abuse behind closed doors seriously. In reality, it is just another example of the neoliberal state's attempts to appropriate or co-opt the feminist movement against male-to-female violence (Bumiller 2008; DeKeseredy 2017). It does not examine how broader social and cultural forces such as patriarchy influence men to be abusive. On top of this problem, it defines sexual and physical violence in narrow, legalistic terms and not surprisingly uncovered a markedly lower annual rate of intimate male-to-female physical assault (1.3 per cent) than do independent academic surveys that normally elicit 12-month rates of 11 per cent or higher (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2013). More recent North American government public health surveys, such as the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (Black et al. 2011) also elicit very low annual rates of physical and sexual violence against women.

Matthews is spot on in his analysis of the problems associated with the 'lure of empiricism' and cites Jock Young's (2004) critique of 'voodoo criminology'. Yet, let us not forget that Young did not entirely reject quantitative research. On the contrary, in *The Criminological Imagination* he argues that 'a humanistic criminology needs numbers just as it is not restrained and defined by them' (Young 2011: 224). Let us also not forget that he was heavily involved in British Left realist local survey work and is co-author of *The Islington Crime Survey* (ICS) and the *Second Islington Crime Survey* (Crawford et al. 1990; Jones, MacLean and Young 1986). It should be noted in passing that the ICS ranked near the top of the list of the most widely cited critical criminological books in the 1990s (Wright and Friedrichs 1998).

The two sweeps of the Islington Crime Survey, feminist violence against women surveys, and other progressive research projects elicited higher rates of some significant harms than did government surveys. That is why the process of revitalizing or rebuilding Left Realism should involve returning to its empirical roots. I hypothesize that by doing so the data generated by

local realist surveys will cause many criminologists, journalists, and others to question whether sweeping claims of the great crime drop are legitimate.

New empirical directions

Policing studies

Left Realism, as Lea (2016) notes in this special issue, is not 'methodologically weak'. Nonetheless, the realist empirical project needs to shift with the times. Still, changing research trajectories sometimes involves 'going back to the future'. For instance, in the US, the drift toward military-style policing identified nearly 30 years ago by Kinsey, Lea and Young (1986) has now turned into a tidal wave. Consider the recent deaths of African-American men resulting from police use of deadly force in Ferguson, Missouri, New York City and Baltimore. Additionally, police are increasingly using military equipment provided through federal programs. Between 2009 and 2014, the US federal government provided eighteen billion dollars for such programs, but training about the proper use of high-powered weaponry is sorely lacking, as documented by a 2014 report published by the Executive Office of the President shortly after the Ferguson shooting in August of that year.

Kinsey, Lea and Young (1986) provide a compelling Left realist alternative to military and 'broken windows' styles of policing – 'minimal policing'. This is designed to foster democratic accountability of police to local communities and local police authorities. Minimal policing involves strict limits on police powers and is heavily guided by the notion that the police should cooperate and respond to the demands and concerns of the community, rather than vice versa. The principles of minimal policing are: maximum public initiation of police action; minimum necessary coercion by the police; minimal police intervention; and maximum public access to the police. Given the recent chain of events in some US urban, disadvantaged communities, achieving these goals would denote a necessary major change in policing.

It is not enough to simply repeat Kinsey and colleagues' call for minimal policing. Data supporting its effectiveness are sorely needed, especially since there is mounting conservative support for 'evidence-based policing research'. The popularity of this approach is illustrated by the creation of the Evidence-Based Policing Research Program located at George Mason University's Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy and the 2014 *Conference on Evidence-Based Policing* at the University of Cambridge's Institute of Criminology. Proponents of evidence-based practice embrace an approach to knowledge production which idealizes systematic reviews, experimental research, evaluation studies, and quantitative meta-analysis as 'the path to criminological truth' (DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2013: 303).

To date, critiques of the conceptualization and implementation of evidence-based practice have been concentrated in the research on education (Clegg 2005), medicine (Goldenberg 2006) and batterers' programs (Gondolf 2012). Left realists, then, need to jump into the fray and help prevent the spread of policing research that focuses on an arbitrarily limited array of acts and measures.

Proponents of evidence-based practice tout themselves as scientific and apolitical, but in reality they promote particular conservative politics. Additionally, calls for evidence-based practice focus on micro- or individual-level variables (DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2013). Even eminent mainstream criminologist Robert Sampson (2010) points out that the valorization of randomized clinical trials as the 'gold standard' for knowledge production is highly problematic because the policies to be guided by the evidence are, by definition, implemented at the macro-level.

Critiquing evidence-based practice is not the same as eschewing evidence. Instead, Left realists, like other progressive scholars, should use a variety of data-gathering methods and a broad

understanding of evidence to improve our understanding of policing. Certainly, it should be left in the hands of those who embrace evidence-based practice.

Adult Internet pornography consumption and its violent effects

Less than a handful of academics who publicly identify themselves as critical criminologists have focused on adult pornography and its violent consequences. Actually, criminologists in general 'have not been fleet of foot' in dealing with Internet porn (Atkinson and Rodgers 2014: 1). This is partially due to the fact that numerous academics and university/college administrators view pornography as a topic unfit for scholarly inquiry (DeKeseredy and Corsianos 2016). Nevertheless, there is a growing body of progressive social scientific literature that challenges this belief and some Left realists have recently added to it (DeKeseredy 2015a, 2015b; DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2013). Some realists have also gathered relatively new qualitative data on the relationship between male pornography consumption and various types of violence against women (DeKeseredy and Hall-Sanchez 2016; DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2009).

Given their keen interest in the mass media, it is logical to assume that cultural criminologists would also study contemporary Internet pornography, including the emergence of amateur online 'tubes', such as YouPorn, XTube and Porno Tube, all modeled after the widely used and popular YouTube. YouPorn had 15 million users after launching in 2006 and was growing at a monthly rate of 37.5 per cent (DeKeseredy 2015a; Mowlabocus 2010; Slayden 2010). Yet, as Matthews (2014) states in his critique of cultural criminology:

Surprisingly, there is relatively little discussion of the new social media and their profound impact upon culture, politics and identities (Castells 1996; Ferrell et al. 2008; Young 2007). For a criminology which aspires to be 'critical and activist', this is a strange omission since the new social media are widely held responsible for transforming and undermining, as well as challenging, established forms of mass media and facilitating so-called cyber activism. (Matthews 2014: 100)

Matthews' assessment of cultural criminology is not totally negative and he identifies 'points of agreement' that 'may provide some foundation for developing a cultural realism' (2014: 108). As a matter of fact, shortly before his death, Jock Young was very optimistic about such an intellectual and political development. In his foreword to the 40th anniversary edition of Taylor, Walton and Young's *The New Criminology*, Young (2013: xxxiv) states, 'There is a certain serendipity with regards to a synthesis between realism and cultural criminology because both fit together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle: one depicts the form of the social interaction that we call crime, while the second breathes human life into it'. Young also asserts that cultural criminology brings to the 'square of crime' discussed by contributors to this 2013 issue and other publications (Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014; Young 1992) 'meaning, energy and emotion: it turns its formal structure into a lived reality' (2013: xxxviii).

If a Cultural Realism is born, perhaps it will follow in the footsteps of its cultural criminological parents (for example, Ferrell, Hayward and Young 2008), continue to examine popular culture, and address Matthews' call to examine social media. Again, there are social media porn sites and pornography is now an integral part of popular culture. To be sure, these transformations warrant considerable empirical, theoretical and political attention from Cultural Realism. The rationale is as follows. First, we now live in a post-*Playboy* world (Jensen 2007) in which adult Internet pornography has become normalized or mainstreamed (DeKeseredy 2015b; Dines 2010). Second, cyber porn images, videos and literature cause much damage to gender relations for these (and other) reasons:

- They are widely accepted, despite becoming increasingly more violent and racist (DeKeseredy and Corsianos 2016). Internet pornography often involves gang rapes and features degrading stereotypical images of people of color, Asian women and Latinas (Bridges et al. 2010; DeKeseredy 2015b; Dines 2010).
- There is a growing body of research showing a strong correlation between male consumption of cyber porn and the abuse of current and former female intimates (DeKeseredy 2015a, 2015b).
- There are over four million Internet pornography sites (Dines 2010), with thousands added every week (DeKeseredy, Muzzatti and Donnermeyer 2014).
- Pornography is a lucrative business and those who produce it aggressively defend their means of profiting off degradation, racism, sexism and suffering. Consider that worldwide pornography from a variety of sources (for example, Internet, sex shops, hotel rooms) recently topped US\$ 97 billion. This is more than the combined revenues of these famous technology companies: Microsoft, Google, Amazon, eBay, Yahoo!, Apple, Netflix, and Earthlink (DeKeseredy 2015b).

In addition to adding to a much-needed critical criminological data base on porn, Cultural Realism would make another important contribution, which is prioritizing gender. 'Gender matters' is a call that has thus far received little attention from cultural criminologists around the world (DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2013; Dragiewicz 2009). Perhaps this is because cultural criminologists agree with Matthews' (2014: 11) claim that feminist criminology 'has lost much of its impetus in recent years'. Nothing could be further from the truth. As Flavin and Artz (2013: 10) remind us in the *Routledge International Handbook of Crime and Gender Studies*, there has definitely been 'extensive theoretical and empirical progress' in the study of crime and gender. In point of fact, feminist analyses of the gendered nature of crime, law and social control are stronger than ever and any variant of realist criminology can only gain by meaningfully engaging with this work.

Nevertheless, Matthews (2014: 12) accurately notes that much of feminism now focuses 'on specific issues rather than engaging in wider debates about patriarchy and gender inequalities'. This is not a new observation. Nine years ago Meda Chesney-Lind (2006: 9) asserted, 'the field must put an even greater priority on theorizing patriarchy and crime'. Feminist scholars who study gender and crime can do a better job of explaining what we mean when we talk about gender and patriarchy. These concepts are complex and their meanings are not self-evident. There is a need for theories that explain how patriarchal gender norms shape material realities as well as individual beliefs and behavior. It is the interaction of cultural, institutional and personal manifestations of patriarchy that is truly interesting (DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2013).

Rural women and girls in conflict with the law

Missing from Matthews' (2014) book is mention of recent work in the area of rural Left Realism (DeKeseredy and Donnermeyer 2008; Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014). Moreover, the word 'rural' is nowhere to be found in the index. The same two points can be made about the bulk of criminological literature, regardless of whether it is critical or mainstream in nature. Actually, crime and social control in rural communities rank among the least studied social problems in criminology (Donnermeyer 2012). What Donnermeyer, Jobs and Barclay (2006) stated nine years ago is still relevant today:

If rural crime was considered at all, it was a convenient 'ideal type' contrasted with the criminological conditions assumed to be exclusively in urban locations. Rural crime was rarely examined either comparatively with urban crime or as a

subject worthy of investigation in its own right. (Donnermeyer, Jobes and Barclay 2006: 199)

One would not know from reading most of the criminological literature that fully 49 per cent of the world's population live in some kind of rural context. Within this percentage are economies, cultures and peoples who create an incredibly diverse array of places and an infinite number of ways in which both conforming and law-abiding behaviors and deviant and criminal behaviors can be expressed. Hence, contrary to conventional wisdom, there are high rates of certain crimes in particular types of rural communities, and these ought to be the focus of criminology as much as diversity among urban places and peoples are already (Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014).

Some readers may argue that since the 'square of crime' is a dated contribution and that Left Realism has historically focused almost exclusively on inner-city street crime, it has little, if any, relevance to a critical understanding of current criminal activities and societal reactions to them in rural communities. Joseph Donnermeyer and I (see DeKeseredy and Donnermeyer 2008; Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014) fundamentally disagree with this notion and have developed a rural square of crime, but space limitations preclude describing it here. Furthermore, although their theories of rural separation/divorce sexual assault are primarily guided by feminist and male peer support theories of woman abuse in urban areas, DeKeseredy et al. (2007), DeKeseredy, Rogness and Schwartz (2004) and DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2009) address key rural realities and are partially influenced by early Left realists' (for example, Lea and Young 1984) applications of the concepts of strain and subculture to an understanding of crime.

It is unclear why it took so long for Left Realism to inform theoretical, empirical and policy work on rural crime. After all, the call for a rural Left Realism dates back to a piece written by US criminologist Darryl Wood (1990). He argued that:

Not only can left realism provide aid to the study of rural crime, but the study of rural crime can also support the foundation of left realism. That rural areas can also be impacted by working-class crime provides much to the left realist argument that the study of such behavior must go beyond the perspectives which have been fed to scholars for a long time now. And when we consider that the political economic situations of both inner-city citizens and rural citizens are similar, left realism is provided with further justification for trying to provide a socialist response to working-class criminality. (Wood 1990: 14)

No one has yet tested hypotheses derived from the rural square of crime. Furthermore, the bulk of the rural research done by Left realists concentrates mainly on male violence against women in the US. It is also fair to conclude that violence against women monopolizes rural feminist criminological scholarship around the world (DeKeseredy 2015c).³ This is an important trend that should continue, especially considering that rural women in the US are at higher risk of experiencing this harm than are their urban and suburban counterparts (Rennison, DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2012, 2013). In the words of Pat Carlen (1992: 211), 'Indeed the realists' work on women as victims of crime has been one of their major contributions to both feminist struggle and criminology'. Then again, in the same publication she takes realists to task for not taking seriously people's experiences (including women) as offenders, suspects, defendants and suspects. The same problem exists today, especially when it comes to women.

Left Realism could fill a major void by discerning, through the use of local surveys and other methods, whether rural women and girls are at greater risk of committing crimes than girls and women in urban and suburban places. Our knowledge of similarities and differences in criminal justice system responses to rural and urban women/girls in conflict with the law is also limited

(DeKeseredy 2015c). What we do know, however, is that women and girls, too, suffer from relative deprivation, belong to subcultures, and are exposed to the same mass media and cultural influences promoting capitalist and individualist materialist acquisition, all of which should give them the motivation needed to commit crimes in rural areas and to obtain desired objects (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2005). Still, compared to men and boys, most females do not do this. Left realist research and theory, regardless of whether such work occurs in rural or urban places, are still weak in this case and could again benefit by addressing the work of feminist scholars such as Claire Renzetti (2013), Kerry Carrington (2015) and Meda Chesney-Lind and Merry Morash (2013).

Left Realism should address these concerns in its future attempts to take new 'departures from criminological and sociological urbanism' (Hogg and Carrington 2006: 1). These partings should also take us in new theoretical and methodological directions because rural criminology is largely atheoretical and is mostly quantitative in nature (DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2013; Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014).

Indigenous social problems

Crime and oppressive social control in Indigenous communities were briefly addressed at the aforementioned Vancouver Left realist conference (see DeKeseredy 1992); however, there was no follow up. To be sure, Left Realism is not totally to blame for this because criminology in general has not done much to describe the plight of Indigenous people and to help the struggle for change (Tauri 2013). Such selective inattention is troublesome because there is much crime, especially violence against women and children, in Indigenous communities. For example, roughly three per cent of the 35 million Canadian citizens publicly identify themselves as Aboriginal or native, but it is estimated that they are 12.5 times more likely to be victims of robbery or of physical or sexual assault than non-Aboriginal people (Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014; Siegel and McCormick 2012). Most of the crimes committed by Canadian Aboriginal people, though, are 'native-on-native' (Restoule 2009), but these harms cannot be adequately understood without a thorough, sophisticated understanding of colonialism.

In many parts of the world, too, including in Canada, Australia, and the USA, Indigenous people are considerably more likely to live in overcrowded housing, suffer from major health problems, and live in poverty than members of the dominant culture (for example, people of European descent). Left realists, as well as other types of critical criminologists, are fully aware that these are strong determinants of crime. Further, Aboriginal people throughout the world have been harmed by the loss of rural job opportunities in the last few decades, a problem that also contributes to a myriad of crimes (Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014; Hogg and Carrington 2006).

On top of experiencing very high rates of interpersonal crime, many Indigenous communities are constantly subjected to 'over-policing' and other racist police practices (Perry 2009). Consider these problems that routinely plague Canadian Aboriginal people. It is well-documented that they:

- spend more time in pretrial detention;
- are more likely to be charged with multiple offenses and often for crimes against the system;
- are more likely not to have legal representation at court proceedings;
- spend much less time with their lawyers, especially in northern communities, because the court party flies in the day of the hearing;
- are more than twice as likely to be incarcerated than non-Aboriginal offenders; and
- often plead guilty because they are intimidated by the court and simply want the proceedings over with (Restoule 2009: 259).

In what is still one of the most widely read and cited social scientific articles in the world, Howard Becker (1967), a scholar very familiar with the negative effects of being labelled deviant or criminal, asks sociologists, 'Whose side are we on?' Left realists are on the side of the relatively poor and powerless, who are overrepresented among victims of crime, especially violent crime. This group includes women, non-whites, and working-class people (Ellis and DeKeseredy 1996). It only makes sense, then, for Left realists based in countries with a relatively sizeable portion of Indigenous people to add their concerns to the realist empirical, theoretical and political agendas.

Although, to date, realist surveys have been restricted to inner-city areas, this does not mean that they cannot be conducted in rural, isolated and Indigenous communities. In fact realist criminologists are more likely to conduct local surveys in these environments than are conventional researchers because they are strongly committed to the objective of developing policies which aid disenfranchised people. Realist survey technology can provide a defensible 'alterNative' source of information which can be effectively used in political struggles against racist law and order campaigns (DeKeseredy 1992; Tomaszewski 1997). Even so, this research would only further contribute to 'Indigenous marginalization' if it is 'Aboriginal-free in terms of data gathering and engagement with the research population' (Tauri 2013: 219). Indigenous people need to be equal partners in the empirical process and play equal roles in designing the research, analyzing the data, and writing reports and articles.

Conclusion

More can and will be said about the future of Left Realism. Certainly, the suggestions offered here constitute just the tip of the iceberg. All the same, two more recommendations are necessary prior to ending this piece. A revitalized or what Matthews (2009) refers to as a 're-fashioned' version of Left Realism will only truly advance if its proponents avoid engaging in divisive debates similar to the ones they had in the past with those who they referred to as 'left idealists'. Also, realists, as is the case with other critical criminologists, must always avoid the trap of simply criticizing conventional research and theory. Of course, critique is necessary for improving our understanding of any social problem, but useful alternatives to conservative approaches should always be provided and this has always been one of the key strengths of the realist agenda.

Another one of Left Realism's major strengths is that it helps challenge the myth that critical criminological perspectives are simply 'rhetorical' (Wheeler 1976), 'ideologically charged ideas' (Liska 1987), and are 'untestable' (Akers and Sellers 2013). As mentioned elsewhere (see DeKeseredy 2011) some readers may perceive two of these citations as dated and that the claims associated with them are no longer topical. Unfortunately, they are still widely cited in popular North American undergraduate textbooks because (and we don't really have to be reminded of this) the bulk of contemporary criminology in that continent is dominated by positivism (Young 2011).

Today, many people either forget or do not know that Left Realism made some of the most important empirical contributions in the history of criminology and is destined to make even more in the future. Hopefully, Roger Matthews' (2014) new book and the articles included in this special issue of the *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* will trigger a new wave of research that has the potential to translate into critical practice.

Correspondence: Dr Walter S DeKeseredy, Anna Deane Carlson Endowed Chair of Social Sciences, Director of the Research Center on Violence and Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia, USA, 26501; Adjunct Professor, School of Justice, Faculty of Law, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia. Email: walter.dekeseredy@mail.wvu.edu

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² See Lowman and MacLean (1992) for published articles that emerged from this event.

³ There are, though, a few feminist exceptions to the rule, such as Judith Grant's (2008) gendered analysis of Appalachian women's pathways from addiction to recovery; Catrin Smith's (2014) work on injecting drug use and the performance of femininity in North Wales; Rockell's (2013) study of rural drug-involved recidivist property and public-order offenders; Dawn Beichner and Cara Rabe-Hemp's (2014) of the multiple disadvantages faced by mothers who have been incarcerated when they return to rural communities; and Donna Swift's (2015) work on girl-to-girl fighting in rural New Zealand.

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