More than ‘just a picture’: experiences of non-consensual sexual image sharing among adults

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Abstract

Non-consensual sexual image sharing, sometimes known as 'revenge pornography' or 'image-based sexual abuse', is a phenomenon where images of a sexual nature are shared without the consent of the person depicted. The growth of digital media has caused a huge increase in occurrences of this experience, however the rapid growth and varied nature of this phenomenon renders it difficult to name, define, or conceptualise. This thesis seeks to examine the experience of having sexual imagery shared without consent among adults. It questions: what does it feel like to have sexual imagery shared without consent? How does one react to this experience? Furthermore, what lasting repercussions (if any) does the experience have? This thesis makes a clear empirical contribution this field via in-depth, qualitative interviews, conducted with both men and women affected by this phenomenon. It argues that the experience is a harmful one, but one that is greatly context-dependent- the extent to which one is impacted is reliant on a number of personal factors. It also posits that the experience can be categorised by a sensation of loss; loss of security, of trust, or reputation. Furthermore, this experience can also be categorised by a sense of shame and self-blame. This thesis offers a new perspective on the phenomenon of non-consensual sexual image sharing, exploring the varied and nuanced ways that this experience is felt and managed by those affected.

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Authors declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

In 1953, Marilyn Monroe's nude images were published in the first issue of *Playboy*. The photographs, which were taken out of desperation and which Monroe believed would be styled in such a way as to render her unrecognisable- were sold to *Playboy* mogul Hugh Hefner without her awareness or permission (Hills 2017; Scheller 2015; Barris 1995). Monroe later said in her biography (Barris 1995) that she felt "nervous, embarrassed, even ashamed" (p.83) of the images, stating that "nice girls did not pose in the nude" (p.82); furthermore, she received no financial compensation from *Playboy* for the 50,000 copies her edition sold (Hills 2017). Although not considered as such until much later in history, this event is often cited as the first occurrence of 'revenge pornography' (Fallik et al. 2022; Maddocks 2018).

Revenge pornography is a phenomenon whereby a person's sexual images are shared by a third party without consent. Often known by alternative terms such as 'image-based sexual abuse', 'technology-facilitated abuse', or 'non-consensual sexual image sharing', it is not a new phenomenon, but one that has been catapulted into public consciousness in the last ten to fifteen years. The growth of technology which permits both the capturing and distribution of sexual images has created an environment in which the sharing of this content without consent can thrive. While often considered to occur in the context of the breakdown of intimate relationships, where an ex-partner shares these images with malicious intent, in reality these images can be shared by a variety of parties (including friends, strangers, or hackers) and for a variety of reasons beyond 'revenge', such as financial gain, humour, or voyeurism. The images can depict varying levels of sexual content, ranging from explicit sexual acts to merely suggestive material.

The impact of having sexual imagery shared without consent can be severe. People affected have reported impact to their mental and physical health, loss of jobs and livelihoods, reductions to their ability to engage romantically and socially with others, and feelings such as shame, self-blame, humiliation, anger, and fear (McGlynn et al. 2020; Bates 2017; Franks 2017b; Bloom 2014; Citron & Franks 2014). What's more, the cyclical nature of online spaces means that there is no finite end to the sharing of these images; they have the potential to circulate forever (Levendowski, 2014b). There is also little indication that this phenomenon is decreasing. The Revenge Porn Helpline, a charity which offers guidance and support to those

affected, stated 19,000 reports of sexual images shared without consent were made to them in 2023, a 109% increase on previous years (Papachristou 2023). Despite laws, legislation and campaigning, the problem endures- it is a 'cultural harm' (McGlynn & Rackley 2016) enacted by "a society of Peeping Toms, no longer fearing judgement for our voyeurism, but administering judgement on the objects of our gaze" (Franks 2017b, p.1254).

The study of non-consensual sexual image sharing is made difficult by a variety of factors. Competing names, definitions, and categorisations of this phenomenon makes it difficult to track and compare accounts. In addition, the role of technology in facilitating the creation and distribution of this content means that it advances at a speed difficult to keep pace with; just as you feel you understand the ways in which this phenomenon occurs, a new manner, method, or location for creating or sharing sexual images emerges. Finally, the sensitive, intimate, and embarrassing impact of having sexual imagery shared without consent can make those affected reluctant to talk about their experience. In short, the phenomenon is difficult to name, difficult to conceptualise, and difficult to study. This thesis seeks to make a clear empirical contribution to this field. By collecting data via qualitative interviews with people who have had sexual imagery shared without consent, it seeks to explore its experience, impact and aftermath.

1.2 Social, cultural, and policy landscape

As any visit to an art gallery will attest, it is not uncommon for the nude form to be depicted in artistic renderings, and looked upon with desire, admiration, or reverence. As long as we have had the means to depict- and later go on to observe this depiction- of the nude body, we have done so. There are those that argue that one of the first images taken with the camera was that of a naked woman (O'Toole 1988). The presence of pornography can be documented throughout human history, and reached a particular peak in the Victorian age, prompting the creation of the Obscene Publications Act (1857) to legislate against the creation and distribution of such materials (Setterfield 2017). As "camera, video, computing and communication technology" (Salter & Crofts 2015, p.1) has developed and the ability to take photographs has become less expensive, less time-consuming, more private, and more accessible, the ability to record nude or sexual images has also increased. The darker side of this technological advancement, however, is that the ability to take and share sexual images of absolutely anyone has grown, regardless of their level of consent. Examples of this are littered throughout history alongside the growth of such technologies.

The roots of the technology and culture that currently facilitates non-consensual sexual image sharing particularly began to emerge in the late 1970s. One of the earliest 'sex tape' scandals occurred when tapes containing home-movie footage of 'blacksploitation' actors Jayne Kennedy and Leon Issac Kennedy entered circulation. The tapes- which were shared both commercially and informally- were allegedly released by Leon Issac Kennedy following his divorce from his wife, as punishment for leaving him (Setterfield 2017; Salter & Crofts 2015). Slightly later in the 1980s, the pornographic magazine *Hustler* ran a competition bluntly named 'Beaver Hunt', a contest which encouraged readers to submit nude images of women, often accompanied by intimate details such as their names, hobbies, and sexual fantasies. The magazine was later sued by some of these women, who objected to this publication (Salter & Crofts 2015; Levendowski 2014a; 2014b). *High Society*, another pornographic magazine, ran a 'celebrity skin' feature which depicted nude television and movie stars, again without their consent (Rosen 2010). The magazine was sued by the actress Jennifer Aniston for sharing photos of her topless, which were both taken and shared without her consent, and left her feeling "shame, humiliation, anger and emotional distress" (Rosenzweig 2002, p.1).

In the 1990s, the growth of the internet created a newer, faster way to distribute non-consensual sexual imagery, one which didn't rely solely on the commercial pornographic industry. Pamela Anderson and Tommy Lee's 'sex tape'- which was, similarly to the case of the Kennedys, a stolen, personal, home video of the couple- was the first to use the internet to facilitate distribution of the stolen content. Anderson, who was the "most searched-for person on the Internet between 1995 and 2005" (Risse 2023, p.123) described her experience in 2023 as 'horrible' and 'humiliating' and likened the experience to sexual violence (Edwardes 2023). In subsequent years, the internet quickly became the main distribution route for this type of content, and several other celebrities began to find their private sexual content shared online. The 2014 celebrity hacking scandal, known crudely in online spaces as 'the fappening', resulted in a number of celebrities- largely female- having images stolen from their iCloud accounts and shared online, an experience actress Jennifer Lawrence (who was one of the many women affected) described as a 'sex crime' (Massanari 2017; Vanity Fair 2014). This heavily publicised incident prompted the FBI to intervene in the sharing of these celebrity images on the US-hosted forum 4chan, with Google quickly joining suit in blocking searches for them (Scheller 2015).

Beyond celebrities, the accessibility of technology both to record and to distribute these images has caused an increase in the scale and scope of the problem. The internet is cited as 'reinventing' this phenomenon- the ability to record, upload, and distribute such content became swiftly available to anyone with the ability and the incentive to do so (Maddocks 2018).

While celebrities receive the most attention, this is by no means a problem which only affects the famous; as Salter and Crofts (2015) argue, "beyond these high-profile cases are innumerable people whose images have been uploaded to the internet without their consent" (p.2). Online spaces dedicated to the sharing of sexual content of ordinary people- again, usually women- began to spring up in 2014 (Citron & Franks 2014). The most notable of these, 'isanyoneup.com', was created in 2010 by Hunter Moore, receiving more than 10,000 image submissions and allegedly earning him between $8,000–13,000 USD a month (Stroud 2014). This website instigated a global trend; whilst it was sold by Moore to an anti-bullying charity in 2012, several similar websites arrived in its place (Fallik et al. 2022). The digital nature of this phenomenon poses a distinct problem, as online spaces are notoriously difficult to legislate- with a global reach, the internet is frequently considered 'public domain' and outside of the interference of national bodies. Whilst governments can intervene where websites are hosted on their soil, the enduring nature of the internet means that takedown requests or bans on content come too late, as data, once online, remains shared forever (Massanari 2017; Scheller 2015). This becomes what Levendowski (2014a; 2014b) calls the 'whack-a-mole problem', as those affected must take part in a continuous process of locating and reporting these images, only for them to crop up once again at a later stage.

A further problem is found in the sheer scale of adult content available online. Images uploaded to 'revenge pornography' websites join an online environment already bloated with explicit imagery, both consensually and non-consensually distributed. Outside of such dedicated websites, appetites for so-called 'amateur pornography'- material that gives the impression of being created by 'regular' people, rather than professional adult performers- provides a seemingly legitimate smokescreen for non-consensual content on more mainstream pornographic websites (Franks 2017b). This makes it increasingly difficult to identify the difference between consensually and non-consensually shared content, or to locate such content once you know it is out there. The ubiquitousness of pornographic content is part of a wider cultural shift; by the early noughties, pornography became "seamlessly integrated into popular culture" (Paul 2005, p.iv). This shift is part of a broader change to what Atwood (2009; 2006) calls a 'mainstreaming of sex'- a process of integration and normalisation of sexual content, discourse, and behaviour into popular culture. One example of how normalised accessing sexual images of female celebrities had become at this time can be exemplified by actress and feminist campaigner Emma Watson. In 2008, when leaving her eighteenth birthday party, she recalled paparazzi lying on the floor as she left the event, deliberately trying to take photos beneath her skirt- images which were then printed in the British tabloids the next day (Blair 2016).

By 2012, victim support groups began to emerge in several countries, including the United Kingdom, and women's rights networks began to develop 'anti revenge porn' campaigns (Maddocks 2018; Salter & Crofts 2015). That same year, campaigner-turned-academic Holly Jacobs founded the 'End Revenge Porn' campaign to advocate for the criminalisation of the phenomenon, which later became the 'Cyber Civil Rights Initiative' (n.d.), a non-profit organisation that supports victims of online abuse. This was largely triggered not only by the increasing body of people who were becoming affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing, but also by attitudes such as that from US law professor Eric Goldman, who argued that legal protection was not required for those affected by this experience- instead, he argued that simply advising people not to record sexual content was a sufficient response (Goldman 2013). Fellow professor of law Mary Anne Franks labelled this statement as nothing more than "garden-variety victim-blaming", likening this stance to the advice given to many women that they must prevent sexual assault themselves (Franks 2013, p.1). Franks was responsible for drafting early laws criminalising non-consensual sexual image sharing in the USA (Franks 2017b; Franks 2015).

The mid-2010s came with increased media and legal scrutiny to the phenomenon: in the UK and Wales, the distribution of non-consensual sexual imagery was made illegal in 2015 (Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015), and 2016 saw the term 'Revenge Pornography' added to the Oxford English Dictionary (Maddocks 2018). This law defined the crime as "the sharing of private, sexual materials, either photos or videos, of another person, without their consent and with the purpose of causing distress" (Ministry of Justice 2015). At the same time, the government launched the Revenge Porn Helpline, a specialist service ran by the South West Grid for Learning (SWGfL) charitable trust, which has now successfully supported victims of this experience for a decade (Sharratt 2019; Government Equalities Office 2015).

While the establishment of legislation and government support was welcomed, campaigners and academics found several flaws in this law. The first of these was that this legislation did not classify the experience as a *sexual* offence, meaning that participants were not guaranteed anonymity, a factor that impacted the ability of those affected to come forward (McGlynn & Rackley 2016). A further issue was that the legislation focuses on the motivations of the image sharer, with explicit reference to 'intent to cause distress' (Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015), a legal response that has focused too much on the 'revenge' in revenge pornography (McGlynn & Rackley 2017). Intent can be hard to prove, and this specific wording makes it difficult to bring legal action against perpetrators who share for other reasons, such as voyeurism (Plaha & Panorama 2022). Finally, the law didn't protect against threats to share sexual content, a factor later rectified in the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) following campaigning from activists, survivors, and charity groups such as Women's Aid (Nazeer 2021).

Several notable cases emerged in the UK following this legislation, which helped to publicise the phenomenon of non-consensual sexual image sharing, to highlight the serious impact this experience can have, and to bring attention to flaws in the existing legislation. One such case was that of Georgia Harrison, a reality television star whose ex-boyfriend, Stephen Bear, circulated explicit videos of the pair via his OnlyFans (a platform which facilitates content subscription and is often used for adult content). The videos were taken via indoor surveillance footage in his home, which she was unaware of during their interaction (Aspinall 2024). The conviction of Bear was considered a landmark ruling which highlighted the seriousness and severity of non-consensual sexual image sharing (Moore 2023; Rackham 2023; Gilbourne 2022). Harrison made several public appearances in the aftermath of her image-sharing. She became an advocate for women's safety, working alongside Refuge (a charity that supports women and children affected by domestic violence) and the Revenge Porn Helpline to campaign for better online protection for women and girls, contributing to efforts such as the Refuge #notyourstoview campaign, which raised awareness of website and platform culpability (Robinson 2024; Refuge 2022). Furthermore, she presented evidence on both her own experience and the experiences of others to the Women and Equalities committee at parliament, and in June 2025 was awarded an MBE for her tireless work in this field, demonstrating the significance and importance of her advocacy (SWGfl 2025; House of Commons 2024).

Another key case is that of Gina Martin, who in 2017 had a man take a photo beneath her skirt at a festival, a phenomenon known colloquially as 'upskirting'. Despite immediately alerting the police, who were sympathetic, she was told that what the man had done wasn't illegal. Martin conducted a year and a half of campaigning, including speaking publicly about her experience and attending parliament to raise this issue with politicians (Martin 2021; BBC News 2017). 'Upskirting' was successfully made illegal in England and Wales via the Voyeurism Offences Act (2019), with Martin being credited as the driving force behind this change (BBC News 2019). While celebrated, the legislation was criticised for its narrow scope, such as not criminalising photos taken of women's breasts (Gillespie 2019). Indeed, Martin recently spoke about how, reflecting on her law change, she now wishes to "make my own law moot" (Martin 2023, p.1). She now primarily focuses her activism on campaigns which advocate for prevention via the education of young people on the concepts of masculinity, gender, and sexual violence, working with groups such as 'Tomorrow Woman' and 'Beyond Equality' (Tomorrow Woman 2025; Mustafa 2022).

More recently, the much campaigned for Online Safety Act (2023) has introduced further legal restrictions against such crimes. This included providing specific legislation around the taking and soliciting of sexual images and expanding the legislation to include manufactured or

altered images, which permits the law to account for the growing number of 'deepfakes'- AI generated sexual content (SWGfl 2024). This also included making non-consensual sexual image sharing a 'priority offence', which obliges websites and social media platforms to take proactive measures to prevent the image sharing in the first place (Landi 2024). However, once again this legislation has left gaps in its protection, which campaigners, academics, legal professionals and activists are now seeking to fix.

One such example is that of 'deprivation orders', a mechanism by which courts can enforce the erasure of sexual images from the personal devices of perpetrators. These were introduced in 2023, but are poorly enforced, meaning that offenders in some cases are being permitted to keep sexual content of their victims (Thompson & Talwar 2025). This is despite the fact that the issuing of deprivation orders is standard practice in other cases that involve elements of digital exploitation (Das 2025; Mortimer 2025). Furthermore, while sharing (or threatening to share) deepfake content is now illegal, crucially the creation of it is not (Morton 2024). While amendments to this are currently being advocated for (Robinson 2025), time is of the essence when it comes to AI-generated content. The technology is growing at speed; currently, a person's likeness can be taken from any existing image and transposed over the faces of actors in sexual content, creating custom pornography. Anyone can be targeted by this; including campaigners such as #NotYourPorn founder Kate Isaacs, who was subject to the creation and circulation of 'deepfaked' videos in a clear attempt to discredit her activism (McDermott & Davies 2022).

Outside of poor legislation, the enforcement of, and engagement with, these laws is another problem. Such incidents are believed to be under-reported to the police, and where formal reporting does occur, those affected often experience a poor police response (Huber 2023b; McGlynn et al. 2019). Even when reported, conviction rates for sharing sexual imagery without consent remain low, often due to lack of evidence or withdrawal of support from the victim (Wilson-George 2023). In 2023, the charity Refuge found that despite reports of intimate image abuse increasing, only around 4% of these reports lead to a charge or summons (Bottomley & Bruckmayer 2023). Some have noted that further legislation is pointless if not enforced by an informed police presence. Gillespie (2019) for instance, argues that in Gina Martin's case, the police in attendance could have arrested the suspect on the offence of 'outraging public decency'. While he acknowledges that better legislation around 'upskirting' is required, he states that:

> The Gina Martin case shows that some front-line police officers do not understand the law… unless this lack of understanding of the law is addressed, then the VOA

> (Voyeurism Offences Act 2019) will be pointless. A law is only relevant when enforced (p.1108).

This demonstrates that legislation only goes so far in permitting practical protection or justice for those who have had sexual imagery shared without consent.

This background informs our understanding of non-consensual sexual image sharing in a few ways. Campaigners and activists broadly conceptualise this problem as one facilitated by technology. The experience is likened to areas such as cyber-bullying, online abuse, and general poor conduct online. There is therefore much campaigning that focuses on the responsible use of technology- both of the government to better legislate and restrict access to such content, and of online companies which permit- and some would say encourage- the circulation of this content on their platforms. The #NotYoursToView Campaign, for instance, ran by the charity SWGfl, sought to raise awareness of a 'loophole' in the law that renders the content itself not illegal, which means that platforms can choose not to respond to content removal requests (Oppenheim 2024).

There is some suggestion that tech companies are paying better attention to this problem. The pornographic website *PornHub*, which was found to be hosting a variety of non-consensual content- including material that depicted sexual violence, and images of children- has taken measures to remove such content and prevent its re-upload, but has been criticised for not doing enough to verify the ethical creation of the material it hosts (Ansari 2021; Kristof 2020; Mahdawi 2020). Similarly, the forum Reddit implemented policies that banned the distribution of non-consensual sexual content in 2015, following this with a ban on deepfakes in 2018 (Hern 2018; Massanari 2017). Despite this, a Panorama investigation in 2022 found that this ban wasn't working, and a 'collector culture' around these sexual images was circulating in a dozen Reddit forums (Plaha & Panorama 2022). Another forum that facilitated the distribution of sexual images of men was found to be hosting a significant number of images without consent, and was accused of shaming and mocking these men when they tried to take them down; at time of writing, this website was still live (Barker 2018; Beresford 2018; Rose 2018). Ofcom, the UK communications regulator, is currently developing draft guidance for technology firms to follow to prevent the non-consensual sharing of sexual images and will be holding these companies to account- but it is too soon to tell how effective this will be (Ofcom 2025).

Alongside a focus on the role of technology in facilitating this experience, most activists and campaigners working in this area also focus on the gendered nature of non-consensual sexual image sharing. This includes examining the similarities between non-consensual sexual image

sharing and other forms of sexual assault, with emphasis on the disproportionate impact of this on women and girls. From this perspective, image-sharing is "[Marilyn] Monroe-era fetishisation of women's non-consent" writ large (Maddocks 2018, p.147); traditional sexist attitudes towards women amplified by technology to create a 'digitized rape culture' (Dodge 2016). Efforts such as the '#notyourporn' campaign, which was founded by Kate Isaacs in 2019 after her friend had sexual content shared to an adult website, make clear that this content is primarily considered pornographic in nature, echoing long-standing arguments from feminists as far back as the 1970s that pornography harms and objectifies women (Dworkin & MacKinnon 1988; Dworkin 1981; Brownmiller 1975). Other campaigns such as the #thisisnotright campaign, run by the Metro newspaper in collaboration with the charity Women's Aid (Arthurs 2024), shares news stories and advocacy updates about non-consensual sexual image sharing, alongside other incidences of sexual and domestic violence against women.

The recent case of Gisèle Pelicot illustrates particularly well the relationship between non-consensual sexual image sharing and other forms of sexual violence. Gisèle Pelicot became a "global icon in the campaign against sexual violence" (Walt 2025, p.1) during the much-publicised rape trial of her husband and 50 other men, all of whom were accused of raping her. Pelicot's husband, Dominique, was convicted of drugging and raping his wife, and recruiting other men to do so as well. Pelicot waived her right to anonymity during the trial to bring attention to the case and was awarded with France's highest honour (Knight of the Legion of Honour) in recognition of her bravery, as well as being named by Time as 'woman of the year' (Fatima 2025; Walt 2025). What led to Dominique being caught, however, was not his behaviour towards his wife, but an incident of 'upskirting' women in a supermarket, and it was this offence that brought to light the catalogue of abuse he had recorded whilst sexually violating his wife (Walt 2025; Pochin 2024). Stories such as this one, in addition to the fact that a third of all 'upskirting' offenders between 2020 and 2021 were also charged with other serious sexual offences (CPS 2021), demonstrates how often non-consensual sexual image sharing occurs alongside sexual assault, and can therefore be considered- at least in some circumstances- a symptom of wider sexual violence.

All of this demonstrates that non-consensual sexual image sharing is largely considered as a phenomenon which happens *to* women, *by* men, and there is little cultural attention where men are the ones affected. Indeed, there is competing evidence around who is affected more by this experience. While a few studies suggest that women are more likely to be affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing (Papachristou 2023; Branch et al. 2017; Franks 2017b; Hall & Hearn 2017) a 2017 study found no statistically significant differences in victimisation rates by gender (Henry, Powell & Flynn 2017); in fact, the same study found that men are more

likely to *voluntarily* share nude images; a factor perhaps related to the lack of societal discourse around men as would-be victims. A further study reported that in 2021-2022, almost 2,500 reports of this experience- 59% of total reports- came from men (eSafety Commissioner 2022), demonstrating a significant rise in men affected by this. Current work suggests that where this occurs to men, it is more likely to happen in the context of blackmail, a phenomenon known as 'sextortion' whereby a third party threatens to share the images unless certain conditions are met. Research on the impact and experience of 'sextortion' is mixed- while one study argues it has little harmful impact to men (Sharratt 2019), others argue that the element of threat that accompanies sextortion can cause even "greater psychological distress" than simply having these images shared alone (Henry et al. 2017, p.9).

Notable cases where men are targeted by non-consensual sexual image sharing only highlight this gendered difference in attitude. British royal Prince Harry had nude images taken and shared without his permission while attending a party in Las Vegas in 2012, which were subsequently published in *The Sun* Newspaper. Prince Harry later said that while he felt he should be permitted a reasonable expectation of privacy- the photos were taken at a private event- he thought he had let both himself and his family down (BBC News 2013). Around the same time, topless pictures of Prince Harry's sister-in-law and fellow royal, Kate Middleton (at the time, Duchess of Cambridge, now Princess of Wales) were taken by paparazzi during a holiday in France. The images were refused publication by the British press, including *The Sun* newspaper, who argued that circumstances were different between images of the two, as Prince Harry was partying with strangers while Middleton was privately holidaying with her husband (BBC News 2012). Kate Middleton's images were generally considered a "gross invasion of privacy" (Taylor 2017, p.1), and she even received praise that her images depicted a "very in-love husband and wife" as opposed to the "tawdry, drunk" behaviour of Prince Harry (Miranda 2012, p.1). Laid out in comparison, it is easy to see parallels between the treatment of Prince Harry (where the general response seems to suggest that he ought to *expect* to be photographed when engaging in drunken, nude behaviour, and that this behaviour *should* induce guilt or shame), and countless other women who have received a similar 'victim-blaming' (Franks 2013) rhetoric. What this clearly demonstrates is that there is a cultural, heavily gendered divide in how we perceive non-consensual sexual image sharing when it occurs to men and women respectively.

Another consequence of this is that this experience is frequently framed as heterosexual in nature, where men appear as the perpetrators and women the victims. A few studies have reported that identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual increases chances of victimisation from this experience (Galop 2022; Henry et al. 2017; Lehart, Ybarra & Price-Feeney 2016). From

around 2018, a smattering of articles provided first-hand descriptions of this experience from the perspective of gay men, all of whom spoke of the embarrassment and stigma that they felt accompanied having sexual imagery shared without consent (Anonymous 2022; Rasker 2019; Barker 2018; Rose 2018). One first-hand account of this experience published by Survivors UK- a charity that supports men and boys affected by sexual violence- described his own experience as "life ending" and subject to an "unspoken LGBTQ taboo… men, whether gay or straight, are judged on a gender stereotype that dictates that we should suffer our emotional pain in silence" (Survivors UK n.d., p.1). Furthermore, there is very little dialogue around how this experience may affect transgender people, who are subject both to sexual objectification and an increased threat of sexual violence- and therefore seem a likely target for this experience (Montoya 2023; Nianias 2015). Some have noted how this exclusion is symptomatic of a wider issue of a lack of acknowledgement that LGBTQ+ people are subject to sexual and domestic harms, which often focuses on a mainstream 'violence against women' rhetoric (Golds 2022). The UK government has recently pledged increased funding for domestic abuse services that support LGBTQ+ people to try to rectify this (Perry 2025), which demonstrates an awareness of this failing, but it is too soon to foresee how this will impact those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing.

This background establishes a clear empirical issue which this research seeks to address. Our cultural and social understanding of this experience shapes this as a highly gendered phenomenon, where men are the perpetrators and women are the victims. This is in many ways an understandable reaction; this is clearly very damaging to the lives of women, who are subject to more discriminatory and shameful attitudes around sex and sexuality than men are. Perhaps one reason for this discrepancy is that a number of organisations which are vocal about women's experiences of non-consensual sexual image sharing- such as Woman's Aid and Refuge- were founded in the 1970s and already have sustained roots in campaigning for women's safety from other forms of sexual, domestic, or intimate violence (Refuge n.d.; Women's Aid n.d.). The dialogue of women as victims of sexual harms has a much longer history than that of men. However, it is clear that this focus has neglected the voices of people affected by this experience who are not heterosexual women, such as men or members of the LGBTQ+ community. This research will open engagement with the study to anyone who has had sexual imagery shared without consent, regardless of sexuality and gender, aiming to gain a comprehensive overview of what it means to be affected by this experience.

1.3 Research field

Non-consensual sexual image sharing is often shaped by the 'big scandals' discussed in the previous section, which form the framework that structures the way we comprehend this phenomenon- but, as McGlynn et al. (2020) argue, "Beyond the scandals, we know relatively little about the reality" (p.2) of the experience of having sexual imagery shared without consent. What we do know paints a bleak picture of this experience. Studies by Bates (2017), Huber (2023a), Aborisade (2021), and McGlynn et al. (2020)- the first of which examined 'revenge pornography' and the latter examined 'image-based sexual abuse'- indicate the severe impact that this experience can have on those affected, including impact to mental health, loss of trust and security, feelings of blame or shame, and impact to jobs, reputations and relationships; harms which endure far beyond the original image-sharing experience.

The study of this phenomenon is made complicated by a few factors. The first of these is terminology. Currently, non-consensual sexual image sharing occupies a poorly defined space. It is known by many names, each offering competing definitions and conceptualisations of the experience (Maddocks 2019; 2018). This is made further complicated by the many 'types' or subsets of non-consensual sexual image sharing- 'upskirting', 'deekfakes' or 'sextortion' are just some examples. While there have been a handful of studies of the experience of 'non-consensual sexual image sharing' more broadly, including Huber (2023a), Aborisade (2021), McGlynn et al. (2020), and Bates (2017), these studies focus on a subset of non-consensual sexual image sharing, such as 'revenge pornography' or 'image based sexual abuse'. As will be discussed in section 1.5, section 2.2, and indeed, throughout the thesis, this work aims to conceptualise this experience in broader and more neutral terms, in the hope that this wider perspective avoids some of the difficulties in more narrowly defining this experience.

The study of this topic is also further complicated by the ever-evolving nature of the technology that often facilitates non-consensual sexual image sharing; new 'forms' of the experience continue to evolve. The recent growth of artificial intelligence, for instance, has made it easier for sexual images of a person to be created without their consent, and have led to severe concerns about how we protect those affected and legislate against such an offence (Mania 2024; Morton 2024; Schick 2020). New forms of social media and technology additionally further facilitate the distribution of this content. Such advances in technology merits the application of regular research to the field, to best examine this constantly changing area.

Existing work in this area, whether empirical, legal, or theoretical in its framing, further conceptualises this phenomenon as one that broadly happens to women. Non-consensual

sexual image sharing is framed as part of a continuum of practices that broadly define sexual violence (McGlynn, Rackley & Houghton 2017; Kelly 1988). Authors who take this perspective argue that non-consensual sexual image sharing is shaped by the larger gendered power structures that create, normalise, and encourage sexual violence against women, and situate the experience firmly in this framework (McGlynn et al. 2020; Powell & Henry 2017; Citron & Franks 2014; Gavey 2005). Furthermore, an increasingly sexualised culture- one in which sex has become a larger part of our identity and lives- exacerbates this issue, by encouraging a climate in which the sharing of pornographic content can thrive (Attwood & Smith 2015; Attwood 2009; 2006; 2002). Just a handful of bodies of work in this area address this phenomenon outside of a heterosexual context (Gilden 2023; Hearn & Hall 2019; Waldman 2019).

Other groups prefer to focus- or bring in focus alongside the consideration of sexual violence- on the proliferation of technology. Work in this area focuses on the apps, platforms, social networks, devices, and manners of online interaction that facilitate non-consensual sexual image sharing. These groups situate the phenomenon in the context of wider digital offences: cultures of 'trolling', 'e-bile' (Jane 2014), online revenge (Stroud 2014), or other forms of online abuse. This is a landscape which is both "gendered and deeply entrenched in technological cultures" (Salter 2018, p.256), forming a school that defines this phenomenon as *technology-facilitated* sexual violence (Dragiewicz et al. 2018; Henry & Powell 2018; Henry & Powell 2015).

1.4 Research aims

This research project aims to further explore the experience of having sexual imagery shared without consent in adulthood, moving beyond narrow parameters or 'types' of image sharing to examine the experience in its broadest sense. It will make a clear empirical contribution to this limited field with analysis of in-depth, qualitative data collected from those affected by this experience. The project seeks to recruit participants who relate to the term 'non-consensual sexual image sharing' in any of its forms or guises, provided they were over eighteen at the time of the image sharing. This recruitment does not wish to add any further restrictions beyond this, with a view to allowing anyone that self-identifies as having relevant experience to take part. The project will use qualitative, semi-structured interviews, conducted online via video conferencing. Borrowing a narrative technique, each interview will start with a broad question- "tell me about when this happened to you"- to allow each participant to offer

an account of their own experiences on their own terms. Follow-up questions can then be asked to further explore the project's research aims.

The project seeks to speak directly to those affected about the experience itself, and the ways (if any) that this experience has affected them. Alongside understanding the circumstances of their image-sharing, it seeks to explore the severity that the release of these images had on the individuals, including repercussions on their mental health, their careers, and their relationships with others. Additionally, it questions what steps (if any) the individual took to take control of these images and find justice. This could be a formal proceeding, such as reporting the incident to the police, or reporting the images to the host website. It could also include informal actions, such as confronting the perpetrator directly. Finally, it aims to examine if the sharing of these images has caused changes to the behaviour of the individual – for instance, if they changed their image sharing habits. The study aims to offer much needed insight into the experiences of those victimised by this crime and contribute to a wider academic understanding of what it means to be affected by this phenomenon.

1.5 Terminology

Before proceeding, it is important to outline what is meant by the term 'non-consensual sexual image sharing', and why terminology here is significant to how we understand and conceptualise this phenomenon. The concept of terminology runs throughout the thesis, and affects both the way this project relates to other bodies of work in this field, and the way that this project was designed and conducted. The experience of having sexual imagery shared without consent goes by many names, which are discussed in further detail in section 2.2. 'Revenge pornography' remains the most notable term, and indeed, is the term I use when explaining my project in informal or social situations. While the most recognisable title for this experience, it has been criticised as being sensationalist and insensitive to those affected. It is also very poorly defined- it has now been applied so broadly and widely that it is unclear what distinction, if any, can be made between 'revenge pornography' and other forms of non-consensual sexual image sharing (Maddocks 2019; 2018).

For these reasons, the term 'revenge pornography' is often eschewed in academic works for more studious alternatives. 'Image-based sexual abuse' or 'technology-facilitated sexual violence', along with many variations, prioritise the serious impact of this experience and frame the experience as 'sexual violence' rather than 'pornography'. Additionally, the latter emphasises the role of the digital in this phenomenon, and the ways in which online networks

contribute directly towards this experience. While certainly more appropriate than sensationalist alternatives, it raises further questions about how to define this experience. What exactly renders an experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing as 'image-based sexual abuse', rather than 'revenge pornography'? Will those affected resonate their experience with the term 'abuse' or 'violence'?

Furthermore, the experience has several subtypes or subcategories that can be difficult to neatly sort into broader groups. If you are 'upskirted', for instance- a situation where images are taken beneath your clothing without your consent- how much do the above terms relate to you? In addition, terms such as 'sextortion', where those depicted in the images are blackmailed on threat of having images released, or 'deepfakes', where the person depicted has their face superimposed onto a sexual image, offer further examples of subcategories of this experience. There are many ways of having sexual imagery shared without consent, and ultimately providing a clear index and definition of each subtype does not necessarily contribute towards the aims of this project, which seeks to explore the experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing regardless of type or circumstance. In addition, any such endeavour would likely become outdated very quickly. Non-consensual sexual image-sharing is a many-headed hydra- new forms or types of it manifest on a regular basis, alongside the technology that exists to facilitate them. The growth of AI or 'deepfake' pornography is a particular concern at point of writing, which will no doubt develop its own terminology and definitions as the phenomenon is further understood.

What is required then, is a term capable of being easily understood, easily defined, and easily applied to relevant experiences. 'Non-consensual sexual image sharing' was selected as the chosen label on this basis. It is intended to be a deliberately broad and neutral term which encompasses *any* scenario where sexual imagery of a person is shared without their consent. This term is designed to be inclusive of any parties who fit the above criteria. It was chosen to include all relevant labels for this experience and allow for analysis of the phenomena in its many forms. I do not wish to present this term as the 'final' or 'ultimate' name for this experience- undoubtedly, the language used to describe it will continue to evolve just as the phenomenon itself does, and additionally, alternative terms all provide their own merits. Instead, I present this term simply as the most suited for my research aims. Furthermore, I will certainly draw on work which examines the phenomenon of 'revenge porn' or 'image-based sexual abuse', for instance, over the course of this project.

1.6 Thesis structure

This thesis has a seven-chapter structure. This chapter offers background on the phenomenon of non-consensual sexual image sharing, establishes the research project and its aims, and outlines the use of terminology, briefly offering a rationale for these decisions. The next chapter reviews the relevant literature needed to understand this research area. This includes reference to non-consensual sexual image sharing in its many forms, but additionally includes discussion of four contributing themes found in the literature. The first is the relevance of sexual violence to the project, including gendered interaction and power dynamics. The second focuses on sexualisation of culture, and the ways in which sex has become a commodity and source of identity in modern society. The third responds to the largely feminist focus of the two prior chapters by examining how queer cultures of intimacy change how this phenomenon is shaped, defined, and experienced by those affected. The fourth chapter focuses on digital cultures, and the ways in which online landscapes facilitate non-consensual sexual image sharing and exacerbate the impact felt. The third chapter covers the methodology of the project. This chapter not only outlines the decisions made on how to plan, collect, and analyse the data, but details the careful ethical considerations that must be made when conducting empirical research on a sensitive subject area. As this field is not well researched, the chapter additionally offers further methodological findings that might be used to build future studies of this topic.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters will outline the project's analysis, each focusing on a specific theme. The first of these is titled 'harm', which identifies the types of harmful responses that this experience instigates. It explores how this phenomenon fits with the continuum of sexual violence (McGlynn et al. 2017; Kelly 1988) and identifies the specific factors which make this experience harmful, including where boundaries are breached, social networks are disturbed, and images are everlasting. The fifth chapter is titled 'loss', which argues that this experience can be categorised as a series of losses. Loss of control, loss of ability to react, loss of reputation, loss of trust, and loss of digital freedoms are all key factors in which the person affected is left diminished. The sixth chapter is titled 'shame', which outlines where feelings of embarrassment, humiliation, and judgement all contribute to an overall sense of shame. This shame can occur both from outside forces- such as family members, friends, or wider society- or from the self. This chapter also discusses the ways in which shame can be navigated and resisted. The conclusion clearly identifies the empirical contributions of this research. It discusses where the findings corroborate with other voices in this field and further demonstrates the novel findings of this work. This thesis makes a clear

contribution of knowledge to our understanding of the experience of having sexual imagery shared without consent.

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

While non-consensual sexual image sharing is not a new concept, it is only in the 21st century that research in this field has come into its own- as Bates (2017) and Franks (2017b) argue, our understanding, acknowledgement, and approach to non-consensual sexual image sharing has only been discussed in detail relatively recently in history. Most existing literature on the experience of having sexual imagery shared without consent situates the experience broadly in four contexts. The first is the context of this experience as sexual violence. Non-consensual sexual image sharing is considered a 'digitised' manifestation of sexual violence, a modern version of an 'old' problem. This literature builds on principles of gendered power structures, which normalise and excuse sexual violence- particularly, violence against women. The majority of existing work in this field, particularly pre-existing qualitative research, conceptualises the phenomenon in this manner. The second is the context of an increasingly sexualised culture. This literature explores the ways in which western culture has become more focused on sex and sexuality, which normalises the taking and exchange of sexual images, both consensually and non-consensually. A sexualisation of culture has additionally led to the growth of online pornography, which is argued to both contribute to, and normalise the distribution of, non-consensually shared images.

The third section breaks from the discussion of feminist literature to examine queer cultures of intimacy. While queer theory in relation to this phenomenon is limited, this section draws on existing work to examine how queer contexts and cultures around dating, sex, and image-sharing in a broader sense might affect how this phenomenon impacts those outside of a heteronormative context. The final section places the phenomenon in the context of a digital landscape. Advances in technology, social media, and digital networks all play a part in facilitating non-consensual sexual image sharing, and in many cases exacerbates and prolongs the impact of having sexual imagery shared without consent by removing boundaries of temporality and anonymity.

It is difficult to determine just how prolific the experience of having sexual imagery shared without consent is- as other studies in this area will attest, the sexually harmful nature of the experience makes collecting accurate data difficult (Huber 2023a). The implications of this for this project will be discussed further in chapter 3. The data we do have, however, suggests it is

not an uncommon experience. One study of a convenience sample of 470 college freshmen showed that around 10% had had a private image shared beyond the intended recipient, and that a predominant number of these were women (Branch et al. 2017). Another study indicated that 4% of all internet users- as many as 1 in 25 online Americans- had either had a sexual image shared or threatened to be shared (Lehart et al. 2016). Ruvalcaba and Eaton's (2020) more recent study found that 1 in 12 participants had reported at least one incident of' 'nonconsensual pornography'. In the UK, the Revenge Porn helpline reported a massive increase in outreach for support during the Covid-19 pandemic- numbers which have still not reduced to pre-pandemic levels- and their annual report indicates that since the helpline began, over 320,000 pieces of content have been reported on (Ward 2023). This data presents this issue as a growing problem to be addressed.

2.2 Defining and conceptualising 'non-consensual sexual image sharing'

2.2.1 Defining the problem: the many alternatives to 'revenge pornography'

The act of having a sexual image distributed without consent is known by several names. The term 'revenge pornography' remains the best known, popularised by media use and its attention-grabbing terminology, however the phrase is much critiqued. While research on 'revenge porn' exists (Gilden 2023; Hearn & Hall 2019; Bloom 2014; Citron & Franks 2014; Stroud 2014), various alternatives have been suggested including 'non-consensual pornography' (Ruvalcaba & Eaton 2020; Bates 2017; Sebastian 2017; Franks 2015; Citron & Franks 2014) and 'involuntary pornography' (Burns 2015; Cecil 2014). Others wish for their terminology to emphasise the harms of the experience, preferring terms such as 'image-based sexual abuse' (Harder 2023; Huber 2023a; Aborisade 2021; Jurasz & Barker 2021; Mandau 2021; McGlynn et al. 2017; DeKeseredy & Schwartz 2016; McGlynn & Rackley 2016), 'image-based sexual exploitation' (Henry & Powell 2016) and 'intimate image abuse' (Sharratt 2019). Other phrases such as 'technology facilitated coercive control' (Dragiewicz et al. 2018) and 'technology-facilitated sexual violence' (Henry & Powell 2018; Pina, Holland & James 2017; Henry & Powell 2015) emphasise the role of technology in the crime. More neutral titles include 'non-consensual dissemination of intimate images' (Maddocks 2019), 'non-consensual intimate image sharing' (Spencer & Dodge 2018), 'the distribution of unauthorised sexual images' (Powell 2010), and 'non-consensual sexual image sharing' (Buiten 2020). This wide

range of terms presents the first challenge in seeking to understand this phenomenon, as the concept lacks a firm conceptualisation and terminology.

Maddocks (2018) described the move away from the term 'revenge porn' as creating a '"linguistic vacuum", meaning that there are now more terms than one can reasonably apply, with "no scholarly consensus about which term to use" (Dragiewicz et al. 2018, p.610). As a result, this project must begin by addressing the many options available and determining the best fit. Of course, "naming a new social harm presents many challenges" (Maddocks 2018, p.245), especially as each term specifies a different– but specific- point of interest. The use of language is important in any social research endeavour; Kate Lister, in her reflection of her use of the word 'whore' in her project on historical sex workers, argues that "language is an important battleground in the fight for social equality… we can begin to understand how words do enforce and create our reality" (2020, p.7). Therefore, critical and careful thought must be applied to the naming of this phenomenon.

As 'revenge pornography' remains one of the most popular terms for this problem, one might question why an alternative is needed. A media-constructed phrase which is deliberately "attention grabbing and salacious" (Maddocks 2019, p.1), it has entered into common lexicon, but it is actually a misnomer on both the use of the terms 'revenge' and 'pornography' (Franks 2015). Many object to the use of the term 'revenge' on the grounds that it implies the victim is at least partially to blame. Framing the sharing of these images in this specific context suggests that the behaviour of the victim motivated a vengeful response in some way, which presents them as deserving of their experience (Maddocks 2018; Henry & Powell 2016). It places emphasis on the grounds used to justify the act of 'revenge porn', which are often based on negative social norms in the context of a relationship, including alleged infidelity, promiscuity, poor sexual performance, or sexual identity (Hearn & Hall 2019; Hall & Hearn 2017). A more appropriate terminology ought to move focus away from the behaviour of the victim, to avoid these victim-blaming narratives (McGlynn & Rackley 2016; Rackley & McGlynn 2014).

Additionally, the motivation of 'revenge' is not always accurate. The term evokes a very specific narrative, that of a jilted ex-boyfriend seeking to enact vengeance on their (usually female) partner. While many affected people do have their sexual images circulated by an ex-partner with vengeful intent, this is not the only circumstance in which it happens, and emphasis on this experience invalidates the experiences of others affected by different motivations. Images might be shared by a range of people, both known and unknown to the victim, for a wide range of reasons (Sebastian 2017; Franks 2015). Even where the initial sharer of the image is motivated by revenge, the images are frequently re-shared and circulated online by persons unknown to the victim, meaning that revenge ceases to be a motive (Henry & Powell 2016).

Framing the act solely as a single expression of revenge ignores the additional harms that come from the wider circulation of the imagery. Additionally, the emphasis on revenge in 'revenge pornography' is also dangerous when we consider the framing of the crime in law. If focus is placed on the motive of the offender, the law risks only prosecuting image sharers where intent to cause revenge can be proven, which would exclude perpetrators motivated by other means such as personal sexual pleasure or voyeurism (Plaha & Panorama 2022; McGlynn & Rackley 2017; Bloom 2014).

Moving away from a narrative of 'revenge' successfully morphed 'revenge pornography' into different terms, such as 'non-consensual pornography' and 'involuntary pornography'. Despite this, the use of the term 'pornography' to define these leaked images remains an issue. Part of the problem lies in our inability to define the term 'pornography'. While some prefer broad definitions, such as "regulated, explicit depictions of bodies, sex organs and sexual activity specifically designed to sexually arouse" (O'Toole 1988, p.1), others argue that the term exists as a spectrum that can define everything from *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (Lawrence 1960), to the works of Madonna (specifically, *Erotica (1992)* and *Sex* (1992)), to 'hardcore' adult entertainment videos (Lane 2013). Framing this imagery in the same context as commercial content deliberately intended to arouse seems disingenuous. The term 'pornography' places an almost voyeuristic focus on the sexual content of the image, which draws focus away from the act as a harmful breach of privacy (Henry & Powell 2016; Rackley & McGlynn 2014).

Similarly, the use of the term 'pornography' is complicated by the ways in which the content of a shared sexual image may vary. While some images might depict explicit sexual acts, others might merely be sexually suggestive– for instance, depicting a person partly dressed, or in underwear or swimwear (Henry & Powell 2016). What this suggests is that images depicting any degree of sexual content may be involved in acts of non-consensual sexual image sharing. Harder's (2023) work on image-based abuse discussed the ways in which non-sexual or suggestive images are 'pornified': rendered explicit by use of pornographic cultural scripts, regardless of the actual sexual content of the image. Similarly, Huber's (2023a; 2023b) research on image-based sexual abuse identified several incidences of non-sexual images 'made' to be sexual, including the distribution of images of a Muslim woman without her hijab. 'Pornography' as a term therefore emphasises explicit acts, which may not always be relevant to this experience.

Another problem with the term 'pornography' is that it offers a sense of consent or legitimacy to these images, framing them as a kind of commercial entertainment rather than as a non-consensual breach of privacy (McGlynn & Rackley 2016). The marketing of these images as sexual entertainment is incredibly harmful to the people affected. It encourages their

consumption as "a category of online pornography" (Salter & Crofts 2015, p.233), rather than conceptualising them as a violation of privacy. As non-consensual sexual videos are often shared under the category of 'amateur pornography', this conflation is dangerous (Franks 2017b). It also frames the sharing of these images as somewhat inevitable; it suggests that the content was created for widespread consumption. This contributes to a cultural response which seeks to blame the victim for taking the photos in the first place, rather than blaming the person who shared the images (Rackley & McGlynn 2014). Furthermore, while privately shared sexual images might borrow style or content from pornography, Amundsen's (2019) research found that women who shared sexual images in the context of an intimate relationship did *not* consider their images as 'pornography'. It was only when images were examined in a public context that the women feared they might be perceived to have (largely negative) pornographic connotations. 'Pornography' therefore remains an inappropriate term to describe sexual imagery shared without consent.

The terms 'image-based sexual abuse', 'intimate image abuse' and 'image based sexual exploitation' represent a shift in conceptualising the phenomenon, emphasising both the deliberate and damaging intent of the sharer and resulting harms to the victim. McGlynn et al. (2017) frame non-consensual sexual image sharing in the context of Kelly's (1988) theory of the continuum of sexual violence, defining the crime as a "continuum of image-based sexual abuse" that "encompasses all forms of the non-consensual creation and/or distribution of private sexual images" (2017, p.28) (discussed further in section 2.3). This phrasing allows for the sharing of such images to be viewed in the context of other acts of abuse, particularly domestic or sexual in nature. Additionally, in contrast to 'revenge pornography', 'image-based sexual abuse' places all responsibility for the crime on the sharer of the image and allows for the affected person to claim an identity as a victim (Henry et al. 2017; Henry & Powell 2016). It places the phenomenon in a cultural context that emphasises its sexual harms, without the voyeuristic, victim-blaming connotations of 'revenge pornography' (McGlynn & Rackley 2016). The use of 'victim' as terminology has further implications for this project and is discussed further in the methodology chapter (see section 3.3).

Similarly, phrases such as 'technology facilitated coercive control' and 'technology-facilitated sexual violence' build on the conceptualisation of sexual image sharing as abuse. They emphasise the many ways in which technology facilitates and encourages forms of intimate and domestic abuse. The phrase highlights the role of surveillance technology in creating these images, and the role of social media and communication platforms in allowing them to be circulated (Dragiewicz et al. 2018). Advocates for this phrase note that technology has moved abuse beyond the traditional spatial body and made it omnipresent (Woodlock 2017)– sexual images shared online remain there, constantly circulating, amplifying the harms for the

affected person. The emphasis on technology is therefore important to understand the full extent of the phenomenon and the harms it inflicts (Henry & Powell 2018). However, while this phenomenon almost always has a technology-facilitated component, there are often 'offline' components to the phenomenon (Hearn & Hall 2019) which might make the phrase 'technology-facilitated sexual violence' feel inappropriate for an affected person.

Terms that focus on the phenomenon as an act of abuse, and as intrinsically linked to digital communications, are invaluable in conceptualising the phenomenon in an appropriate and sensitive way and offer much improvement on the phrase 'revenge pornography'. It is difficult, however, to determine how one should refer to this phenomenon "without privileging one expert's terminology over the others" (Maddocks 2018, p.346). Ultimately, the decision on what term to use in this project was shaped by various factors. The first was the terminology used by existing in-depth qualitative studies, which was 'revenge pornography' (Bates 2017), and 'image-based sexual abuse' (Huber 2023a; Aborisade 2021; McGlynn et al. 2020). Choosing an alternative term would allow for a different perspective on this topic and make a clear novel contribution to this field. The project also wished to examine the phenomenon from, as much as possible, a neutral perspective- rather than approaching with preconceived notions about abuse, or through an established lens of this problem solely as a form of 'violence against women', a neutral term would allow for analysis to hinge solely on the participant's perspectives of this experience. I was additionally mindful of the likelihood of a gap between 'academic' and 'public' understandings of this phenomenon, and the potential for this phenomenon not to be defined as 'abuse' by those affected by it (Harper et al. 2022; Karasavva et al. 2022). Therefore, a neutral term, such as Buiten's (2020) 'non-consensual sexual image sharing', will allow for exploration of the phenomena without specific conceptualisations attached. The methodological factors which shaped this decision will additionally be covered in section 3.3

While this thesis seeks to prioritise the more neutral term 'non-consensual sexual image sharing', the nature of this phenomenon means that it will continue to reference literature that refers to this experience in its many forms. Hence, other terminology may be used when referencing the specific work of other authors.

2.2.2 A typology of non-consensual sexual image sharing

When discussing non-consensual sexual image sharing, it is important to consider the phrase an 'umbrella term' which encompasses several smaller experiences. Powell and Henry (2017),

who prefer the term 'image based sexual abuse', identify a typology of behaviours to define the phenomenon in five categories: relationship retribution, sextortion, sexual voyeurism, sexploitation and sexual assault. Sexual images shared as a form of relationship retribution are the most well-known method of having one's sexual images shared, and the origin of the popular moniker of 'revenge pornography'. This method of non-consensual sexual image sharing is frequently perpetrated by men against women (Bates 2017; Bloom 2014), but not exclusively- several prosecutions in the UK have involved a female perpetrator, with either a male or female victim (Hall & Hearn 2017; BBC News 2015). 'Sexual voyeurism' covers images leaked not for the purpose of revenge or blackmail, but for purely sexual intentions. Following 'relationship retribution', 'voyeurism' is likely the second most well-known form of non-consensual sexual image sharing. The most famous incident that would fall into this criterion would be the 2014 celebrity hacking scandal, where sexual images of several celebrities- mainly Hollywood actresses- were obtained illegally, released and circulated online. 'Celebgate'- or 'The Fappening' as several tellingly enthusiastic message boards referred to the incident – led to discussions about the ethics of viewing these images for personal sexual pleasure (Moloney & Love 2018; Marwick 2017; Massanari 2017). Jennifer Lawrence, one of the most notable victims of the image leak, condemned those who sought out her sexual images online, stating she felt like the victim of a 'sex crime' as a result (Vanity Fair 2014).

While in this instance the victims of 'celebgate' were aware of the existence of the images, some sexual imagery shared for voyeuristic purposes may involve footage that has been taken covertly, which was the case for another notable victim of this experience, Georgia Harrison. She stated the sexual videos that were shared of her were taken via surveillance footage in her ex-partner's home; recordings which she was unaware of at the time (Aspinall 2024; House of Commons 2024). Other scenarios may mean that the victim is totally unaware that their image has been taken and shared at all. 'Upskirting' and 'downblousing' are practices that involve using a smartphone to surreptitiously take footage beneath a woman's clothing. The images are then shared online, frequently without the victim's knowledge (McGlynn 2015). The public availability of AI technology has additionally allowed for the fabrication of sexual imagery for largely voyeuristic purposes. The creation of so-called 'deepfakes'- faked imagery which superimposes the face of a person (usually a female celebrity) onto the body of an adult performer has become an incredibly popular form of pornography (Schick 2020; Hern 2018).

The category of 'sextortion', a portmanteau of the words 'sex' and 'extortion', involves the threat of distribution to make additional demands of the victim, such as money, information, compliance, or further images (Powell & Henry 2017). Where men are targeted as victims of non-consensual sexual image sharing, 'sextortion' is often reported as the most common motivation (Notte 2024; Sharratt 2019; Maddocks 2018; Henry et al. 2017). Others have made

the case that it is a common tactic in domestic abuse situations, where a person threatens the release of such images in an attempt to exert further power or control over a partner (Dragiewicz et al. 2018; Powell & Henry 2014). 'Sextortion' has also occurred in a political context - investigative journalist Rana Ayyab was subjected to a smear campaign involving the circulation of a 'deepfaked' porn video which aimed to both silence and discredit her (Schick 2020).

'Sexploitation', a portmanteau of 'sex' and 'exploitation', follows a similar format to 'sextortion'. However, sexploitation is concerned with the commercial trade of these images, profiting not directly from the victims themselves but from the industry of collection and distribution. As Maddocks (2018, p.354) argues, "the buying and selling of non-consensually acquired intimate content is big business, with a global audience and no start-up costs". The notable 'revenge porn' website isanyoneup.com began this trend, and others emerged in its place; including one sister website which obliged those who found themselves uploaded to pay a fee to have their images taken down (Hall & Hearn 2017). This illustrates how 'sextortion' and 'sexploitation' in non-consensual sexual imagery can often run hand in hand.

The final category of 'sexual assault' suggests, horrifyingly, the circulation of sexual imagery taken during a sexual assault. Several notable rape cases in the USA have involved the perpetrator recording imagery during the assault and sharing it amongst their peer group, sometimes being further shared on social media. In 2015, the rapist Brock Turner was suspected to have circulated an image of his victim's breast in a group text (Carissimo 2016). In the 2012 Steubenville rape case, one of the assailants and several witnesses circulated images of the victim nude and unconscious on social media, with a general commentary that made light of the rape and referred to the victim as a 'whore' (Powell & Henry 2017; Orenstein 2016). In this context, the sharing of these images acts as a secondary form of assault, both exacerbating and re-traumatising the victim (Dodge 2016; Sandberg & Ugelvik 2016).

This section illustrates the myriad of ways in which a person might become a victim of non-consensual sexual image sharing. Images might be taken with consent, recorded surreptitiously, or even fabricated. They might be shared by an ex-partner, stranger, or hacker, for a huge range of motivations. Images might be shared with the express purpose of discrediting the person depicted or simply circulated anonymously. Some experiences might fit within any number of these typologies. This analysis is by no means exclusive- due to the nature of this phenomenon and its relationship with technology, new forms of non-consensual sexual image sharing will continue to evolve– but it does provide a useful framework which details the many variable experiences that fall within the term 'non-consensual sexual image sharing'.

Most of the existing research on this phenomenon focuses on broadly conceptualising the experience, be it through legal (Brady 2017; Bloom 2014; Citron & Franks 2014; Cecil 2014), or societal (Maddocks 2018; Stroud 2014) definitions of the issue. Where empirical research has been conducted, a small body of work exists which examines the images themselves, including any accompanying comments and commentary (Harder 2023; Hearn & Hall 2019; Hall & Hearn 2017; Burns 2015). The nature of this research means that it focuses on so-called 'revenge porn' websites and so speaks to a relatively specific 'sub-type' of non-consensual sexual image sharing. Other studies examine the rates and proclivity of non-consensual sexual image-sharing (Ruvalcaba & Eaton 2020; McGlynn et al. 2019; Branch et al. 2017; Lehart et al. 2016; Cyber Civil Rights Initiative 2013), or the perpetrators of this experience (Powell et al. 2019). There have also been a few studies on police interactions with those affected (Huber 2023b; Spencer & Dodge 2018).

Work that focuses directly on qualitative data of the experience of having sexual imagery shared without consent has grown in recent years. Bates's (2017) interviews with female 'revenge porn survivors' in North America found that the experience had a severe impact on the mental health of those affected, including feelings of anxiety, loss of control or trust, reduced self-esteem, and the presence of negative coping mechanisms. Bates found that the experiences of these 'revenge porn' survivors had much in common with rape survivors and concluded that revenge porn should therefore be classified as a sexual offence. McGlynn et al.'s (2020) interviews with 'victim-survivors of image-based sexual abuse' from the UK, the USA and Canada, built on these findings, presenting the "all-encompassing, ongoing and often devastating harms" (p. 17) of this experience. Aborisade's (2021) study examined female victims of image-based sexual abuse in Nigeria through the lens of male support theory, and his findings focused largely on the degree to which victims were blamed for their experience. Finally, Huber's (2023a) study of UK based women affected by image based sexual abuse focused on the far-reaching effects of this experience, including impact to their mental and physical health, education, and everyday experiences. This study seeks to make a clear empirical contribution to this relatively small field by conducting qualitative research interviews with those who have had sexual imagery shared without consent. By approaching this project from the broad, neutral perspective of 'non-consensual sexual image sharing', and by opening participation to a wider group of people, this study intends to offer a new perspective on what it means to be affected by this experience.

2.3 Sexual violence

In most existing literature, non-consensual sexual image sharing is overwhelmingly considered as an act of sexual harm. This is a logical assumption to make, based on the fact that the images are inherently *sexual* in nature. As Brady (2017, pp.22–23) states:

> The photographs used in revenge porn are by nature sexual and portray the victim either nude or engaging in sexual activities. It is impossible to separate the sexual nature of the images from the underlying action. Perpetrators are not uploading photographs of their victims watching television or reading but are uploading sexually explicit photographs because they will humiliate the victim. Therefore the sexual nature of the photographs is inherently related to the crime of revenge porn.

While Brady is referencing explicit material here, the images shared in this context can be considered sexual regardless of the actual content depicted- a naked body or a body part is not inherently sexual, for instance, but can be made so. The images shared might only depict suggestive material (for instance, a photograph of cleavage), but these are *perceived* as sexual by another party, and therefore the image is rendered as sexual in nature (Harder 2023; Huber 2023b).

The second most obvious reason for considering non-consensual sexual image sharing a sexual harm is that several studies argue that women are more frequently the victims (Ruvalcaba & Eaton 2020; Lehart et al. 2016; Franks 2015; Cecil 2014), and men more frequently the perpetrators (Hall & Hearn 2017; DeKeseredy & Schwartz 2016; Citron & Franks 2014; Franks 2011). As such, much of the existing literature on non-consensual sexual image sharing examines the phenomenon in a heterosexual context, that situates the experience in gendered power structures. This section outlines some of the arguments that situate non-consensual sexual image sharing into a broader structure of sexual violence.

2.3.1 The continuum of sexual violence

One of the arguments in favour of considering image-based sexual abuse as a sexual harm is the overlap between this experience and other forms of sexual violence (McGlynn et al. 2017; Bloom 2014). McGlynn et al. (2020; 2017) offer the clearest rationale for this argument, using Kelly's (1988) continuum of sexual violence to explain how and where non-consensual sexual image sharing fits into this landscape. Kelly's (1988) analysis of sexual violence was one of the first to situate potential harms in the context of a continuum. She advocates for the replacement of a 'male' definition of sexual violence– where violence is visible and obvious–

to a 'feminist' definition of sexual violence, which moves away from solely physical harms to include a wider range of behaviour. In Kelly's view, so-called 'minor' incidents such as flashing and catcalling, illustrate that sexual violence exists in a myriad of forms both large and small, which permeate the everyday lives of women. Therefore, she defines sexual violence as:

> Any physical, visual, verbal, or sexual act that is experienced by the woman or girl, at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or takes away her ability to control intimate contact (Kelly 1988, p.41).

It is easy to see where non-consensual sexual image sharing fits as per this definition: it is both a visual and a sexual act, which has the intent to degrade and to remove the control of one's body autonomy from the affected person.

McGlynn et al. (2020; 2017) find Kelly's use of a continuum incredibly useful in situations such as non-consensual sexual image sharing, where "modes of perpetration rapidly change due to advances in technology" (2017, p.28). They argue that it allows for the identification of a framework that places behaviours- which may on the surface appear very different– in a hierarchical and related format. In this context, the individual occurrences that make up non-consensual sexual image sharing, such as 'revenge porn', 'upskirting' or 'sextortion', exist as a "continuum of practices that together form a concept of image-based sexual abuse" (p.28). As has already been discussed in section 2.2, this structure is useful for conceptualising non-consensual sexual image sharing in a broad and all-encompassing manner.

McGlynn et al. (2017) also emphasise that these practices exist "on a continuum with other forms of sexual violence" (p.28). All four existing qualitative studies that have examined the impact of non-consensual sexual imagery have situated it to some degree in the context of sexual abuse, including a study on those affected by 'revenge pornography' (Bates 2017) and three studies on 'image-based sexual abuse' (Huber 2023a; Aborisade 2021; McGlynn et al. 2020). Their findings all identify overlap between this experience as reported by their participants, and the experiences of those affected by sexual violence in other forms. In some cases, this point was made clearly by the participants themselves. For example, in two studies, several participants identified that the images shared were of a sexual assault (Aborisade 2021; Bates, 2017), rendering the overlap plain. The sharing of images of sexual assault has been addressed by other authors (McGlynn et al. 2019; Powell & Henry 2017; Dodge 2016; Cecil 2014) and remains an upsetting but clear link between the two forms of violence. In other cases, this link was more metaphorical. Participants described their experience as like being

'almost raped', like being 'raped online' (Huber 2023a; McGlynn et al. 2020), or like being 'publicly raped' (Aborisade 2021). This indicates a clear conceptualisation by some of those affected of their experience as a form of sexual violence.

In other cases, the feelings expressed by the participants were linked to wider experiences of sexual violence more generally. Bates's (2017) finding of the coping mechanisms displayed by those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing- engaging in avoidance/denial and self-medication- was also argued to be common in rape victims (Campbell 2008; Boeschen et al. 2001). Other aspects, such as feelings of depression, worry, anxiety, fear, post-traumatic stress disorder, and thoughts of suicide, were expressed by several of the studies on non-consensual sexual image sharing (Huber 2023a; Aborisade 2021; Bates 2017) and can also be evidenced from victims of rape (Basile & Black 2011; Littleton & Henderson 2009; Campbell 2008; Monroe et al. 2005; Boeschen et al. 2001). Condemnation and blame (or the fear of such) both by others and themselves, was another factor found in the research (Huber 2023a; Aborisade 2021), with further parallels in victims of sexual violence (Olukemi & Folakemi 2015; Aborisade & Vaughan 2014). In addition, the disruptive nature of this experience- a 'social rupture' (McGlynn et al. 2020) which fractures into every aspect of a person's life- was found in a few studies (Huber 2023a; McGlynn et al. 2020) and again found in studies of sexual violence (Du Toit 2009; Brison 2003). This is by no means an exhaustive list, and the links between the two phenomena will be discussed in more depth and detail throughout this section.

An important caveat here is that three of the four empirical studies mentioned recruited based on the term 'image-based sexual abuse', which may lead to a sample more inclined to relate their experience to sexual violence. Three of the four additionally recruited solely women, which may also affect a willingness to relate one's experience to sexual violence, as women are more likely to victims of sexual violence more broadly and to have had some experience of sexual harm (Bates 2020). However, what can be asserted here is that, at least in some circumstances, non-consensual sexual image sharing has significant overlap with, and can be considered as a form of, sexual violence.

2.3.2 Masculinities and femininities

As with broader forms of sexual violence, the literature on non-consensual sexual image sharing identifies that this phenomenon is highly gendered; it is inherently linked to gender relations and gendered victimisation (Powell & Henry 2017). When discussing the relations of sex, gender and power, it is important to acknowledge "heterosex and gender relations as

socially and culturally constructed" (Powell & Henry 2017, p.29). This is to say that gendered roles are not innate, biological or fixed, but instead constantly defined and redefined by a social and cultural environment, a matter of "human agency rather than nature" (Connell 1987, p.x). Gender relations, according to Connell (1987), are always being made and remade in the interactions, relationships and practices of everyday life. At the same time, social institutions such as the family, education, workplaces, media, the economy and the state- groups which Connell (1987) refers to as the 'gender regimes' of organisations and institutions- contribute to the shaping of these relations. In discussing gender, then, we are referring to a social construction formed by interaction, as opposed to a biological or fixed definition.

Non-consensual sexual image sharing is a site where structures of gender are expressed and formed. As Hall and Hearn (2017, p.49) argue, "revenge porn may be interpreted as structured action, resulting from the gender-sexual social order and structures, sometimes called patriarchy, and/ or as a way of doing gender, doing sexuality, or doing gender/ sexuality performatively". We will discuss the role of patriarchy in more depth in section 2.3.3, however for now we will focus on the meaning of the phrase "doing gender". This can be linked to the work of Judith Butler (2004) who argues that what we understand as gender is in fact a political category, which is more of an act of 'sustained social performance' than an innate role. Messerschmidt (2018) expands on this, stating that "although 'sex' defines social identification as 'male' or 'female', 'doing gender' systematically corroborates and qualifies that sex identification and category through embodied social interaction" (p.6). Wajcman's (2004; 2010) work on 'technofeminisms' additionally offers an important argument for how gender is constructed online, which will be discussed further in section 2.6.1. Wajcman argues that technology and gender are constructed mutually in relation to one another and cites Butler's concept of gender as performance as key to this understanding.

Non-consensual sexual image sharing, then, is a site where gender is 'done'. Aborisade's (2021) study on image-based sexual abuse founds its analysis on 'male support theory', the notion that men commit acts of harm or violence against women as a way of 'doing masculinity'. Such acts confirm a man's standing in a peer group which "promotes and legitimizes image-based sexual abuse of women" (Aborisade 2021, p.2) thereby improving their social standing and affirming themselves as a man (DeKeseredy & Schwartz 2016; 2013). Other studies offer further evidence for this. Hall and Hearn's (2017; 2019) discourse analysis on the narrative text accompanying images shared non-consensually found that men shared these images as "compensatory manhood acts… a way to overcompensate, to protect/rehabilitate the men's manhood and to hurt/control the women in question" (2019, p.162). Harder's (2023) study in this area corroborated this, analysing the dialogue that occurs in the comments which

accompany images shared to 'revenge porn' websites. These comments included boasting of sexual exploits and heavily sexualised description- enacting male bonding through "rough, bawdy, lad-ish comradery" (p.661).

Interestingly, this concept of 'doing gender' was also enacted where men were targets of non-consensual sexual image sharing (Hall & Hearn 2017). This echoes Connell's (1987) discussion of hegemonic masculinity, which describes the ways in which a dominant masculinity is painted in terms of strength and control, a 'hypermasculine figure' which is more about the representation of patriarchal power than a realistic masculine ideal. This constructed image is difficult to achieve; as such, men are subject to judgement and ridicule where they fail to meet these goals. Hegemonic masculinity is therefore "constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinities" (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Connell 1987, p.186). In Hall and Hearn's (2017) study, images of men were shared alongside charges of abusing their female partner (the original image poster), being poor fathers, displaying poor sexual practice, or being a homosexual. Men were also objectified on the basis of physical appearance, with disparaging comments based on their penis size. This demonstrates that the image poster is seeking to justify the sharing of this image based on the man's inability to 'do masculinity', with the clear intention of humiliation and emasculation (Messerschmidt 2018).

Naturally when it comes to women, their images are shared with commentary based on strict standards of femininity, as many authors have noted (Langlois & Slane 2017; Dodge 2016; Jane 2014). Hall and Hearn's study (2017) again identified common categories for text accommodating pictures of women to be based around objectification, sexuality, prostitution, gold-digging, motherhood, infidelity and hygiene. Comments often focus on the basis of promiscuity, with statements such as 'slut', 'whore', or 'asking for it' (McGlynn et al. 2020); or focus on appearance, with both positive and negative examples- from 'she's so hot' to 'haggard looking bitch' (Langlois & Slane 2017, p.125). Non-consensual sexual image sharing in this context is clearly deployed where women are perceived to fail in upholding dominant feminine characteristics (Naezer & van Oosterhout 2020; Messerschmidt 2018; Franks 2017b; Powell & Henry 2017).

2.3.3 Rape culture

A final argument in favour of considering non-consensual sexual image sharing as a form of gendered violence can be found in the argument that non-consensual sexual image sharing, like other forms of sexual violence, is caused by 'rape culture'. Rape culture can be defined as:

> The social, cultural and structural discourses and practices in which sexual violence is tolerated, accepted, eroticised, minimised and trivialised… violence against women is eroticised in literary, cinematic and media representations; victims are routinely disbelieved or blamed for their own victimisation; and perpetrators are rarely held accountable or their behaviours are seen as excusable or understandable (Powell & Henry 2014, p.2).

In other words, sexual violence is embedded in the fabric of society, normalised and permitted by "social, cultural, and structural discourses". Building on our discussion of masculinities and femininities in section 2.3.2, these discourses can all be rooted in a sexist power structure which prioritises male dominance and female submission: as Connell (1987, p.80) argues, "patriarchal power on a large scale requires the construction of a hypermasculine ideal of toughness and dominance".

Sexual violence is argued to be a tool used, deliberately and carefully, to maintain this patriarchal power structure. The regulation of sexuality and sexual activity throughout human history is one of the many ways in which a dominant, male ruling class categorised and controlled women (McNair 2002). Even today, heterosexual gender roles are embedded in a "learned system where consensual sex is associated with power" (Chapleau & Oswald 2010, p.75). The way in which sex– including sexual violence or abuse– is a site for power exchange between men and women was first highlighted by feminist scholars of the 1970s, including Greer (2002), Brownmiller (1975), and Griffin (1971). Brownmiller (1975, p.15) in particular makes explicit that the threat of sexual violence is a "conscious process of intimidation", an act of masculine 'sexual conquest' that is designed to render women submissive and fearful.

Rape culture, therefore, is one that permits, normalises, excuses, and accepts sexual violence done to women, and can ultimately be tied to the idea of *power*. It is from this dynamic, feminist authors argue, that sexual violence- including non-consensual sexual image sharing- stems (Powell & Henry 2017). Many authors in this area have made the point that acts of non-consensual sexual image sharing seem to be about power and control. Both Bates (2017) and McGlynn et al. (2019) reported that the image sharing resulted in a loss of control for those

affected, centred on a loss of the images, but also reaching to other areas of their lives; a loss of self-esteem, a loss of security and a loss of privacy.

Another way in which 'rape culture' seeks to normalise sexual violence is in the objectification of women. Feminist authors have identified the ways in which women, and particularly women's bodies, are constructed as "sexed subjects" (Powell & Henry 2017, p.23); not agents of their own sexuality, but passive vessels onto which sexual fantasies might be projected. Women face this construction of themselves in almost every area of their lives. Bates' (2014) project on 'everyday sexism', which collates experiences of sexual violence, displays a climate of sexual aggression that details everything from 'minor' incidents (such as suggestive looks or stares) to violent and brutal attacks, experienced everywhere from sites of education, to work, to leisure. She identifies these experiences as a "steady drip-drip-drip of sexism and sexualisation and objectification" which creates "the assumption of ownership and control over women's bodies" (p.14). Women's relationships with their sexual images will be discussed further in section 2.4.3. However, evidence of objectification is demonstrated in previous studies of non-consensual sexual image sharing. Bates (2017), for instance, describes one participant who felt that the naked photos shared of her "stripped her of her femininity" and made her feel like she was not "doing a good job of being a woman" (p.33).

In addition, a rape culture can be defined by normalising and excusing acts of sexual violence. Gavey's (2005, p.3) work on the 'cultural scaffolding of rape' specifies the ways in which "discourses of sex and gender produce forms of heterosex that set up the preconditions for rape– women's passive, acquiescing (a)sexuality and men's forthright, urgent pursuit of sexual 'release'". Gavey notes the myriad of ways in which sexual dominance in men is normalised and expected, mirrored by a sexual passivity in women. Just as with our discussion of the construction of gender in section 2.3.2, these ways of 'doing masculinity' are equally as manufactured. While this system of heterosexual power relations is frequently pitched as a 'natural' or 'biological' fact of humanity, this claim is "dubious at best" (Gavey 2005, p.97). It is important to locate sexual violence within this wider cultural framework. Men who commit sexual violence against women do not do so solely because of individual desire, but because of this wider societal framing where gender roles are socially constructed, affirmed and re-affirmed. Orenstein (2016, p.195) further echoes Gavey's argument, stating that "boys continue to be seen as the proper initiators of sexual contact… a boy's sex drive is considered natural, and their pleasure is a given. They are supposed to be sexually confident, secure, and knowledgeable". Women are, in contrast, constructed as the "gatekeepers of male desire, charged with containing it, diverting it, controlling it" (p.59). Through this argument, acts of sexual violence are less about individual desire, and more about asserting this dominance. This

argument also relates to sexual script theory (Simon & Gagnon 1986), which will be discussed further in section 2.4.3.

In an environment where women are constructed as the 'gatekeepers' and 'controllers' of male desire, they are often blamed when this sexual desire reaches excess. 'Victim blaming' is common for victims of sexual violence, where the victim is accused of having invited, contributed to, or otherwise failed to avoid their experience (Powell & Henry 2014). The presence of blame- either from the self or from other parties, has been noted in incidences of non-consensual sexual image sharing by a few authors (Harder 2023; Huber 2023a; Franks 2017b; Hearn & Hall 2019; Hall & Hearn 2017; Franks 2013). Aborisade's (2021) study makes this point clearest, going as far to argue that his study "revealed that victims of IBSA are subjected to *more* social condemnation, stigmatization, and isolation than victims of rape, based on greater attribution of blame to IBSA victims" (p.10). Aborisade's study was based in Nigeria, "a deep-rooted sexually conservative" (p.2) society which he explicitly identifies as a "rape culture". He notes that while victims of sexual abuse in Nigeria are subject to blame and condemnation (Olukemi & Folakemi 2015; Aborisade & Vaughan 2014), image-based sexual abuse generated "a different social response" (p.10) from sexual violence that invoked more extreme discourses of blame.

This is perhaps not surprising due to the nature of non-consensual sexual image sharing. Because sexual image sharing often involves the distribution of content that was originally recorded with consent, and often taken by the person depicted, those affected are subject to blame based on their own perceived 'part' in the incident (Aborisade 2021; Cecil 2014; Citron & Franks 2014). This argument naturally ignores the fact that consent is *context specific* and situational- consent to share such images with a specific party or audience, or to share the images in a specific circumstance, does not translate to permission to share the images beyond this agreed boundary. This deliberate misunderstanding of the principle of consent is argued by Citron and Franks (2014) to rarely be used "outside of sexual practices" (p.348)- sharing sensitive information with a doctor, for instance, would not permit the doctor to share that information with the public.

Non-consensual sexual image sharing, therefore, might be argued to be subject to a collection of 'beliefs' or 'myths' which affect how those affected by it are perceived. This parallels the presence of 'rape myths'- common false discourses that circulate regarding incidences of sexual violence, and often include discourses based around a victim's clothing, drinking habits, or relationship to the perpetrator. Powell et al.'s (2019) study developed its own 'sexual image-based abuse myth acceptance scale' (see Table 1) based on Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgeralds

(1999) existing rape myth acceptance scale. They found a higher rate of belief in such myths correlated with an increased rate of perpetration of image-based sexual abuse, a finding that was also found in Karasavva et al.'s (2022) study based on the same scale. Harper et al. (2022) built on this with the development of the 'beliefs about revenge pornography questionnaire', a "systematically developed and validated improvement" on Powell et al.'s (2019) scale, which analysed myths based on four factors: "victims as promiscuous", "victim harm", "avoiding vulnerable behaviours" and "offence minimization" (p.775). Their findings echoed the work above, indicating not only the presence of 'rape myths' related to non-consensual sexual image sharing, but the contribution this has to causing such incidences.

Sexual Image-Based Abuse Myth Acceptance (SIAMA) Scale Items
Minimize/excuse 1. Women should be flattered if a partner or ex-partner shows nude pics of her to some close friends 2. A woman should share a nude image of herself with her partner, even if she doesn't really want to, for the good of the relationship 3. If a guy shares a nude or sexual pic of his partner with his friends when he's drunk, he can't really be held responsible 4. A man shouldn't get upset if his partner sends nude pics of him to others 5. Although most women wouldn't admit it, they generally find it a turn-on for a guy to share nude pics of her with his mates 6. A woman shouldn't get upset if her partner sends nude pics of her to others 7. If a woman shows her friends a nude or sexual image of her partner, it just shows how proud she is of him 8. It's only natural for a guy to brag to his mates by showing them a nude or sexual image of his partner 9. If a woman is willing to send a nude or sexual image to a man she just met, then it's no big deal if he goes a little further by showing it to his mates 10. Women tend to exaggerate how much it affects them if a nude or sexual image of them gets out online 11. A man's reputation is boosted among his mates if he shares nude pics of a sexual partner 12. Men don't usually mean to pressure a partner into sending nude pics, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away **Blame** 1. If a person sends a nude or sexual image to someone else, then they are at least partly responsible if the image ends up online 2. A woman who sends a nude or sexual image to her partner, should not be surprised if the image ends up online 3. If a man sends a nude or sexual image to someone he just met, he should not be surprised if the image ends up online 4. Celebrities and well-known media personalities who take sexy images of themselves should not expect that those images will remain private 5. People should know better than to take nude selfies in the first place, even if they never send them to anyone 6. If a man sends a nude or sexual image to a partner, he can't expect it will remain private.
Table 1. Source: Powell et al. (2019, pp.39–40)

The presence of 'rape myths' as related to non-consensual sexual image sharing is particularly significant for two reasons. The first is that such a belief is highly likely to impact the way that a person experiences this phenomenon. With those who experience sexual assault, existing research indicates that belief in rape myths can cause feelings of shame or self-blame in those affected (Chapleau & Oswald 2010; Payne et al. 1999). The second is that, as Harper et al. (2022) argue, this indicates a dissonance between public and academic perceptions of non-consensual sexual image sharing. While academic circles largely favour presenting such incidences in the framework of gendered or sexual violence, their data indicates a large presence of belief in 'revenge pornography' myths. The authors suggest that the 'lay person' opinion tends to less sensitive interpretations of what causes non-consensual sexual image sharing and focuses more on factors such as victim culpability. This difference between academic and public understandings of non-consensual sexual image sharing is likely to impact the way this research will be conducted, something that will be discussed further in our methodology (see section 3.3).

2.4 Sexualisation of culture

Another factor that shapes the presence and experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing is the background of an increasingly sexualised culture. As McNair (2002, p.7) argues, "today, across the range of artistic, promotional and journalistic media we are likely to view, discuss and think about sex with greater frequency and attention to detail than at any previous stage in history". The proliferation of pornography is another relevant factor here: we are now argued to live in a "porn-saturated, image-centred, commercialised culture" (Orenstein 2016, p.40). This section will discuss modern approaches to sexuality and evaluate the role of online pornography and increasingly sexualised identities, both in facilitating non-consensual sexual image sharing and exacerbating its impacts.

2.4.1 Mainstreaming sex

Sex occupies a strange place in our cultural discourse. It is simultaneously described as natural, derived from a human or biological urge to reproduce, and yet subject to constraints and rules- both 'public' and 'private' (Gavey 2005). Foucault's (1978) work offers a clear assessment of the role of sex in society, arguing that sex is a 'produced' and 'constructed' concept which is innately tied to structures of politics, power, and social control. Just as with our discussion of gender in 2.3.2, 'sex' in this context does not refer to a physical or biological act but instead refers to the discourses which shape the way sex is understood.

The idea of 'mainstreaming sex' is the argument that "sex is becoming more visible in contemporary Western cultures" (Attwood 2009, p.xiii). For instance, magazines aimed at both men and women dish out advice on how to attract, achieve, and maintain sexual gratification with a partner (Gill, 2007), music charts are dominated by songs full of explicit imagery (Orenstein, 2016), and sex is now "entwined with ideas of romance, attraction, commitment, independence, orientation, crime, identity, hygiene, waste, fantasy, confidence, despair, nature, abnormality, deviance, degradation, fulfilment, liberation, status, sin, perversion" (Attwood & Smith 2015, p.325). McNair (2002, p.61) argues that we have reached a stage of 'porno-chic' or 'mainstream pornography'. This does not refer solely to the proliferation of pornography, but to the "representation of porn in non-pornographic culture" (p.61). He cites the music artist Madonna as one of the first cultural figures to use the aesthetic of pornography, including the depiction of nudity, simulated sex, sadomasochism, and stripteases in her material (Madonna 1992; Madonna et al. 1992). Perhaps even more transgressive than this imagery was that Madonna created these works and continued to identify as a feminist. Madonna's decision to present herself in the style of a porn star was not, as some called it, 'self-objectification', but instead was a form of rebellion against the constraints placed on female sexuality; a way for her to embrace a part of herself she felt had been neglected and censored. Madonna's status as a sexually assertive woman *and* a feminist:

> Announced the arrival of a new phase in western sexual culture, and the colonisation of mainstream media by a new model of femininity, informed by feminism and publicly identifying with it, but cut from very different cloth than that worn by popular female artists before her (McNair 2002, p.69).

What followed was 'pornochic'– the "taboo, transgressive qualities of pornography" (McNair 2002, p.70) packaged as glamourous and pleasurable, in art, advertisement, fashion, film, television and music.

McNair (2002) also identifies western society as having moved into something he calls 'striptease culture', where discourses around sex and sexuality moved from personal, individual matters to public discussion. This is defined by an almost voyeuristic public interest in the private sexual lives of our cultural figures– for example, the Bill Clinton sexual affair scandal of the 1990s– but also by "ordinary people talking about sex and their own sexualities, revealing intimate details of their feelings and their bodies in the public sphere" (p.88). Invasive journalism practices, reality television, 'confessional' talk shows, and the growth of internet forums and webcasts have all contributed to a wider social climate where "the line

between public and private is eroded" (p.95), and traditional boundaries between private and public lives are blurred. This combined with a public interest in "sexuality in all these forms" (p.86)– although still firmly rejecting pornographic media- has created a climate of sexual confession and a public broadcasting of intimacy.

From this background where sex has become emphasised, we have developed new and interesting ways to have it. Previously, sex was an act committed within the same time and physical location, bound by physical and spatial boundaries (Wiley 1995). Phone sex, chatroom sex, long distance relationships, social media, and dating apps are just some of the ways this has changed (Bell 2006; Ben-Ze'ev 2004). It is from this background of increased sexualisation that sexual image sharing, and therefore, non-consensual sexual image sharing, has grown.

Despite an increasingly sexual climate, there remains an undeniable relationship between sex, shame, and panic. Sex and sexuality have always been a site for general anxieties, particularly when that sexual activity occurs out of the sanctity of heterosexual, monogamous marriage (Smith & Attwood 2013). Although we exist in a culture where sexuality has become mainstream, these anxieties and panics continue. As Attwood argues (2006, p.80):

> We respond to our culture's 'incitement to discourse' about sex with a kind of weariness; the explicit has become so familiar and sexual transgression so mainstream. All the same, sex is the occasion of public fascination in the form of scandals, controversies and moral panics.

This is an important point to note- while as a culture we may be more fixated on ideas of sex, this has not stripped sex of its relationship to shame and judgement. This turbulent backdrop forms the basis for an analysis of how, where and why sexual images appear and circulate.

2.4.2 Online pornography

One of the clearest ways our culture has become more sexualised can be seen in the growth of online pornography. The way in which technology contributes to this growth will be discussed further in section 2.6; however, this section will focus on access to, use of, and the impact of access to pornography, and the ways in which it facilitates the spread of non-consensual sexual image sharing. While statistics vary on just how much web use is specifically to access pornography (Ogas & Gaddam 2012), what is clear is that any person with an internet

connection can quickly and easily access a huge range of pornographic content, in the relative privacy of their own home.

This current online pornography climate directly contributes to and exacerbates the problem of non-consensual sexual image sharing in several ways. The website *PornHub* was one of the first to alter the online landscape of pornography. Billed as 'YouTube for porn' (Ronson 2017), it provided a central place for users to upload content– both created by themselves or (more frequently) stolen from others. It quickly became a huge industry. In 2012, *PornHub* estimated that 80% of all online pornography was being accessed via their website (Ronson 2017). In 2019, there were over 42 billion visits to *PornHub*- every minute, 2.8 hours of footage was uploaded (PornHub 2020). Ronson (2017) highlights that the website was founded, in part, on the stolen works of female performers in the pornography industry. Whilst they struggled with judgement and discrimination, Fabian Thylman– the man behind *PornHub*'s success– was able to build a grossly expensive pornography empire from their labour (Lord 2019). The theft and circulation of sexual material belonging to others is therefore a hallmark of the modern online pornographic climate, which has provided a base from which non-consensual sexual image sharing could grow.

One notable area where mainstream pornography and non-consensual sexual imagery merge can be found in so-called 'amateur' pornography. Amateur pornography is a term used to describe content where the performers are not paid professionals in studios, but instead simply regular people. Appetites for this material are growing; 'amateur' was one of the most viewed categories on *PornHub* in 2023 (PornHub 2024; Ruberg 2016). So-called 'amateur' porn appeals to a desire for authenticity, providing "new bodies with fresh faces… an endless stream of authentic young women" (Ogas & Gaddam 2012, p.192). Franks (2017b) however, argues that 'amateur' porn is not made appealing by its authenticity, but instead by its dubious ethical positioning. She argues that the appetite for non-professional pornography, when professional material can be found just as easily, indicates that the lack of consent- or at the very least, the absence of explicit consent- is the "point of the spectacle… the erotic charge" (p.1254).

Although consent is by no means guaranteed in mainstream productions, 'amateur' pornography allows for sexual imagery to be shared without any indication that the people depicted consent, or are even aware of, the video's recording or circulation, under a label that suggests legitimacy. Several victims of non-consensual sexual image sharing have found imagery of themselves circulating on *PornHub*, among other adult websites, under the guise of 'amateur' material; including some who were sexually assaulted or underage at the time of

recording (Ansari 2021; Kristof 2020; Mahdawi 2020). Recently *PornHub* has faced backlash for hosting these videos and made the decision to remove content uploaded by unverified users; additionally, they claim to have implemented technology to prevent the re-upload of videos flagged as depicting inappropriate content. Despite this, many remain critical of the website's efforts to prevent harm and suggest that further auditing is needed to ensure that their content has been ethically created (Cole & Maiberg 2020; Lord 2019). What this indicates, then, is that adult content websites act as spaces where non-consensually shared images can be uploaded, accessed, shared and downloaded, with an air of legitimacy applied to this content.

Online pornography is additionally argued to contribute to non-consensual sexual image sharing in two other ways. The first is that it turns those depicted *into* pornography against their will. This argument is either supported or critiqued based on your perspective of pornography itself. There have long been two divided schools of thought within feminism, known as the 'feminist sex wars' or 'feminist porn wars' (Dodson 2013; Long 2012). One side considers pornography as inherently harmful, objectifying, and misogynistic, contributing to a culture that emphasises and legitimises sexual violence against women. The opposing faction argues that this view is puritanical and naïve, and prefers to conceptualise women as empowered sexual agents, in control of their own body and free to make their own choices.

There are several vocal critics of pornography from a feminist perspective. For Dworkin (1981), pornography can never move far beyond its original etymology –where graphos means 'to write' and pornē means 'whore'. She considers pornography as a manifestation of men's ownership of women, and inherently an expression of male dominance:

> Owning is expressed in every aspect of the [pornographic] photograph… The possession of her extends over time… the camera and the photographer behind it also own the woman. The camera uses and keeps her. The photographer uses her and keeps an image of her. The publisher of the photograph can also claim her as a trophy. He has already mounted her and put her on display (Dworkin 1981, p.28).

For anti-porn feminists, pornography transforms a woman into a literal object; a photograph, video, or other image-based medium. In this image, women have ceased to be people but instead have become "anonymous panting play-things, adult toys, dehumanised objects" (Brownmiller 1975, p.394). From this stance, pornography is both a manifestation of, and re-enforces, a system of male sexual dominance and female sexual submission. Non-consensual sharing of sexual images is a natural extension of this 'ownership'.

In this argument, the harms from non-consensual sexual image sharing would begin as the image is taken, and this stance may be more relevant for those who have images taken without consent such as with 'uspkirting', footage taken via hidden cameras, or sexual assault. Dworkin and Mackinnon (1988) explicitly used an early example of non-consensual sexual image sharing in one of their anti-pornography arguments, stating that "women are tricked or pressured into posing for boyfriends and told that the pictures are just "for us" only to find themselves in this month's *Hustler"* (Dworkin & MacKinnon 1988, p.70). More recent studies highlight this too; as discussed in section 2.3.2, studies that examine the commentary which accompanies these images found sentiments of 'pornification', sexual trophyism and sexual degradation were common in the way that male posters contextualised images of women (Harder 2023; Hearn & Hall 2019; Hall & Hearn 2017; Langlois & Slane 2017). Harder's (2023) study also identified the ways in which images of women uploaded to a pornographic website without their consent were 'pornified'- made explicit via commentary, pastiche, and explicit scripts.

The opposing stance of pro-pornography feminists largely seeks to locate women's sexuality in a pornographic context. They argue anti-porn critics reproduce outdated ideas about sexuality which suggest that men are the only ones who harbour sexual desire, and women merely endure these advances (Willis 2005). Dworkin (1981), for instance, praises women who reject or resist sex for their 'silent rebellion' against the patriarchy– which implies that women engaging in sex are merely complying with a patriarchal agenda. This assumption that all pornography debases and disgusts women ignores the fact that women are not simply objects to be sexualised, but active agents with sexual desires of their own. Pro-pornography feminists argue for the importance of pornography in a woman's "struggle to define, understand and locate one's sexuality" (Taormino et al. 2013, p.15). Parties that uphold this stance point to the statistics about female viewership of porn and to the existence of so-called 'feminist porn'– which is created and produced by women– as evidence of female sexual agency (Hartley 2013).

It is perhaps more necessary than ever to consider a woman's autonomous role in their sexuality when examining non-consensual sexual image sharing. While Dworkin (1981) argues that the viewer and photographer of pornography 'owns' the depicted woman, in sexual image sharing the photographer often *is* the woman, in that the image is taken *of* her, and *by* her (see section 2.4.3). While we cannot discount that women may be coerced into taking these images, it certainly suggests that for at least some, these images were taken as a result of their own choice. As Lister (2020, p.77) argues:

> Women today can at least choose to be part of a narrative that fetishizes them. Many women find reclaiming sexuality on their own terms empowering and work to redefine their stories on their own terms.

The taking and sharing of intimate images can be a way of conveying trust and intimacy, which will be covered in further detail in section 2.4.3. This indicates that it is not the images themselves that objectify or reduce those depicted in them; it is instead the *sharing* of these images without consent that does so. This argument is backed up by analysis of the commentary that accompanies these images (Harder 2023; Hearn & Hall 2019; Hall & Hearn 2017; Langlois & Slane 2017). Harder (2023) in particular highlighted the way in which the sharing of these images *transformed* them, rendering them 'pornified'. If, as Hall and Hearn argue (2017, p.43) "first and foremost, revenge porn can be seen as *pornography"*, then we might do well to focus on the pornographic nature of the act of sharing the image, rather than the content of the image itself.

The second way in which online pornography is said to contribute towards non-consensual sexual image sharing, is that access to pornography is argued by some to contribute to sexual violence. This builds naturally on the work of anti-pornography feminists. Not only is pornography considered a symptom of a sexist culture but also acts as re-enforcement of these ideals- as Morgan (1978, p.169) notably argued, "pornography is the theory, and rape is the practice". In this context, the online pornography climate has provided both a platform for non-consensual sexual image-sharing, and a culture which actively encourages the act of sharing it, without care or concern for the persons depicted.

One such reason for this concern is the age at which people are accessing adult content. One study by Flood (2007) indicated that 70% of 16–17-year-olds had been accidentally exposed to pornography online. Flood is careful to highlight that exposure to age-appropriate content regarding sex would not be an issue. Instead, he argues that the real harm stems from the fact that "pornography is a poor sex educator" (p.58)- the concern here being that young people are learning about sex though inaccurate pornographic representations, and will be unaware that the language, visual cues and scripts specific to pornography are not accurate representations of sex (Attwood 2002). There is also evidence that online pornography markets increasingly violent content to users, distorting the boundary between what is and is not sexual violence (Vera-Gray et al. 2021).

Some argue that the case for pornography inciting violence is a causal link that will inevitably be difficult to prove, and in any case, sexual violence and pornography have existed for too

long to determine which came first (McNair, 2002). However, others note that pornography publicises and normalises harmful discourses: "Pornography reflects, amplifies, and provides support for sexist attitudes and values, making it an integral part of today's modern and expanded rape-supportive culture that contributes to image-based sexual violence" (DeKeseredy & Schwartz 2016, p.4). Additionally, Tyler (2016) argues that there is very little difference between mainstream pornography and 'revenge porn', stating that "all porn is revenge porn" (p.1). She notes that the hallmarks of non-consensual sexual image sharing – humiliation, degradation and questionable consent– have defined and continue to define the mainstream industry today, enacting harms which impact "women as a class" (p.1). Harder (2023) has perhaps the most measured take on this, relating the relationship between pornography and non-consensual sexual image sharing to rape culture and rape:

> Rape culture, which encourages, normalizes and exonerates sexual violence— can never be blamed for a rape, just like porn cannot be blamed for the pornification of images. But the culture around an act of offline or online sexual violence is important to the cultural meanings that are given to that act and thus to how it is experienced. If it was not a stigma for women to be seen as pornographic, it would not be possible to shame them by pornifying their images (p.662).

We must be careful, then, not to infer direct causation between online pornography and non-consensual sexual image sharing. Instead, we might argue that they are produced- and reproduced- from the same culture, a culture defined by sexist values.

2.4.3 Sexual identities and interactions

This focus on sex in our society has led to it becoming more intrinsic to how we see ourselves. Sex has begun to be "central to our sense of identity and personal value… sex and relationships have become increasingly central to our sense of self" (O'Neill 2018, p.153). Aspects such as how *much* sex we are having, *who* we are having sex with, the *types* of sex we are having, the *number* of sexual partners we have, and the *frequency* of our sexual encounters are increasingly relevant to how we see ourselves and how others see us (Attwood & Smith 2015). This is done, Gill (2009a) argues, in specifically gendered ways. This section will address the ways in which women's relationships to sex and sexuality have changed and note how this impacts our understanding of non-consensual sexual image sharing.

For women, the 'sexualisation of culture' has theoretically completely transformed their relationship to the concept of sex. The ideal 'feminine' image in the media, for instance, is no

longer “prim, domesticated, willingly submissive”; the ‘new woman’ is “economically empowered and sexually competitive” (McNair 2002, p.118). As with Madonna’s ‘self-objectification’, this modern portrayal depicts women as sexual agents who own their sexual autonomy and display it based on their own desires and interests. Gill (2009a; 2008) describes the women depicted in such forms of media as “the midriffs”: women going from “passive, mute objects” to “active sexual subjects”, modelling a sort of “sexual power” (2009a, p.147) and “displaying a pronounced discourse of choice and autonomy”- an apparent “feminist icon” (2008, pp.41–43).

While at first blush this may seem progressive, Gill advises caution in approaching the ‘sexually empowered woman’ without criticism. Firstly, she notes that only *some* women are permitted to be sexual subjects. The ‘empowered woman’ is heterosexual, white, middle-class, thin, and conventionally attractive (2009). This is certainly not to say that women outside of these categories are not subject to sexualisation, but that they are not permitted the sort of self-driven, subjective, empowered sexuality of a ‘midriff’ (Tyler 2008; Attwood 2006). Women outside of these criteria who dare to display sexual agency- that is, sex that originates from their own desires, and not simply sexuality applied to them from other parties, can only have their sexual desires presented as repugnant, inappropriate, or repulsive (Attwood 2009; Gill 2009a; Tyler 2008). In this sense, this so-called female empowerment can be argued to be derived from masculine ideas about beauty and sexuality.

The second caution against this form of sexual empowerment can be found in its inauthenticity. It is driven by commercial rather than personal desire, shaped by what *looks* good rather than what *feels* good. Levy (2005) defines this change as ‘raunch culture’, arguing that ‘sexiness’ is packaged and sold to women as a form of empowerment- not with the intention of ‘liberating’ women from sexual subjugation, but instead about marketing ‘sexiness’ in a commercial and saleable manner. Orenstein (2016) echoes this judgement, arguing that ‘raunch culture’ applies:

> Pressure on young women to reduce their worth to their bodies and to see those bodies as a collection of parts that exist for others pleasure; to continuously monitor their appearance; to perform rather than to feel sensuality (p.13).

This argument shares two key things about the way in which women interact sexually in the ‘postfeminist’ climate. The first is that it indicates:

> A shift in the way power operates: from an external, male judging gaze to a self-policing, narcissistic gaze. It can be argued that this represents a higher or deeper form of exploitation than objectification- one in which the objectifying male gaze is internalised to form a new disciplinary regime. (Gill 2007, pp.151–152).

This builds on the dynamics of gender and power established in section 2.3. Rather than objectification being understood as something done *to* women *by* men, women are now made complicit in their own objectification. This changes the power dynamic from 'external oppression' to internal 'regulation and discipline' (Gill 2008).

This brings us to the second key definer, that sexual identity is shaped by the image of what it means to be sexual, rather than any form of natural desire. Gill (2007) further argues:

> In today's media, possession of a 'sexy body' is presented as women's key (if not sole) source for identity. The body is presented simultaneously as women's source of power and as always unruly, requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodelling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever-narrower judgements of female attractiveness (p.149).

From this perspective, the taking and sharing of sexual images is an extension of this portrayal and management of 'sexiness', a process Orenstein (2016, p.20) describes as women "dish[ing] up their bodies for inspection by others and themselves". To relate this to our discussion of femininities in section 2.3.2, we might interpret this as a form of performing gender, a modern, sexualised, postfeminist version of femininity (Messerschmidt 2018; Butler 2004). There is much concern about women- particularly young or adolescent women- taking and sharing sexual content of themselves, causing what Hasinoff (2013, p.450) describes as a "technological, sexual, and moral crisis" (also Krieger 2017). Much like with pornography, there is some debate about whether these images are inherently objectifying, and that women are making 'porn of themselves'; or, alternatively, whether these images are indeed an expression of empowered sexuality.

Research in this area indicates a complicated assessment of this problem. Ringrose et al.'s (2013) study, which examined teenage sexting practices, provided a mixed response to this debate. While the girls interviewed indicated that being asked to take sexual images was a 'compliment', they were still subject to moral judgement following incidences of image-sharing.

> Akin to adult 'postfeminist' media cultures, for teen girls, being asked for an image of one's body carries value, even constitutes a new norm of feminine desirability within today's digital teen peer networks… However, consonant with familiar sexual double standards, both boys and girls described girls who sent images as 'skets' who lacked self-respect. Thus images of girls' bodies can be used to devalue and shame girls in the teen peer network (Ringrose et al. 2013, p.319).

While there is value that comes from feeling 'desired' by others, sharing sexual images exposes the person depicted to moralistic discourses about sex. This is an interesting point to note- so-called 'sexually empowered women' are defined as confident, desiring, and always 'up for sex' (Gill 2009a; Machin & Thornborrow 2003). This does not, however, free women from the more traditional, expected norms about female sexuality, as discussed in section 2.3.3. Gavey (2005) describes this as a "dreary and confusing scenario for women who want to be sexual. They can go for what they want, but they mustn't be seen to be wearing the pants" (p.11). Barker, Gill and Harvey (2018) echo this, describing the "double bind" that manifests in "the current 'postfeminist' climate which calls forth an active, desiring, 'up for it' sexual subject, yet still judges women far more harshly for their sexual activity than men" (p.59). This double standard is particularly relevant for those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing, who are often blamed for having taken the image in the first place (Bloom 2014; Citron & Franks 2014; Levendowski 2014a).

Other research also suggests both positive and negative attitudes towards self-taken sexual images. Leong and Cheng's (2019) study found that sexting is a contradiction; it both objectifies and liberates, causing shame and excitement, in the same interaction. Amundsen's (2019) study on the practice of sexting found that private sexual images were capable of providing feelings of empowerment, power, and control, and were used as a tool to express sexual intimacy with one's partner. It was only when these images were seen outside of established or intended audiences that they took on the derogatory connotations and terminology of 'pornography', indicating that it is "this context-dependant interpretation of the sexual image that renders women's private sexual images capable of both being and not being pornography" (p.491).

Others have raised the point that for those able to exercise 'sexual privacy' (complete agency over their sexual lives and decisions), the sharing of intimacy with others is an important form of human connection; having the choice to share private parts of yourself is crucial for relationship building (Amundsen 2019; Citron 2019; Gerstein 1978). This offers further evidence for the argument that the images *themselves* are not degrading. Bate's (2017) study

echoes this- one victim of revenge porn shared with her that the images themselves caused no distress or embarrassment, but the act of sharing them publicly without permission is what felt violating. If we consider sexting as a form of 'media production' (Hasinoff 2013), it can be argued that the taking of sexual images allows for self-expression and an exploration of pleasure; rather than simply receiving and managing the sexual desires of other people, images can instead express an 'authentic' perspective on their own sexual expression. It is only where images stray outside of any intended audience that feelings of shame or objectification are introduced.

Ultimately, Hasinoff (2015; 2013) argues, it is difficult to determine to what degree outside pressures shape sexual expression. There are those who argue that even images taken and shared without overt coercion cannot be considered as entirely freely made. Such choices are made by those "within complex social and media contexts they [women taking sexual images] do not control" (2013, pp.456–457). On the other hand, if *all* decisions are made in this context, it is impossible to determine what is and isn't influenced by a highly sexualised culture:

> Girls are often expected to develop sexual desires and modes of sexual expression that bear little evidence of their saturation in mass media representations of sexuality. Some researchers who examine girls' sexuality online are disappointed and frustrated when girls seem to reproduce the conventions of commercial pornography (Hasinoff 2013, p.456).

There is also a concern that women are forced or pressured into taking such images. Orenstein (2016) argues that women, particularly adolescents, are more likely to experience pressure or coercion to engage in sexual image sharing practices, thus rendering them more susceptible to having images shared without consent. Mediated intimacy is a relevant concept here, which argues that the way we express ourselves sexually- both in our individual identities, and in our interactions with one another- is shaped by outside sources that tell us how we ought to act, behave, and operate. Modern intimate and romantic relationships are constructed and shaped by cultural understandings of what it 'means' to be intimate (Barker et al. 2018). Advertising, films, television shows, magazines, and self-help texts all contribute towards this dialogue (Gill 2009b).

Also relevant here is the notion of 'sexual script theory' (Simon & Gagnon 1986), which asserts that sexual interaction is facilitated using cultural roles, tropes, or dialogue, combining "individual desires to social meanings" (p.100). Orenstein, (2016, p.34) cites popular media as

an indicator of sexual scripts: “in one era, they learn that you don't kiss until the third date; in another, they learn that sex precedes an exclusive relationship”. Both Harder (2023) and Ruvacalba and Eaton (2020) situate their research on ‘nonconsensual pornography’ and ‘image-based abuse’ in sexual script theory, suggesting that established narratives around sex both cause these phenomena and additionally shape how they are shared. For instance, in Harder’s (2023) work, the image sharers used specific pornographic tropes and narratives in sharing such content, a ‘pornification’ of dialogue (Paasonen, Nikunen & Saarenmaa 2007). Cultural scripts may certainly shape why people engage in image-sharing, and indeed, why these images are then shared on.

While we have discussed sexting at length, we must be careful not to infer a causal link between sexual image taking and sharing more broadly and non-consensual sexual image sharing. Powell et al.’s (2019) study found that partaking in ‘sexual selfie behaviours’ did increase the likelihood of perpetrating or being victimised by this experience, as one might anticipate, however the authors were careful to note that the majority of participants in their study engaged in these behaviours without reporting either perpetration or victimisation incidences. What this suggests then, is that such incidences of non-consensual sexual image sharing emerge from a backdrop of ‘sexual selfie behaviours’ of which most people who engage in do so without issue.

2.5 Queer cultures of intimacy

The literature covered in 2.3 and 2.4 is largely focused on feminist perspectives, which is, for the most part, concerned with how non-consensual sexual image sharing is shaped by patriarchal gendered power structures and an increased sexualisation of women. What this excludes, however, is incidences where non-consensual sexual image sharing happens outside of a heterosexual power dynamic. Despite evidence that suggests LGB people are at more risk of being affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing (Henry et al. 2017; Lehart et al. 2016), there is surprisingly little academic work or theory examining how or why this occurs, and little qualitative examination of how this experience is felt by LGBTQ+ people. As Gilden (2023, p.804) states:

> The anti-revenge porn movement has largely lacked explicitly queer voices…there has been little in the way of queer analysis about how revenge porn- and the laws regulating it- reshapes and/or reinforces dominant norms of gender and sexuality.

This section will draw on a few key works that exist in this area to examine how queer cultures of intimacy are shaped by different conditions of consent and power than heterosexual interactions, and how this should change our understanding of how non-consensual sexual image sharing affects this group of people.

This thesis has already established that a mainstream 'revenge pornography' narrative'- whereby image sharing happens following the breakdown of an intimate, private relationship, to women who are targeted by their ex-partners- is reductive. This framework prioritises patriarchal power structures which enforce (hetero) male dominance and (hetero) female subordination. Gilden's (2023) work on how the queer experience is excluded from US 'revenge pornography' legislation notes two main ways that this narrative fails to account for queer cultures of intimacy. He argues that heteronormative narratives around non-consensual sexual image sharing prioritise the idea of these images as originally 'private'; content taken behind closed doors and dragged into the public by a vengeful partner. Gilden (2023) argues that as queer people have been "forced out of their homes" to find each other (p.842), sex is not per-se a private act. He cites queer, 'technically public' spaces or festivals such as bathhouses, sex clubs, or San Francisco's Folsom Street Fair, as sites where "queer community, politics, and identities" are founded (p.837). To appear to "like-minded strangers" (p.835) in a state of undress in environments such as these is a way of embracing and enjoying one's queer identity. The idea of *like-minded* strangers here is key; being visible to strangers who share your community and values is not the same as being visible to a general public. It still permits a person to control who is seeing them and how they are being seen, an exercise in sexual agency (Citron 2019).

However, as this is considered 'technically public space', US legislation fails to protect queer people photographed in these venues under existing revenge porn laws (Gilden 2023). Content of a person recorded and shared without their consent may not be moving from 'private' to 'public' spaces, but instead between *different* public spaces. This evokes the concept of 'situational identity negotiation'; the idea that individuals carefully curate their identity to suit the social groups they interact with; for queer people especially, this is often a process of careful identity management to prevent stigma or harm (Parmenter, Galliher & Maughan 2022; Pfeffer 2014; Plummer 2013; Green 2007; Kaufman & Johnson 2004; Goffman 1963). Legislation or campaigns that focus on these images as 'private' miss this nuance; while one is technically appearing in public, this 'public' is a curated, supportive, community space, and consent to be seen there in a sexual context is not necessarily consent to be seen this way in other public venues, or to have this presentation photographed or filmed. It fails to account for the fact that consent is context specific (Citron & Franks 2014)- as feminist scholars have argued, nudity or sexual behaviour in one context (be that sharing a nude picture or attending

a sexual event) does not translate to consent *outside* of this context (Bloom 2014; Cecil 2014; Citron & Franks 2014; Levendowski 2014a).

The second reason that mainstream revenge pornography narratives exclude queer people is that they prioritise images shared in the context of sexual or romantic relationships. There is a risk here of reducing the fault of the image-sharing to a breach of contract between two intimate parties, a betrayal of trust where trust was promised. While having images shared by someone you had a close and intimate connection with can certainly exacerbate the harms felt, it ignores the fact that there ought to be a *reasonable assumption* that any party, regardless of your own intimacy with them, would not want their sexual images to be shared without consent (Waldman 2017; McGlynn & Rackley 2016). Gilden (2023) notes that by focusing on intimate relationships, this narrative prioritises heteronormative definitions around commitment and intimacy (Rosenbury & Rothman 2010). The dominance of this narrative risks creating a climate where "the only victims that do not deserve blame for their sexual expression are those who have waited until they have entered into an exclusive, intimate relationship before sharing nude images" (Gilden 2023, p.851). Again, feminist scholars would agree here; the discussion of blame evokes the many narratives around 'victim blaming' that women have faced in the aftermath of their image-sharing (McGlynn et al. 2020; Powell & Henry 2014; Franks 2013). Others have noted that as images are frequently shared and re-shared by parties unknown to them, their relationship to the original image poster becomes irrelevant (Powell & Henry 2017; Henry & Powell 2016; Citron & Franks 2014). Both queer and feminist scholars would therefore concur that the sharing of sexual images with one party should not be considered an invitation for sharing these images further; as before, these images should remain context dependent (Citron & Franks 2014).

Indeed, a few studies have noted that queer groups- especially, queer men- are far more likely to share nude images outside of intimate relationships. Online spaces are key sites for queer people, particularly for young queer people, as they allow for access to information, community, and support, in ways that their other social networks may not facilitate (Gilden 2013; Harper et al. 2009; Gray 2009). Therefore, online queer spaces are commonly used to facilitate dating, sexual, and intimate interactions. While all men, regardless of sexuality, are more likely to voluntarily share sexual or nude images (Henry et al. 2017), gay male social networking applications have developed their own culture around the sharing of images, with research in this area noting that the exchange of sexual content is an expected part of engaging with others online in these venues (Gilden 2023; Waldman 2019; Tziallas 2015; Jones 2005). This 'norm of reciprocity' (Waldman 2019) or 'code of reciprocity' (Jones 2005) involves the mutual exchange of images over the course of an interaction. These images act not only as verification (Jones 2005)- offering evidence that a person is who they say they are- but can

also be expressions of "body positivity and sexual freedom" (Waldman 2019, p.998). Tziallas (2015) further argues that gay male social networking applications are not simply about gaining 'hookups' or partners, but additionally about 'gamified' socio-sexual interaction, where a curated catalogue of "do-it-yourself (DIY) amateur porn" (p.761) can be gained via careful, strategized interaction with others.

Despite this normalisation, sexual image exchange remains a site of power dynamics. Much as with heterosexual interactions, the sharing of images comes with risk, and therefore indicates an expression of trust (Amundsen 2019). Images shared are subject to risk management strategies that are carefully negotiated and curated to manage privacy- for instance, by manipulating the image in some way to maintain anonymity (Waldman 2019; Jones 2005). Increased trust is not shown by the degree to which the image is explicit in nature, but instead to the degree in which the content displays identifying features such as voices, faces, or tattoos (Tziallas 2015; Jones 2005). This is why reciprocity is so important- if the sharing of images makes one vulnerable, the *mutual* sharing of images helps to counteract this risk- a process of "I'll show you mine, you show me yours" (Waldman 2019, p.998; Jones 2005). This balance of power is something that theoretically cannot be attained in a heterosexual context, as heterosexual men are subject to different 'rules' around sex than heterosexual women, and therefore a man's sexual images cannot contain the same degree of risk as a woman's (Hasinoff 2013).

This context paints non-consensual sexual image sharing among queer men in a very different light than where this affects heterosexual women. Gilden (2023) notes that an optimistic reason for this normalisation of image-sharing can be found in the "sex-positivity of queer sexual spaces and the comparatively low levels of stigma surrounding nudity and sexuality" (p.816); in the absence of the threat of social stigma for being seen in a sexual manner, gay men- unlike women- can theoretically share sexual images free of this judgement. Waldman's (2019) work on queer men, dating apps, and 'revenge porn' explores this further. He notes that the ubiquitousness of sexual image sharing in the queer community gives some a lax approach to sharing these on; there is little acknowledgement that sharing these images without permission is a privacy violation itself (Waldman 2017; Citron & Franks 2014). Waldman's (2019) work noted a sentiment, both among men who had images shared without consent and men who hadn't, that a degree of non-consensual sexual image sharing was to be somewhat expected- "someone with an attractive physique who shares intimate photos either wants or should have no problem with the further spread of his photos" (p.995)- and that this threat is somewhat built into the risk assessment conducted when sharing these images in the first place. This presents a clear conundrum; while the non-consensual sexual distribution of content is a privacy violation, when shared within a community which normalises image-

sharing and is absent of judgement and stigma around sex, queer men may not necessarily consider themselves harmed or violated by this experience in the same way that women do.

Gilden (2023) does further note, however, that a code or norm of reciprocity can pressure users to share sexual images in ways that are "subtly or overtly coercive- in some ways not that dissimilar to accounts of straight women and girls with respect to nude images" (p.816). The idea that men are being pressured into taking and sharing these images presents a much bleaker perception of this experience (Waldman 2019; Jones 2005). There is also the risk of having these images shared beyond the boundaries of gay male social networking applications. Where accounts of gay men affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing exist, they often involve circumstances where these images have strayed to pornographic websites or other social networks, and this was perceived as a violation that caused emotional distress, embarrassment, self-blame, and objectification (Anonymous 2022; Barker 2018; Waldman 2017; Survivors UK n.d.). This overlaps with women's experiences of non-consensual sexual image sharing.

Perhaps then, the significance of the harm experienced by non-consensual sexual image sharing is less defined by gender or sexuality, and more defined by contexts such as the audience the image is shared to, and the judgement or stigma felt as a result. Queer men may experience less impact when images are shared in spaces where mutual image-sharing is the norm, but this culture remains a microclimate in a wider heteronormative landscape (Gilden 2023). LGBTQ+ people face increased risk that their images may 'out' them. As with all people affected by this experience, they may be at risk of damage to their careers, public profile or personal safety, however, this threat is amplified by the potential for further homophobic or transphobic discrimination (Gilden 2023). This is a form of what Franks (2017a) calls "intersectional surveillance" (p.464), arguing that in a climate where surveillance is more prominent than ever, marginalised populations find themselves subject to greater levels of visibility and scrutiny (Citron 2019). This can apply to women's bodies, poor bodies, non-white bodies, and indeed, non-heterosexual bodies; a sexual image taken and shared not only exposes the person depicted as a sexual figure without their consent, but as a queer figure as well (Franks 2017a; Citron 2019). Further research is therefore needed that focuses on the impact of having sexual imagery shared without consent for queer men, and the factors or context which may shape or impact this experience.

This section has largely focused on the ways in which queer men engage sexually with one another. The neglect of other members of the LGBTQ+ community is not deliberate, but a side effect of limited relevant study in this area. Transgender people, who are subject to higher risk of sexual violence and are also highly fetishised in pornography, seem both a likely target for

non-consensual sexual image sharing and at risk of significant harm should this occur (Pavanello Decaro et al. 2024; Peitzmeier et al. 2020; Fernández-Rouco et al. 2017; Kussin-Shoptaw, Fletcher & Reback 2017). Their absence from research in this area is therefore notable. In addition, there is little research on lesbian dating cultures (Murray & Sapnar Ankerson 2016); although as one study found that lesbians are half as likely to share images when compared to gay men, this might offer some explanation for their absence from research in this area (Garcia et al. 2016).

There is some indication that bisexual women experience non-consensual sexual image sharing in the same manner as heterosexual women- that is, they are usually targeted by men- and that lesbian women report receiving sexual harassment from men on dating apps (Waldman 2019). Another study found that there was no difference between lesbian, bisexual, and straight women in how they were objectified and blamed in sexual images shared without consent (Serpe & Brown 2022). Waldman (2017) further suggests that "revenge porn tends to hit the LGBTQ community when women come out as lesbians after breaking up with men" (p.715), thereby again situating this experience in a gendered power dynamic. Queerness does not shield bisexual or gay women from sexual harms from men, and in some cases may make them more of a target (Bedera & Nordmeyer 2021; Muholi 2004). More research that examines queer women's experiences of non-consensual sexual image sharing, particularly how their sexual identity shaped their experience, would therefore be highly welcomed.

Hearn and Hall's (2019) analysis of the commentary that accompanies non-consensually shared images online is one of the few studies to include data on female-to-female non-consensual sexual image-sharing. They found that the commentary drew on ideas such as promiscuity, with language such as "lesbian slut" (p.871); morality, accusing the person depicted of being a "cheater", "liar", "thief" or "bitch" (pp.871-872); or otherwise drew into question the legitimacy of their sexuality, labelling them as a "pretesbian [pretend lesbian]. She is only lesbian because she is spiteful about men who wouldn't give her the time of day when she was younger" (p.873). The idea of being an 'illegitimate lesbian' fits with a larger body of research on how queer women demonstrate authenticity in their identities (Soares et al. 2025; Jones 2011; Hutson 2010; Walker 1993). Similarly, the accusations of sexual impropriety demonstrate that queer women are not free of the sexual regulation and stigma that affects heterosexual women (Ovesen 2024; Payne 2015; 2010). Hearn and Hall (2019) note ultimately that these commentaries "seem to be strongly based in binary, non-queer gender positionings [and the] performance of gender hegemony… revenge (porn), it seems, is not (yet) very queer" (p.876), suggesting furthermore that there may be some degree of overlap between queer and heterosexual women's experiences of non-consensual sexual image sharing. Similarly to queer men, further research is needed here to fully understand how non-

consensual sexual image sharing is felt by queer women, and the ways in which this might differ from heterosexual women.

2.6 Technology-facilitated victimisation

Huber (2023) identifies image-based sexual abuse as "how technology has facilitated a mutation in forms of sexual violence, causing victims to encounter impacts which are specific to, or amplified by, technology-facilitated victimisation" (p.3). While non-consensual sexual image sharing is not wholly reliant on technology, technology has certainly *amplified* and *exacerbated* the scale and scope of the issue. This section identifies the role of technology in non-consensual sexual image sharing.

It's important to establish what is meant when we say technology, so as not to invoke what Wajcman (2010) calls the masculine view of technology, tools of 'work and war'. In Bell's (2006) analysis on the influence of technology upon the sexual practice of 'dogging', he takes care to define the term 'technology' both in terms of technical hardware, such as the smartphone, but also the "sociotechnical systems of use" that "bring people (bodies) and technologies together in specific ways" (p.392). Sexual image sharing relies on the hardware of cameras- usually embedded in smartphones- to facilitate the taking or recording of the image. Additionally, however, it is reliant on software for the distribution and accessing of these images- internet access, hosting websites, social networks. The internet has been a transformative force, altering every sphere of industry and changing the way we interact with others (Castells 2002). This will be covered further in section 2.6.1.

2.6.1 The social shaping of technology

This section's header comes from the work of MacKenzie and Wajcman (1985). The relationship between society and the technology it uses has been debated since 'technology' as we know it came into common use. Some argue that technology is 'value-neutral'- neither good nor evil but used as a tool to conduct the will of its operator; pessimists, on the other hand, consider technology to be a 'Frankenstein's monster', beyond any one person's control (Tiles & Oberdiek 2013). MacKenzie and Wajcman's (1985) argument sits somewhere between, arguing that technology is shaped around the social, political, and economic factors of those who build them; neither neutral nor with a will of its own, but instead built to reproduce our existing cultures in this new field. This is described by Pinch and Wiebe (1984) as a social-

constructionist view: “science and technology are both socially constructed cultures and bring to bear whatever cultural resources are appropriate for the purposes at hand” (p.404).

This social constructivist perspective- that technology is shaped by the cultures around it- has several examples in the history of sexual media and technology. A demand for sexual content has been charged with driving technological innovation. Lister (2020) argues that “technological advancements do not create new ideas so much as offer new ways to fulfil pretty basic human needs” (p.209). She defines the short space between the development of a new technology and the subsequent use of it for sexual purposes as a ‘kink blink’– an almost non-existent gap. Johnson (1996) further argues that no matter the form of media– books, videos, television– pornography floods in and explores these mediums to their fullest extent. The appetite for the sharing of sexual imagery without consent is not new, it is merely the acceleration of technology which has made this practice so widespread.

One of the most significant technological developments when considering modern day sexual image sharing habits are that of the camera. The camera is rumoured to have been immediately used for sexual purposes: “the folk history of nude photography suggests that the day after the guy invented the camera he had his girlfriend come round and persuaded her to get naked for the sake of record” (O’Toole 1988, p.61). Subsequent iterations of camera technology which removed the role of the photographer and of external photograph development made it possible for pictures to be taken and developed in complete privacy, which naturally made taking sexual images even easier (Rosen, 2010). Undoubtedly, the practice of ‘sexting’ began with the first mobile phone equipped with picture-messaging capabilities (Hasinoff, 2015). Now with the development of the smartphone, high quality images, audio and video can be recorded and accessed in seconds.

Wajcman (2010; 2004) later expanded on the relationship between technology and society with her work on ‘technofeminisms’, which specifically addressed the ways in which social constructions of gender shape technologies. Wajcman responds to some original optimism about how technology might facilitate a ‘cyberfeminism’, a platform free of sexist constraints which would allow for new opportunities for all parties (but especially women) to express themselves freely (Plant 1998; Haraway 1987). Instead, the interaction between technology and gender remains “depressingly familiar” (Gill 2005, p.99). Wajcman argues that online spaces are subject to the same gendered structures and hierarchies as offline spaces- furthermore, they feed into one another: “the gendering of technologies can then be understood as not only shaped in design, but also shaped or reconfigured at the multiple points of consumption and use” (Wajcman 2010, p.149).

Powell and Henry (2017) take Wajcman's argument in their discussion of 'technology-facilitated sexual violence'. From their perspective, non-consensual sexual image sharing is shaped by existing structures of gender discrimination (as outlined in 2.3) but is more than simply a tool used by those inclined to do so. It is instead 'facilitated' by technology in that tech permits the distribution of such images by *design,* shaped by the existing social structures that create it. Technology then, in turn, shapes the cultures it originated from. As they argue, "technologies can be understood as simultaneously reflecting/embedding and reproducing/producing cultures and practices of sexual violence against women" (Powell & Henry 2017, p.39). This argument is key for those who prioritise the technical aspect of non-consensual sexual image sharing, as it highlights the important role that technology has in facilitating and exacerbating its existence.

An example of this "producing/ reproducing culture", particularly where it relates to non-consensual sexual image sharing, may be found in the example of the online pornography industry, as has been covered in further detail in section 2.4.2. Just as with other forms of technology, a desire to access sexual content online drove innovation and contributed to the shaping of the internet: "the demand for [online] porn in particular has been a driving force in the process by which successive generations of information technologies have become part of mainstream consumer culture" (McNair 2002, p.39). Similarly, while adult content websites were not originally designed to host non-consensually distributed content in particular, they became the ideal place for these materials to be accessed, uploaded and shared; in turn, there are now those who argue that adult websites profit from this content, and therefore deliberately engineer their platforms to facilitate its distribution (Franks 2017b; Ruberg 2016; Tyler 2016).

2.6.2 Digital identities and interactions

The internet changes both the way we present our identity, and the way in which we interact with others. Turkle's (1995) work was among the first to discuss how online environments offer a place for 'projections of the self'. Turkle argues that in projecting oneself online, however, one is able to fully *control* the image one portrays online- the internet therefore acts as a kind of 'social laboratory', allowing for a person- per Turkle's theory- to try and test various versions of their identity in a bid to better discover and understand their 'true selves' (Bargh, McKenna & Fitzsimons 2002). The internet is argued to offer a unique space to allow for such self-expression, as it offers a level of relative anonymity- it offers a space to act without fear of judgement from our social circle (Gilden 2013; Bargh et al. 2002). In this way, online spaces

can be likened to 'strangers on a train' (Rubin 1975)- an environment where one can express intimacies to strangers that they would be unable to share with those close to them. The internet disrupts the traditional process of sharing one's intimate information with another person; factors such as relative anonymity, distance, or more regular communication facilitated by digital media can accelerate intimacy (Bargh et al. 2002; McKenna, Green & Gleason 2002).

Of course, while the internet offers the space to interact with strangers, there are also spaces where one must present an 'expected' version of themselves. The internet has changed the way we communicate, not only in the ways we interact with strangers, but in the ways we interact with those in our existing social network (Baym 2010). While there have been anxieties about digital communication detracting from in-person relationships, evidence shows that most relationships– particularly close ones- are now defined by 'media multiplexity', meaning that communication happens via multiple platforms, both in person and digital (Haythornthwaite 2005). We are therefore using digital spaces to interact with those known to us from a range of social circles- and unlike anonymous spaces, this means digital representation is subject to the same level of judgement and scrutiny as from in-person interactions.

Mendelson and Papacharissi (2011) uses the work of Goffman (1959) to describe digital identities. Goffman's work argues that a person's presentation when interacting with others is carefully curated and constructed, a 'performance' of 'appearance and manner' intended to present an idealised version of oneself. This is defined by Goffman as 'front stage', with 'backstage' being one's private self. Digital spaces, then, are a 'front stage' space. Papacharissi (2011) argues that in digital spaces, "while people are purportedly presenting themselves, they are presenting a highly selective version of themselves. Social network sites (SNSs) present the latest networked platform enabling self-presentation to a variety of interconnected audiences" (p.252). Social media networks, in particular, are areas of 'front stage' presentation, reliant on the factors such as the presentation of identity, visibility of conversations and content sharing, and assessment of reputation between users (Kietzmann et al. 2011). These front stages can be separate, just as in real life- for instance, having separate social media platforms for family and friends (Mendelson & Papacharissi 2011).

We can therefore interpret digital spaces- particularly, social media networks- as areas of careful identity presentation. Of course, while one can choose not to use social media, this does not limit the need for a digital representation of oneself. The ubiquitousness of online networks has extended so far into everyday life, it has become incredibly difficult to avoid having a digital profile of some form (Haythornthwaite 2005). Furthermore, the presence of a

digital profile is highly important- a poor online reputation can affect career or education prospects, and the absence of any digital profile can be damning (Buchanan et al. 2017; Papacharissi 2011; Benson & Filippaios 2010). All of this leads us to surmise that for many, a digital identity is a mandatory part of engaging in everyday life in the modern western world.

These factors of digital connectivity and identity all contribute towards the phenomenon of non-consensual sexual image sharing. Boyd (2014) outlines four characteristics or 'affordances' that make sharing such content particularly pernicious. These affordances are:

> Persistence: the durability of online expressions and content; visibility: the potential audience who can bear witness; spreadability: the ease with which content can be shared; and searchability: the ability to find content (p.10).

These four affordances can allow us to understand why technology exacerbates the impact of non-consensual sexual image sharing. Images shared online *persist*- as with all content shared online, they are capable of existing indefinitely. They can be made *visible* to a wider audience, both known and unknown to the person affected. They can be *shared* with immense ease, and in some cases can even be made *searchable* if other identifiable content is provided with the image.

Online sharing of a sexual image then, is subject to a 'temporal extension' (Dodge 2016): existing without end. The case of Rehtaeh Parsons is a particularly evocative case to illustrate this (Powell & Henry 2017; Dodge 2016). Rehtaeh Parsons was a teenage girl who was sexually assaulted and later found recordings of the assault circulating online. The repeated appearance of this footage, coupled with the harassment received alongside it, arguably prolonged the experience of sexual violence, and the further circulation of these images "can be seen as an act of sexual violence in and of itself, the impact of which is sometimes described as even more traumatic than the original assault" (Dodge 2016, p.69). The digital manner of this content made the images more persistent, visible, and sharable, increasing the impact of the sexual violence tenfold.

As for being searchable, it is not uncommon for images shared online to include additional information such as social media accounts, personal details, or contact information (Cecil, 2014). This additional information can sometimes mean the images can be found with an internet search of your name- one study by the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative (2014) found that more than half of images posted were accompanied by the victim's full name, and around half with social network information. Other details included email address (26%), phone number

(20%), and addresses of the victim's home (16%) or work (14%). Search engines present a collective of information about a person that includes material willingly posted by oneself but additionally may feature material about you uploaded by others without your consent (Baym 2010). This renders such images even more visible, able to be accessed by anyone who knows your name.

The internet therefore provides a "staggering means of amplification" (Citron & Franks 2014, p.350). Images, once uploaded, can be shared, accessed, and downloaded by millions of people within seconds, worldwide, both known and unknown, forever, as they "remain in the unforgiving realm of cyberspace" (Cecil 2014, p.2523). Existing studies suggest that the persistence of these images results in feelings of dread, paranoia, and a loss of control (Mandau 2021; Aborisade 2021; McGlynn et al. 2020; Bates 2017; Citron & Franks 2014). This can manifest in a hyper-vigilance, a constant checking of online spaces to determine if the images have re-emerged (McGlynn et al. 2020). This means there is often no end in sight for harms induced by the image sharing– they will cycle around with each re-sharing of the image. Those photographed are re-victimised "in perpetuity" (Orenstein 2016, p.182) as images are saved and circulated, harmed anew each time the image is viewed or shared (Citron and Franks, 2014).

Consequently, as a result of images shared online, those affected may be forced to withdraw from online spaces. Both Huber's (2023a) and Aborisade's (2021) studies reported that a number of women interviewed had to close social media accounts they were previously active on, with some creating new accounts under different identities, due the judgement they received after the distribution of the images was discovered. As we have already established, a digital identity is an important part of existing in the modern world, and to be deprived of it is a significant loss, with some arguing that online safety has become a human rights issue (Bates 2020; Plan International 2020). Franks (2011) has highlighted that this is a particularly harmful aspect of online harassment against women and deprives them of the liberty to freely engage with others online.

2.6.3 Digital embodiment

In discussing the presentation of the self online, we must take care not to draw too much distinction between online and offline spaces. The concept of 'digital embodiment'- the idea that there is very little difference between our physical and digital forms- is key to understanding the occurrence and impact of non-consensual sexual image sharing. As early as the 90's, academics were noting the increasingly permeable boundary between computer and

human (Lupton 1995). Technology has been 'domesticated'– become a normal, ordinary and inevitable part of our lives (Baym, 2010).

Generally, there is increasing sentiment that this online/ offline boundary is reducing. Wajcman's (2010; 2004) 'technofeminism' argument argued in favour of embodiment. Rather than "dreaming of a flight from the body" (Gill 2005, p.99), embodiment remains the best way to approach and comprehend the way gender is enacted online. Wajcman refers to this as "wetware - bodies, fluids, human agency" (2004, p.77) making the case that the body remains gendered even in one's online identity. Baym (2010) echoes this statement, arguing that the concept of 'cyberspace' as a separate realm is a myth. Instead, online interactions are a "tool people use to connect, one which can only be understood as deeply embedded in and influenced by the daily realities of embodied life" (Baym 2010, p.152).

Similarly, just as the difference between the physical and digital body is difficult to note, the difference between 'online' and 'offline' spaces has ceased to exist. New communication technologies are fundamentally about allowing for the ability to 'transcend space' by removing the necessity of physical co-presence (Baym, 2010), meaning that interactions can take place at any time. The proliferation of digital technology has meant that traditional physical boundaries between spaces– such as work, school or leisure– are gone (Andrejevic 2003). The emergence of digital technologies in our lives has been feared to cause a "pervasive state of absent presence" (Gergen 2000, p.240)– a population constantly immersed in a non-physical realm.

Despite this, non-consensual sexual image sharing occupies a difficult position in this conceptualisation, because the harms involved are almost always non-contact, in that the perpetrator does not physically touch or harm the victim. The pervasiveness of the idea of the online world and the real world as "distinct and separate realms, with a solid dividing line between the two" (Bates 2020, p.46) gives the illusion that there is a difference between crimes enacted 'online' and 'offline'; and therefore, a difference between 'harms' enacted online and offline. Criminal law often focuses on physical harm done to the body, particularly with regard to sexual violence (Brown 2006; Huff, Johnson & Miller 2003).

This is argued to reduce how seriously we consider the impact of this experience, as "harms committed in cyberspace are often dismissed as 'not really real', as they are by their nature not physical, bodily harms" (Franks 2011, p.226). Powell and Henry (2017; 2015) further discuss that the sharing of intimate images should be considered an embodied harm. They assert:

> Technology-facilitated sexual violences are not disembodied, metaphysical or gender-neutral forms of representational violence but real forms of violence that have real impacts on real bodies in the real world. The individualised and collective harms of technology-facilitated sexual violence are, in other words, sensory, physical, psychical, exterior and interior (2017, p.65).

There is already empirical evidence which asserts this claim. To begin, there are situations where 'physical' and 'digital' harms from non-consensual image sharing blend together seamlessly, which makes the argument for their separation redundant. Footage of sexual assaults have been recorded and circulated after the fact, thereby further exposing the victim (Henry and Powell, 2015). There is also the threat of physical violence following an experience of non-consensual image sharing, since images can be shared with accompanying information that permits for the identification of an individual. The divulging of such information both increases the ways in which a person may reach out online to harass you and also risks harassment spilling over to the 'real' world, a fear that many victims experience (Citron and Franks, 2014). Huber's (2023a) study reported signs of agoraphobia in some who had been affected, so severe was their reluctance to engage with the physical world following their image-sharing.

Additionally, Powell and Henry (2017; 2015) suggest there is the fact that the impact of the experience is felt 'in the body', as it were- feelings of stress, depression, anxiety reported following incidences of non-consensual sexual image sharing do not affect some remote manifestation of oneself but instead are located in one's person. McGlynn et al.'s (2020) interviews with those affected described their experiences as the "very core" or "really deep within your body" (p.11), locating the impact squarely within themselves. Aborisade's (2021) study adds further evidence to this, with one participant stating that her image sharing felt like she had been 'publicly raped'. This further suggests that the non-physical nature of this experience does not necessarily produce 'less' harm, and that the distinction between the two is more complicated.

2.6.4 Abuse and online misogyny

Another technological factor which contributes to the proliferation and impact of image-based sexual abuse is that of cultures of abuse which circulate online. Stroud (2014) opposes the notion that non-consensual sexual image sharing is *solely* a manifestation of a misogynistic culture. Instead, he argues that the phenomenon is symptomatic of a "culture of quick and anonymous revenge fostered by the online world" (p.179). As outlined in 2.6.2, online

environments allow for a degree of anonymity otherwise difficult to attain, which Stroud (2014) argues acts as a 'shield' behind which people may act however they please. In most cases, however, where online abusive cultures are cited with reference to non-consensual sexual image sharing, a specifically misogynistic culture is described. They situate the phenomenon as symptomatic of both a culture of sexual harassment and a culture of cyberbullying, a 'digitized rape culture' (Dodge 2016) (see section 2.3.3). Understanding the combination of these two factors is seen as essential to this experience (Huber 2023a; Jurasz & Barker 2021; Henry & Powell 2016).

That the internet is subject to cultures of misogyny cannot be argued. Our discussion of the social shaping of technology in section 2.5.1 has already highlighted the ways in which technology is built on, and reproduces, existing structures of gendered inequality (Wajcman 2010; 2004; Mackenzie & Wajcman 1985). Social media networks more specifically have been built on a similar foundation of sexism. The first iteration of the social network *Facebook* was designed for the purpose of ranking women on the creator, Mark Zuckerberg's, college campus. The site, which took images of women without their consent and opened them to digital scrutiny based on their appearance, has been described as "the predecessor to image based sexual abuse" (Jurasz & Barker 2021, p.788). Facebook has somewhat maintained this legacy in being one of the most common platforms for internet abuse, particularly against women and girls (Davey 2020; Plan International 2020).

A particular circle of online misogynistic discourse relevant to this discussion is known as the 'manosphere'. The manosphere encompasses a wide range of online communities that are united under an umbrella of misogynistic content, spanning across websites, forums, message boards, and social media platforms (Ging 2019). The manosphere includes extreme groups such as 'incels' –men who consider themselves 'involuntary celibate' and unwanted by women; 'pickup artists', who measure their success on the number of women they have successfully partnered with; 'men going their own way', who reject the society of women; and 'men's rights activists', who believe in male oppression (O'Neill 2018). These communities form a "chain of interlinked but distinct groups" (Bates 2020, p.186); groups which may have varying aims, but all are united in their approach to gender. These groups have developed a sort of 'hybrid masculinity' which rejects typical notions of masculine hegemony but embraces others (Ging 2019; Massanari 2017; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005).

We certainly cannot lay every incident of non-consensual sexual image sharing at the door of those engaging in the 'manosphere'. However, Bates (2020) argues that their ideas leak out into the wider world:

> Their ideas and lexicon have infiltrated and influenced other communities and ideological groups, both on- and offline. There is a trickle down effect through these groups, whereby certain myths or prejudices that start as seeds… eventually filter into the wider consciousness of mainstream society (p.40).

This is often done under the guise of humour; humour on the internet frequently focuses on gender, and continues to naturalise and perpetuate entrenched stereotypes about the gendered roles of men and women, allowing for sexism to be pitched with an 'ironic' element that mocks and normalises sexism in equal measure (Ahmed 2017; Shifman & Lemish 2010; Gauntlett 2008; Salamon 2007; Shifman 2007). Ultimately, Bates (2020) argues, as the manosphere produces this content, the internet becomes increasingly misogynistic.

These misogynistic online cultures are argued to be responsible for one of the most high-profile incidences of non-consensual sexual image sharing. The celebrity hacking scandal of 2014, known in some online circles as 'The Fappening' after the Reddit forum which hosted this content, was a large-scale theft and distribution of sexual images largely of female celebrities. The images were collected, shared and discussed 'gleefully' on a large scale on this forum (Marwick 2017; Massanari 2017; Moloney & Love 2018). In an analysis of data shared during this period, Moloney and Love (2018) found that the commentary shared by these groups acted:

> To emphasise their sexual potency and distance themselves from the feminine… each act signals a claim to manhood status and the accompanying power and privileges. Taken together, these virtual acts affirmed privileges of manhood while oppressing and debasing women (p.610).

There are other such links to these spaces and incidences of non-consensual sexual image sharing. 4chan, "one of the most infamous trolling platforms on the internet" (Bates 2020, p.140) is a frequent home to non-consensually shared sexual images, among other misogynistic topics. Users further encourage these posters to escalate their behaviour by increasing the number of non-consensually taken images posted (Bates, 2020). Spaces such as this, where images are shared publicly, are often subject to commentary from other users, offering a 'community' of sorts (Harder 2023; Hearn & Hall 2019; Langlois & Slane 2017). As we know further sharing of these images causes harm, we can infer that such discussion exacerbates the impact of having sexual images shared (McGlynn et al. 2020; Orenstein 2016; Citron & Franks 2014).

This establishes a clear link between misogynistic 'toxic technocultures' (Massanari 2017) and incidences of non-consensual sexual image sharing, particularly incidences against women. What remains to be seen, however, is whether this culture shapes harms where the target is not female. Stroud (2014) seems to stand alone in voicing this thought in his argument in favour of considering online hate as a motivator, arguing that "demean[ing] women is clearly one despicable use of revenge porn posting, but the pragmatist analysis offered here would caution us against reducing this phenomena to one essence or explanation" (p.178). Some literature that examines non-consensual sexual image sharing through the lens of 'cyberbullying' found several incidences of same-sex targeting, both male-male and female-female (Small 2023; Naezer & van Oosterhout 2020; Faucher, Jackson & Cassidy 2014), which suggests further examination is needed to determine whether image-sharing in these contexts remains rooted in this culture. In addition, we must once again note that as most research in this area examines women's experiences, and how men fit within this framework is absent. It is certainly possible that men could be affected by this same misogynistic culture. If we accept that non-consensual sexual image sharing persists "as entertainment and as legitimate forms of humiliation" (Dodge 2016, p.72), it is very possible that men could be targeted by this same aim. As discussed in section 2.3,2, we know that men suffer at the hands of misogynistic cultures too, and that men's experiences of non-consensual sexual image sharing follow similar patterns based on failure to meet acceptable gendered roles (Hearn & Hall 2019; Hall & Hearn 2017; Connell 1987).

2.7 Conclusion

This literature review began by identifying the use of terminology in this project, identifying and evaluating various terms before providing an explanation for the chosen 'non-consensual sexual image sharing'. It offered competing definitions, but defined ultimately that we are seeking to examine *any* scenario where a person has sexual imagery shared of themselves without consent. It then covered four distinct themes, which run throughout the literature on non-consensual sexual image sharing in its many forms.

The first, sexual violence, explains that this is where most in-depth qualitative studies in this field are rooted. It outlined haw non-consensual sexual image sharing is situated on the 'continuum of sexual violence' (Kelly 1988) and established how theories of gender as performance (Butler 2004) and hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987) contribute to the causes and experiences of non-consensual sexual image sharing. Additionally, it situated non-

consensual sexual image sharing in the context of 'rape culture' and identified some of the ways in which common experiences in rape victims- loss of control, victim blaming, and objectification- can also be found in those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing.

The second theme, sexualisation of culture, discussed how an increasingly sexualised society (Attwood 2009; 2006) contributes to the experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing. It discussed the current climate of online pornography, and the debated role this has in causing sexual violence. It also highlighted how adult websites contribute to the facilitation of this experience with poor oversight, and, some argue, by intention under the guise of 'amateur pornography'. This section also discussed the internalisation of sexual identity, and how this has changed the way women are presented in modern media. Finally, it discussed the debates around 'objectification' as they relate to sexual images, and how this affects perceptions when they are shared without consent.

The third theme, queer cultures of intimacy, explored the limited data that outlines how this experience may differ in a queer context. It noted that existing conceptualisations and legislations of the phenomenon have excluded queer cultures and highlighted the different relationship that queer men in particular have with the taking and sharing of sexual content. It highlighted the ways in which this is normalised, and while theoretically this normalisation may result in a more accepting and less stigmatised conceptualisation of the sharing of nude images, queer people may be subject to more stigma when images are shared outside of these safe spaces. This section also noted the limited data on lesbian and trans experiences of non-consensual sexual image sharing.

The fourth theme, technology-facilitated violence, described technology's role in non-consensual sexual image sharing. It outlined theories on the social shaping of technology, and how technology is inherently gendered (Wajcman 2010; 2004). It also discussed theories about how people present themselves and interact online, and the ways in which a 'digital self' and 'physical self' are quickly becoming one in the same. It highlighted the technical 'affordances' which exacerbate the harms of non-consensual sexual image sharing: persistence: visibility, spreadability: and searchability (Boyd 2014), and argued that the harms of non-consensual sexual image sharing should be considered as 'embodied'- in other words, not so dissimilar to 'physical' harms (Henry & Powell 2015). Finally, it identified the contributing factor of online misogyny.

The literature review additionally identified some notable gaps, which this thesis hopes to contribute to. The first is in terminology- there is so far no in-depth qualitative study on the

experiences of those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing, only on 'revenge porn' and 'image based sexual abuse'. As Harper et al. (2022) suggests, this academic opinion may not match the conceptualisation of this phenomenon in public opinion. In approaching this project with deliberately neutral terminology, we may be able to determine whether this experience is considered as a *sexual* harm in nature, and in addition whether this harm constitutes *abuse*, by those affected by it.

In addition, this literature review has identified that most existing research related to this phenomenon is about women's experiences of non-consensual sexual image sharing. Theories on sexual violence, pornography, and social media use as they relate this experience are all derived in the female experience. The application of research to women's experiences is understandable, given that women are both more likely to be affected by this experience and clearly subject to severe harms as a result. However, expanding our pool of participants to include men may allow us to gain other perspectives on how this experience is gendered, and how this gendering affects how the experience is processed and felt. Examining this experience outside of a heterosexual relationship power dynamic and including those who shared images in the context of LGBTQ+ relationships may also provide further insight previously uncovered.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

To begin developing a methodology for this project, the most logical beginning was in the re-examining of the project's research aims. This project aims to explore the experiences of individuals who have undergone non-consensual sexual image sharing. It seeks to explore the severity that the release of these images had on the individuals, including repercussions to their mental health, their careers, or their relationships with others. Additionally, it questions what response (if any) the individual took as a result of the incident. This could be a formal proceeding, such as reporting the incident to the police or reporting the images to the hosted website. Alternatively, it could be a more 'informal' response, such as confronting the perpetrator directly. Finally, it seeks to examine any broader changes within the affected person, to determine if the experience has been transformative in any way.

To respond to the desire to better understand the depth and breadth of this experience, a qualitative approach is required. This is because qualitative data allows for the deep exploration of "behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships" (Mack et al. 2005, p.1); in other words, it will permit for the gathering of rich data that thoroughly explores these aspects when collecting information from participants. Qualitative research is concerned with the "particular rather than the general" (King & Horrocks 2010, p.27), meaning that while it does not allow for the examination of wider trends or causal relationships, it is ideal for understanding personal experience and human context. To accurately meet these qualitative aims, interviews were chosen as the ideal method for collecting data. Perhaps the most traditional method of qualitative data collection, it remains one of the most accessible and effective methods of conducting qualitative data gathering (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015). This chapter details the process of developing, conducting, and analysing these interviews with adults affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing.

Conducting empirical research in a subject area such as this presents unique difficulties. There are only a handful of studies which have conducted first-hand qualitative research in this area, some of which were published after the data collection phase of this project was completed (Huber 2023a; Aborisade 2021; McGlynn et al. 2020; McGlynn et al. 2019; Bates 2017). One reason for this scarcity, Huber (2023a) argues, is that the relevant population of participants is incredibly hard to access. The sensitive nature of this topic- both sexual in nature and

frequently associated with negative outcomes such as damage to mental health, loss of trust, and feelings of shame- naturally renders eligible parties reluctant to discuss their experience with researchers (Huber 2023a; Aborisade 2021; McGlynn et al. 2020; Bates 2017). Some studies in this area have circumvented this issue with the use of methods such as online ethnographic research (Hearn & Hall 2019; Henry & Flynn 2019; Uhl et al. 2018; Langlois & Slane 2017) however the nature of this project and its aims requires direct engagement with this population. This chapter therefore additionally explores the challenges faced when conducting empirical research on the topic of non-consensual sexual image sharing and offers methodological recommendations for future research in this area.

3.2 Constructionist, feminist, and sex-positive perspectives

In seeking to understand the perspectives, perceptions, and opinions of those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing, a philosophical framework which meets these aims must be established. As this project seeks to acquire knowledge of personal experience, the position of constructionism is best suited here. Not uncommon in qualitative research, constructionism argues that "people construct an image of reality based on their own preferences and prejudices and their interactions with others" (Schutt 2012, p.651). The goal of a constructionist researcher, then, is not to discover the objective truth, fact, or reality of what has occurred, but instead to seek to examine the ways in which this reality is constructed. This outlook is particularly relevant for this study, as there is neither a manner, or indeed a purpose, in verifying whether an 'objective' truth exists within my participant's experience. I cannot, for instance, check why, where, or how an image was shared; even if this were possible, it would offer little in the pursuit of understanding the experience of having sexual imagery shared without consent. The priority of this research is to examine the ways in which those affected *conceptualise* their own experience.

Constructionist perspectives, unlike realist perspectives, acknowledge not only different perspectives but different *interpretations*- for instance, two participants may comment on the concept of 'fairness', but have different assessments of what this concept means and how it should be deployed (Rubin & Rubin 2005). Constructionists favour methodologies which allow for further in-depth exploration of these factors, a decision I factored into my interview design (see section 3.5). This also follows that the interview itself becomes a site of narrative construction, both on the part of expression of the participant and interpretation of the researcher (Lundgren 2012). This outlook, then, acknowledges the place of critical reflection of both the researcher and the research itself (see section 3.9).

The project will also follow the principles of feminist methodologies, which aligns well with a constructionist viewpoint. Typically, feminist methodology can be defined as disregarding the idea of a remote, objective, 'masculine' approach to data collection, which prioritises 'realist' outlooks; feminist principles instead acknowledge the subjective, and the inability to separate wholly from bias (McRobbie 1982; Oakley 1981). Feminist principles additionally help to shape the study of personal experience, particularly when studying sensitive topics such as sexual violence, aiming to produce findings which illuminate "hidden experiences and voices, issues of power and positionality, ethics, and social action" (Herron 2022, p.660) The focus on intuition, feeling, and emotion that comes with feminist research seems well suited to my research aims, which are focused on exploring personal experiences and perspectives. Another aspect of feminist methods which appealed to me was the care taken with participants. Feminist researchers emphasise that traditional research interviews are sometimes considered as a 'harvesting' of knowledge from a participant, whose role is described as passive, and advocate instead for researchers to approach interviews with careful consideration of this power dynamic (Hesse-Biber 2014; McRobbie 1982; Oakley 1981). My acknowledgement of this is detailed further in section 3.5 and shaped the decisions I made about my interview process. Another perspective of feminist research which seemed significant was that of considering my own position, perspective, and relation to the research, which is discussed further in section 3.8 (Moronez 2014).

The use of feminist principles additionally seemed natural on a project such as non-consensual sexual image sharing, as I anticipated that my pool of participants would be mostly female, based on indications from previous research that women are over-represented as being affected by this phenomenon (see section 2.3). Hence, I expected that I would be setting out to conduct research which privileges "women's issues, voices, and lived experiences" (Hesse-Biber 2014, p.3). In fact, I spoke to a surprising number of men (see section 3.9 for further detail). Despite this, I believe this work still operates under principles of feminist practice. In fact, as Stanley and Wise (1993; 1983) argue, feminist research must go beyond simply 'research about women':

> Feminist research must be concerned with all aspects of social reality and all participants in it. It seems obvious to us that any analysis of women's oppression must involve research on the part played by men in this (1983, p.19)

The decision not to restrict this research to women, then, can still be argued to be a decision made on the basis of feminist research principles. It seeks to examine *all* aspects of social

reality, underlined by the feminist principle of hearing previously unexplored narratives- in this case, not simply accounts of women's experiences of non-consensual sexual image sharing, but accounts from other (largely unheard) parties as well (Rubin & Rubin 2005).

Another conceptual aspect that should be emphasised throughout the project, in both the data collection and analysis periods, is a non-judgemental attitude towards sexuality. Landi (2018, p.323) defined her own research into BDSM communities as coming from a "sex positive approach", defined as a "non-judgmental and curious attitude to sex and sexualities". The sex positive movement has a history rooted in pro-sex feminism and has recently become a popular topic of discussion (Fahs 2014); despite this, it has no clear definition, which can make broader discussion of the area tricky (Belous & Schulz 2022; Ivanski & Kohut 2017; Fahs 2014). For this reason, it is important to make explicitly clear what is meant by using the phrase 'sex positive' in the context of this project. The use of the term 'positive' is not meant to imply that all sexual activity is inherently 'good', or that all participants in the project are expected to have a positive outlook on sex. It simply acknowledges that each person has their own "personal meaning of their sexuality", which should be examined free of the "unidimensional approach to sex in our culture" (Kimmes et al. 2015, p.289). Sex is conceptually "neither good nor bad", but a "subjective experience" that should be acknowledged without the implication of moral assessment (Glickman 2000, p.2). In the context of this project, it is important that the research process maintains this sex-positive approach and strives to not cast additional judgement or shame upon participants, who may already have experienced these feelings in response to the initial image sharing.

There is certainly a difficulty in locating oneself as a researcher in a project about sexuality, largely because one's personal sexual identity is both incredibly private and perceived as unprofessional to discuss in formal workplaces such as academia. Irvine's (2014) argument that research into sex and sexuality remains 'dirty work', subject to controversy and stigma, is relevant here. The public persona presented by researchers– one which is academic, professional, and detached – firmly rejects any involvement from the private self, which has a sexual identity and sexual preferences (or lack thereof) (Taylor & Davidson 2010). Therefore, while I may strive for a sex-positive, non-judgemental approach, I may encounter sexual practices that confuse or offend me on a personal level, because I cannot strip myself of these personal biases. To minimise this impact on the participants and additionally on the research, it is important that I maintain a neutral manner during the interview, but address and reflect on my reactions following the data collection. Lane (2013, p.169), a psychotherapist who specialises in sex-related topics, advises her students to practise watching pornography until they "learn five new things", with the intent of 'broadening their ideas about sex practices and

desires' so they do not inflict further shame upon their clients. While watching pornography as 'homework' does feel extreme, the sentiment of expanding one's knowledge over the course of this research project is certainly beneficial.

3.3 Terminology

The intended participants for this project are people who have experienced non-consensual sexual image sharing whilst over the age of 18. Participants must self-identify as eligible for this project- any persons who have had *any form* of sexual imagery (including photos, videos, or other content) shared in *any capacity* without their consent could be considered eligible for this study. The project deliberately targeted any relevant parties who could claim this broad experience, using language which spoke to anyone who has had sexual imagery shared without consent, avoiding the use of set terminology, such as 'revenge porn' or 'image-based sexual abuse'. Section 2.2 already outlined the difficulties in naming and conceptualising this phenomenon, and these difficulties presented a number of methodological considerations. The project wished to ensure that it was "inclusive of all who fit within sampling parameters" (Ellard-Gray et al. 2015, p.1), which therefore made consideration of terminology a priority. The project wished to attract not only those who identified as being affected by 'revenge pornography' or 'image-based sexual abuse', for instance, but additionally anyone with relevant experience for whom these terms did not resonate.

The use of language in recruitment for research projects can have a significant impact on the results. There was a concern that by using set terminologies such as 'revenge porn' or 'image-based sexual abuse', responses would only be provided by a specific subset of the eligible population, and therefore the data collected would only reflect this narrow pool. Farvid's (2010) work on 'casual sex' raises some of these same problems. Farvid argues that by using the term 'casual sex' in her recruitment materials, the language "automatically invoked certain cultural discourses" and attracted participants who *"identified* themselves as someone who engages in casual sex" (pp.233-234), thereby narrowing the population to a specific subset of all eligible people. In Farvid's second research project on this topic, the use of language which was more ambiguous garnered a more diverse dataset of relevant experiences.

Similarly to Farvid's (2010) work and s has already been discussed in section 2.2, the leading terms for this phenomenon- 'revenge pornography' and 'image-based sexual abuse'- both invoke certain cultural discourses. With regard to the latter term, labelling an event as abuse, while potentially a more accurate description of this phenomenon, risks alienating those who

do not consider their experience to be such. This is particularly relevant with regard to studies of sexual violence, where those affected are often resistant or reluctant to use terminology which emphasises the seriousness of their experience. Several studies on the phenomenon of rape, for instance, found that some participants who had experiences which matched the textbook or legal definition of rape did not consider their experience as such (Johnstone 2016; Kahn et al. 2003; Bondurant 2001;).

Rape is therefore another term which evokes certain 'cultural discourses', and an area that might be examined to better inform the use of language in this project. The 'sexual experiences survey' was among the first to develop a methodology to better measure 'hidden' or 'unacknowledged' rape (Koss 1985; Koss & Oros 1982). The survey asked questions about sexual experiences which included coercive or violent behaviour (or the threat of such), focusing on descriptive terms without the use of the words 'rape' or 'assault'. Although there are certainly criticisms to be made of researchers applying terminology to participant's experiences which have not been applied by themselves (Gavey 1999), this is a clear framework that might be used if one wishes to measure a behaviour or concept beyond the cultural discourses attached to terms or phrases. Using descriptive terms in this study, such as recruiting 'those who have had sexual imagery shared without consent' rather than the use of established terms, may be a more appropriate way to appeal to all participants with relevant experiences.

The factors which contribute to hidden or unacknowledged rape are also relevant to the study. While personal characteristics such as age, personality, culture, or education play a role, the extent to which one's experience matches up with 'rape scripts', or 'rape myths', can contribute towards the likelihood of a person acknowledging their experience as 'rape' (Littleton, Rhatigan & Axsom 2007; Kahn et al. 2003; Kahn et al. 1994). Research has demonstrated that 'rape myths' exist with reference to non-consensual sexual image sharing (Harper et al. 2022; Karasavva et al. 2022; Powell et al. 2019). Harper et al.'s (2022) work on incorrect assumptions about revenge pornography found belief in myths such as victim promiscuity and victim blaming and warned of a gap between public and academic perceptions of this issue. They argue their research:

> Suggests a potential disconnect between elite (sociological) views and the opinions and beliefs held and expressed by the lay public… That is, although the academic zeitgeist is to view the non-consensual sharing of private sexual images through the sociological lens, if the public do not endorse this view (favouring, for example, explanations that focus on sexual arousal) then cases that do not possess these sex-related features may be viewed less harshly (p.777).

This therefore indicates that a gap between academic and public understanding of non-consensual sexual image sharing is likely, and this fact must shape decisions around the language used in recruitment materials.

For similar reasons to avoiding the terms 'revenge porn' and 'image-based sexual abuse', the term 'victim' was also avoided. While other studies on this topic have used such terminology to recruit (Bates 2017), the exclusion of the term in this study was motivated by the desire to be inclusive both to parties who identify as victims, and those who do not. Much like with the term 'abuse', identification as a victim is a contested state, particularly with regards to sexual violence. Being a victim requires acknowledging and claiming the harm done to oneself, which can be complicated with regards to sexual violence- feelings of guilt or self-blame can interfere with the ability the position oneself in this manner.

Being a victim is also a highly personal way to identify; two people who have identical experiences may differ in their application of the term to themselves. Certain people are also more likely to consider themselves as victims. Men affected by sexual violence, for instance, may have more difficulty in associating themselves with this term (Hlavka 2016). The word 'victim' itself is additionally contested; people may resist this term based on perceived discourses of weakness, preferring alternative terms such as 'survivor'. Therefore, the language used in this study focused on those 'affected by' or 'experienced with' this phenomenon, rather than victims of it. DiTullio and Sullivan (2019) advocate for this approach from a therapist's perspective, recommending the use of 'feminist-informed language' such as referring to a person as 'affected by' non-consensual sexual image sharing rather than a 'victim' of it.

Decisions on chosen terminology were therefore based on anticipated public attitudes towards language, and in a desire to approach this project from a 'neutral' position and thereby recruit as wide a range of experiences relevant to the project as possible. The terminology was designed to attract people who considered their experience as 'revenge porn' or 'image-based sexual abuse' but additionally feel relevant to people who associated with a different term, or did not relate their experience to any terminology at all. It seeks to make the project inclusive for all eligible parties, avoiding pre-existing notions regarding *what* this experience is, *how* it occurs, or *who* is affected by it. All communications led with the broad phrase 'have you ever had sexual imagery shared without your consent?' The phrases 'revenge porn' and 'image-based sexual abuse' were included as subheadings based on their relevance, and additionally commonly used as hashtags or content warnings to circulate the content (more detail on this

can be found in 3.4.4). As this phenomenon is still in the process of being defined, this unique approach should, in theory, attract a population for data collection containing a diverse set of experiences and perspectives in relation to this experience.

3.4 Participants and sampling

3.4.1 Participant characteristics

While the use of terminology for this project was kept deliberately broad, there were other conditions that participants must meet before taking part in the research project. In addition to identifying as a person who has had sexual imagery shared without consent, a person must additionally have been over eighteen at the time of the sexual image sharing. This decision was made based on the legal definition of sexual imagery taken of those under eighteen, which is considered as 'indecent or prohibited images of children' (Protection of Children Act 1978). Hall and Hearn (2017) draw a similar distinction in their work, making a clear distinction between 'revenge pornography' and child pornography' on the basis of age. The premise of non-consensual sexual image sharing legally cannot apply to children, as children are not able to give consent to the recording and distribution of sexual content. The sharing of sexual images of children is therefore rightly considered (both legally and socially) as a much more serious offence and is beyond the scope of this project.

This was made a more difficult decision based on the knowledge that many affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing are teenagers. Some studies on the experience of these phenomena have focused on its impact on adolescent girls (Mandau 2021). While we cannot determine exactly how many are affected by this experience, a great deal of research covers 'sexting', 'sending nudes', or other similar sexual activity amongst teenagers, and the concept often draws media attention (Mandau 2021; Thorburn et al. 2021; Naezer & van Oosterhout 2020; Hasinoff 2015; Döring 2014). Teenagers offer a difficult space with regards to consent and sexuality- while legally this is not possible, research indicates that teenagers engage in consensual practices of 'sexting', just as they engage in consensual sex: it can be considered a "normal contemporary form of intimate communication in romantic and sexual relationships… between adolescents who are exploring and growing into adult relationships" (Madigan et al. 2018; Döring 2014, p.5). In addition, as the UK's legal age of consent for sexual activity is sixteen, but child indecency laws apply to those under eighteen, there is a period of time where a person could legally engage in sexual activity but not legally record it. Sexual images of those who are near eighteen, taken with consent, are very rarely considered as 'child

pornography' or indecent images of children- our cultural discourse of this concept often focuses on children much younger in age (McNamara 2022; Bayliss 2020; Clough 2012). Despite this, it was determined that collecting data from those technically affected by 'child pornography'- even if the person affected was near adulthood at the time and did not consider their experience as such- was legally and conceptually outside of the scope of this research.

In addition to age, participants were also restricted to those currently based in the UK. This was done based on varying legal definitions of the phenomenon globally. This decision was also made to account for the lack of research conducted on those in the UK affected by this issue- Aborisade's (2021) and Bates' (2017) studies focus on participants from America, Canada, and Nigeria. Huber's (2023a) UK-based study on the impact of image based sexual abuse, which was published after data collection on this project was completed, makes a similar case, arguing that aside from the work of McGlynn et al. (2020) "research that examines the experiences of victimisation is primarily based on research originating from the US and Australia, leaving knowledge of UK victims' experiences limited in comparison" (p.3).

In contrast to age and location, the decision was made to not limit participants based on gender. The existing literature heavily focuses on acts of non-consensual sexual image sharing which have been done *to* women, *by* men (Aborisade 2021; Bates 2017; Bloom 2014). As has already been discussed in the literature review, existing theories on the topic largely suggest that non-consensual sexual image sharing is a new manifestation of sexual violence meant to control and demean women, leading some to argue that there are "significant instances of anti-male revenge pornography" (p.179) left ignored and unaccounted for in this explanation (Stroud 2014). This means that men have typically been excluded from studies that emphasise non-consensual sexual image sharing as a form of sexual abuse and warrant further inclusion (Henry & Powell 2018). To restrict the sample at this stage would risk excluding participants who could offer insightful data that contributes directly to the research aims. If we consider non-consensual sexual image sharing as a form of sexual violence, it is important to approach the project with a "gender inclusive conceptualisation" of the crime that does not "limit our knowledge" through a heterosexual lens, where women can only be the victims and men the perpetrators (Turchik, Hebenstreit, & Judson 2016, p.134).

A focus on non-consensual sexual image sharing in a solely heterosexual context would also neglect the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, whom some argue are at more risk of experiencing non-consensual sexual image sharing than their heterosexual counterparts (Gilden 2023; Lehart et al. 2016). As the impact of sexual violence on LGBTQ+ individuals and men has been generally much less researched than that of women (Lowe & Rogers 2017; Todahl et al. 2009), collecting data from these groups would be a welcome addition of

perspective. Furthermore, the conceptualisation of gender as a binary label is becoming increasingly outdated. Broadening labels of gender from 'male' or 'female' to include those who fall elsewhere on the spectrum is both the more inclusive choice for participants and allows for a more nuanced view on the impact of a person's gender upon their experience (Frohard-Dourlent et al. 2016).

3.4.2 Targeting participants

Finding participants was identified as one of the most difficult logistic elements of the project. In Ellard-Grey et al.'s (2015) identification of the common ways in which a population is difficult to access, the intended sample for this project met all three categories. Firstly, participants for this research are 'hidden'- there is no sampling frame from which the population may be drawn. Because of the taboo nature of the topic, there is a likelihood that a person affected may not wish to report or discuss their experience with anyone else, which limits formal recording of incidents of non-consensual sexual image sharing. At the time of data collection (years 2021-2022), although the act had been criminalised in the UK, victims were not guaranteed anonymity when reporting (McGlynn & Rackley 2016). Where official records do exist, there are severe ethical implications in accessing or using this data- Harder's (2023) study, for instance, which used police records of reports of non-consensual sexual image sharing, and involved the researcher accessing copies of these images, noted that "the missing consent from survivors still poses an ethical issue" in her work (p.657). As such, there was no available record by which eligible parties may be directly identified and approached.

Participants are also likely to be 'vulnerable' (Ellard-Gray et al. 2015), in that sharing their experiences might put them at risk. This is particularly true for those with experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing, as revealing that such pictures exist online risks exposing these images to a wider audience. Furthermore, as outlined in section 2.2, the literature indicates a degree of overlap between experiences of non-consensual sexual image sharing and experiences of sexual violence. Therefore, it is worth considering the difficulties of conducting research with participants who have faced other forms of sexual harm. Researchers who aim to identify participants with experience of sexual violence face several barriers to access. Participants may feel too ashamed, upset, or vulnerable to discuss their experience with a researcher, or they may feel to blame, or that others will blame them, for their experience. On the other hand, they may not be aware that their experience classes as 'sexual violence', as discussed in our use of terminology in section 3.3- they may be resistant to certain labels that

do not resonate with their perception of the experience (Orchowski, Untied & Gidycz 2013). These are all factors which could potentially affect recruitment of participants.

Finally, participants might additionally be hard to reach due to "factors related to their social location" (Ellard-Gray et al. 2015, p.2912). Some affected persons are forced to withdraw fully from online communities, such as social media (see section 2.6), in response to the repeated sharing of their images and to avoid online harassment as a result (Maddocks 2019; Dragiewicz et al. 2018; Bates 2017; Bloom 2014;). This might have an impact on recruitment methods which use online platforms. As the data collection period for this project took place from 2021-2022, restrictions against in-person interaction as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic made online recruitment a necessity.

Sampling therefore presents a difficult hurdle- we are seeking a sample that could theoretically be found anywhere, with no clear way to identify them, and that may be reluctant to take part. As a result of these difficulties, several recruitment methods were employed to recruit a wide range of eligible participants (Ellard-Gray et al. 2015, p.2915). A number of organisations, including over 30 charity or support organisations and over 100 University Societies in the UK, were contacted and asked to share the recruitment materials. These organisations were selected based on their interest in topics related to the project: an interest in sex positivity, preventing sexual violence, improved sexual education or wellbeing, or social activism more broadly.

Social media advertisements were also used on the platforms of Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter (now X). A dedicated Instagram account was established for the research project, which regularly shared content related to the concept. This content was also shared on Twitter from the researcher's professional account. Relevant social media accounts, chosen based on criteria outlined above, were 'tagged' in the circulated materials. Facebook groups were also selected based on these criteria. Sponsored 'Instagram' posts were also used to push recruitment posts to a wider audience.

In addition to the above methods, physical posters were placed on campus at the University of York in the later stages of data collection, when rules around social distancing as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic were lessened. Snowball sampling was also employed; in the debrief sheet, participants were asked to pass details of the research project along to anyone they knew had been affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing, and thought may be interested in participating.

3.4.3 Recruitment

As outlined in section 3.3, to ensure the project's inclusivity, all recruitment materials used neutral phrasing, asking for participants who had had 'sexual imagery shared without consent' (see appendix F). Some other popular phrases for the phenomenon were also included; these were 'image-based sexual abuse', 'upskirting', and 'revenge porn'. Although the latter term has been subject to intense scrutiny (Maddocks 2019; Henry & Powell 2016; Franks 2015), it seemed necessary for inclusion because it remains the most well-known term for the phenomena. In addition, to ensure participants were over eighteen at the time of the image sharing, this requirement was displayed on all recruitment communications, and participants were asked to confirm this prior to being invited to interview. The requirement that all participants must be currently based in the UK was also outlined on all materials.

All participant recruitment materials included both my university email address and my social media handles. This was done for a few reasons. While the use of a university email address offers some level of 'authority', email is a very formal method of communication- increasingly, social media offers a more casual way to interact with one another. Indeed, many participants reached out to me via the direct messaging services of social media platforms rather than via email. I also considered that participants who were unsure about taking part may be inclined to follow my social media handles while they considered.

Social media also offered a certain element of displaying my character or personality to a potential participant. Kelly (1988) discovered in her study of experiences of sexual violence that many women decided to 'test out' or 'sum up' her personality before deciding to participate in her research. Kelly recommends "face to face contact" (p.9) prior to data collection, to allow for potential participants to conduct an 'informal assessment' of the researcher. Unfortunately, due to the circumstances raised by the Covid-19 pandemic, this was made more difficult. Kelly (1988) notes that many of her participants encountered her at conferences before deciding to participate in her research. Venues where casual networking can occur, such as campuses, conferences or other events, were closed during this period for social distancing reasons. Having a social media profile available to potential participants allowed me to provide a little more context to myself as a human being, however narrow this view may be. At the very least, it would allow participants to envisage me as a person, rather than as a stranger.

3.4.4 Recruitment difficulties

Recruitment for this project was anticipated to be difficult. Huber's (2023a) study, which also conducted interviews with women affected by image-based sexual abuse, expressed a similar sentiment. She states:

> Recruitment of victims was particularly difficult, with many women refusing the invitation to partake and withdrawing during the data collection process. These women were, without doubt, a hard-to-reach group and the difficulty in recruitment is likely to be one of the reasons in-depth knowledge on victims' experiences is limited (p.4).

This statement echoes my own experience. This section highlights some of the key factors which made recruitment of participants particularly challenging.

Firstly, I met a level of reluctance from organisations to share recruitment materials for the project. While a great number of organisations were contacted and asked to share recruitment materials, this was not always met with agreement- from some organisations, there was a reluctance or even refusal to share the research project. In some cases, organisations would only agree to share the project if 'trigger warnings' were applied to the posts. Trigger warnings have become fairly common in online discourse and involves the application of keywords outlining potentially sensitive content to a post, with the intent to allow people who are vulnerable to certain topics more agency in the content that they access (Bridgland, Jones & Bellet 2023; Bashonga 2020). Users may use filtering systems to block certain keywords or use trigger warnings as a notification system that briefs them on the content they are about to read, to prevent upsetting content taking the reader by surprise. Attaching such warnings is considered as good manners in many online circles, particularly if the post or content is likely to be viewed by those affected by violence. While I agreed to add trigger warnings to my recruitment posts- both in the interest of distributing the recruitment material, and from a desire to protect the safety of that particular audience, if the organisation felt it was warranted- this did somewhat disrupt the decisions outlined in section 3.3 regarding my desired neutral terminology. The recruitment images were shared alongside hashtags such as #revengeporn, #imagebasedsexualabuse and #sexualviolence, which very much emphasised non-consensual sexual image sharing in its position as an act of sexual harm.

The use of these warnings also increased the chances of eligible parties having the content filtered out of their online spaces. It is difficult to say if this potential filtering is for good or for ill. One might argue that a person so sensitive to the topic of non-consensual sexual image

sharing would be unlikely to wish to participate in the project. On the other hand, simply because a person doesn't wish to see this content regularly in their online spaces, this does not necessarily translate into a reluctance to engage with studies on the topic. Ultimately, there is no way of knowing if the use of these hashtags filtered the recruitment material away from eligible parties. It does, however, present a significant methodological point for any social researchers engaging in online recruitment for sensitive topics- future researchers would do well to consider the potential use and characterisation of trigger warnings when planning online recruitment.

Alongside the request for trigger warnings, others were reluctant to, or refused to, share the material entirely. While this was never refused maliciously- in fact, many organisations expressed to me how they felt the research was very important- there was a sense that the research may simply be too upsetting, and the organisation did not wish to bother or cause harm to members of their audience already affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing. This was, from some, credited as part of the Covid-19 pandemic. There was a sense that the population was already overburdened with issues of stress and anxiety at this time, and indeed, this may have been the case; the Revenge Porn Helpline reported a 'surge' of reports to their service during the pandemic restrictions, with increased stress, heightened emotions, and greater use of online networks being cited as a possible reason for this increase (Ward 2023; Price 2020).

Another point of difficulty came from restricting participation based on the age of the participant at the time of the image sharing. As outlined previously, this project required that all eligible parties must have experienced non-consensual sexual image sharing while over the age of eighteen. All recruitment materials outlined this requirement clearly (see appendix F). However, I had several potential participants reach out to express their eligibility to participate, only to be turned away based on this age restriction. While none of these participants reached the interview stage, it was a frustrating part of the research process- both for myself, to have to turn away people interested in participating, and I am sure for the potential participant, who felt they had a contribution to make to the topic. In some cases, these participants were incredibly enthusiastic about participating, which caused feelings of guilt when I ultimately had to turn them away.

For future projects in this area, I would seriously reconsider restricting participants on this basis. Participants who met the eligibility criteria were largely affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing during a period described broadly as their 'youth', referring to their late teens and early twenties. While legally distinct, it is difficult on reflection to argue that those

who were sixteen or seventeen at the time of the image sharing had a drastically different experience than those who were affected just a few years on. Many participants who were under eighteen at the time of the image sharing clearly resonated enough with the recruitment appeal to consider themselves eligible, which demonstrates that while the legal difference between 'non-consensual sexual image sharing' and 'child pornography' is clear, the cultural definition remains poorly defined. Future research in this area should carefully consider this age restriction.

Another point of difficulty came at the introduction of the consent form. The method outlined for this project (given in more detail in section 3.5) involved a standard procedure of requiring a participant sign a consent form before engaging in an interview, which was recorded for transcription purposes. Consent forms are established, in theory, to the mutual benefit of both the participant and the researcher- it formally outlines the requirements and expectations to take part in a research project, and the process of signing offers a clear indication to the research that the participant fully understands and agrees to take part (Braun & Clarke 2013; Siber 2009).

However, the consent form and the recorded interview seemed at times to be a hindrance to the data collection process. Signing a consent form creates a formal record of engagement with the research- and for sensitive topics, sharing one's name creates a level of additional risk. In my own research, this is complicated not simply by the embarrassing nature of the topic, but also by the risk that is attached to sharing one's name in association with this concept- it isn't uncommon for sexual images to be shared accompanied by one's name or social media profile, as was the case for some of my participants. Your name, therefore, becomes a potential gateway to access these images (Citron & Franks 2014). While of course all consent forms were held securely, it is easy to conceive why this merited additional risk for some participants, and some ultimately declined when asked to provide a signature. As this was a formal requirement for the ethics process, these potential participants could not proceed to the interview.

The interview itself presents another difficulty for sensitive research. While all participants in this work remain anonymous to the reader of this thesis, I, of course, know who they are; I have seen their faces and heard their voices. This is necessary for the data collection process- indeed, face-to-face interviews are considered the ideal method for data collection, particularly for sensitive research (Ndhlovu 2020). However, several of the people who reached out via direct messages indicated that while they would be happy to share their story anonymously with me via messages, to take part in an interview was a step too far- one person

in particular told me they would feel too 'exposed' in an interview, in a way that they did not while messaging me anonymously.

It is difficult to see a way around this problem. Some projects such as TransActions (Laing et al. 2023), which recently conducted a study involving trans sex workers, has managed to circumvent this issue. For similar reasons to this research topic, asking a participant to sign their name merits an unnecessary risk, and therefore in their study the researcher signed the consent form on the behalf of the participant (Laing et al. 2023). This remains the exception, however, rather than the rule. It is difficult to imagine a university ethics board would approve a decision not to require a signed consent form, particularly at PhD level. Yet I feel we must open the discussion as to why we are using these forms if they are counter-productive to the research aims. Researchers who have criticised the requirement of 'blanket' templates from ethics boards, and particularly the difficulty in applying them to qualitative research, have argued that these forms exist to streamline ethics applications and to protect institutions from litigation, with little regard for the aims or requirements of individual research endeavours (Moore 2012; Siber 2009; Haggerty 2004). Future researchers in this area, then, might benefit from considering if 'informed consent' can be documented in ways which circumvent the need for a signature, and therefore minimise further risk to a participant.

Furthermore, offering a less direct and more anonymous platform in which to collect accounts of non-consensual sexual image sharing may have resulted in wider participation. Laura Bates' (Bates 2014) 'Everyday Sexism' project offers a model as to how this might be done; it offers a platform to anonymously share your story and contribute your experience to a collective body of work and even includes a few handfuls of stories regarding girls and their experience of being pressured into sharing sexual imagery without their consent. Some similar sensitive studies have also used email-based interviews to conduct their research. Sugiura's (2021) work on 'incels', and Madill's (2018) work on 'homoerotic manga and anime' consumers, both used email as a format to conduct their research based on a desire to grant further anonymity to the participants. Other studies have combined methods of face-to-face interviewing with telephone and email, with success (McCoyd & Kerson 2006; McAuliffe 2003; Tausig & Freeman 1988). While text-based data collection methods may lose some of the depth and detail of the narratives uncovered in the research interviews, offering a choice of data collection format to participants may have allowed me to include data from a greater number of participants. Future research on non-consensual sexual image sharing may consider in some form the use of text-based interview methods; this merits serious consideration for others working in this area.

3.5 Data collection

The data was collected via remote interviews conducted over Zoom. Data was collected from nine participants, two of whom had been affected twice by non-consensual sexual image sharing, resulting in a total of eleven incidences. This sample size is typical of studies on sensitive or sexual topics, as similar studies can attest (Notte 2024; Laing et al. 2023; Bollinger & Cook 2020; Heller et al. 2016; Johnstone 2016; East & Orchard 2014; Earle 1999). The dataset contains a relatively diverse collection of demographics and experiences (see section 3.9), and offers in-depth qualitative insight into the "knowledge, experience or other attributes" (Smith 2009, p.8) of what it means to have sexual imagery shared without consent.

The interview used an in-depth semi-structured style. In-depth interviews focus on the discussion of a topic at length, gaining detailed and profound insight into a topic, and are "the preferred method for investigating complex, sensitive, and unexplored topics… provid[ing] a researcher with a distinct opportunity to try to unravel the experiences and thoughts of an individual that led to particular needs, motivations, and behaviour" (Roller & Lavrakas 2015, p.54). To begin the interviews, I prompted participants to tell me their story in broad terms, and utilised follow-up questions based on the information they shared. While I considered a more structured interview format, the topic offered several difficulties which made this less than ideal. The first issue was in catering towards the diverse number of ways in which a person can experience non-consensual sexual image sharing. As discussed in section 2.2, the concept exists as its own continuum of practices, one which continues to develop and grow (McGlynn et al. 2017), suggesting that a 'one-size-fits-all' interview schedule would not suit. I would need to understand the intricacies of each participant's story to properly ask questions about how they had understood, felt, and reacted to their experience. Secondly, the sensitive nature of the topic made me cautious about creating a strict interview schedule. There may be questions I could sense a person was reluctant to discuss, which should either be asked in a gentler manner or avoided entirely. Similarly, some participants may be more forthright and open and would respond well to more direct queries.

To develop this initial prompt, the first question in my interview borrowed the style of a narrative interview, which "centres on the stories the subjects tell" (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015, p.178). Narrative interview questions can follow a loose timeline or structure in defining the participant's story. Cornwall (2018) used this method on her project on sex work- she argues that narrative interviewing "opens a space for dialogue with people who might be hesitant about being interviewed by enabling them to focus on their lives as lived" (p.241). Cornwall began her interviews with a single prompt, asking participants to tell her about the first time

they fell in love. Beginning in this manner 'broke the ice' in the interview, and allowed for the participant to control the dialogue, discussing their experience in their own terms.

This technique is also lauded by Hesse-Biber (2014), who identifies it as part of her feminist methodology. When interviewing on a sensitive or provoking topic- in her research, issues of body image- she argues that the interviewer should offer a gentle introduction to the discussion; after all, we have little previous interaction with, or knowledge of, a participant and their opinion of the topic being discussed. Beginning with a "simple-open ended question" and "deeply listening" to the response provides "support for your participant to tell his or her story" (p.186) which facilitates a scenario where the participant maintains control over both their own account and over the interview itself.

For my own project, I decided to also follow this format. I opened with the prompt: 'tell me about the time this happened to you' and asked participants to start at the beginning of their story and move at their own pace. Some participants responded to this prompt in detail, while others gave me a brief overview. Even where responses were brief, it allowed me to format follow-up questions in their language- for instance, if a participant described themselves as experiencing 'upskirting', I was able to frame my responses in the language they had chosen. It also allowed me to understand the intricacies of their experience- for instance, who shared their image, when the incident happened. how they found out, or where it was shared, to name a few examples. These key facts helped me to build a framework for their experience, onto which I could map questions about how they felt and reacted at various points in the 'narrative'.

This open question also allowed for participants to set the tone of the interview, in terms of how much detail they wished to respond in. Some participants were very clear and explicit in describing their experience; others would use veiled terms or innuendo. In either case, it permitted participants to take the lead in the data collection process, and in responding to the participant in a similar manner, I felt able to let them direct the discussion (Hesse-Biber 2014). Radoslovich (2018) in her research into the sexual habits of those in residential care discussed her own personal difficulty of "building up the courage" (2018, pp.292–293) to ask questions regarding the sex lives of her participants. In using the open narrative structure, I felt this minimised embarrassment or discomfort on both my part and the part of my participants and made discussion of this sensitive topic easier.

For follow-up questions, a loose interview guide was used (see appendix D). Questions were not given in a prescribed order or set manner but instead followed a flexible format which "allowed the participant to lead the interaction in unanticipated directions" (King & Horrocks

2010, p.35). This guide was referred to based on what the participant had originally shared with me about their experience. Some participants needed few follow-up questions and told me in detail about how they felt with little prompting from me; others who were briefer in their initial discussion received more prompts. I would map the prompts onto their story as best I could, situating the questions into their narrative as much as possible, framing questions such as: "you mentioned feeling ashamed when you found out about the image- could you talk a little bit more about how you felt when you found out it had been shared?" (Interview with participant Beth). Additional questions were asked which were not found in the interview guide, where the participant expressed particularly interesting, unusual, or unexpected sentiments which warranted further discussion.

To prepare for the interview, a number of pilot interviews were conducted. Pilot interviews are an effective way to simulate the mechanics of the interview process. While originally planning a more structured interview process, the pilot interviews also allowed for me to review the practicality and implications of using this method, and ultimately, I chose a more narrative structure. Additionally, one of the key outcomes of pilot interviewing allowed me to prepare for the possibility of being faced with particularly harrowing or explicit accounts of non-consensual sexual image sharing. 'Emotion work' (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007) usually refers to the responsibility of the qualitative researcher to express care, empathy and consideration– although, as Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) note, this should be considered less a "tool" deployed by a researcher to manage a participant, and more the expression of a "basic human trait" (p.335) in an interaction between two people. While I felt it was important for me to express emotions as I felt them, preparing myself to hear such accounts would be helpful both for my own mental wellbeing and for that of my participants.

In qualitative social research, "face- to- face interaction has always been the basis" (Ndhlovu 2020, p.52). In-person interaction allows the researcher a great deal of control over the interview variables, such as ensuring a quiet, comfortable, and private environment for the mutual benefit of the participant and the researcher. It also allows for a greater personal connection – many researchers argue that face-to-face communication offers greater levels of rapport between the two parties (Seitz 2015; Braun & Clarke 2013). Despite this, the project was forced to adapt due to the restrictions implemented by the UK Government as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, which made face-to-face interaction impossible. For this reason, the interviews were forced to be conducted remotely via video call, "the closest substitute" (Ndhlovu 2020, p.54) to face-to-face interviews.

Virtual interviews have quickly become a cornerstone of daily interaction during the pandemic. Some social researchers have reported moving their interviews online as an easy

transition, in some cases with more advantages than losses (Vicente et al. 2020). There are certainly benefits to conducting research virtually. Practically, it permits for easier scheduling, eliminating external factors such as travel or booking locations. Many online call services, such as Zoom, offer in-built recording, which provides a high-quality record of the interaction for transcribing and note-taking purposes. By conducting all interviews from home, I could easily ensure privacy and reduce security concerns common in the field, such as unsecure internet connections, or theft of devices containing research data. Additionally, it allowed for a participant to select a safe place of their choosing for the interview. This was frequently their own homes, which created a private and comfortable environment; one participant further chose their place of work, assuring me that they felt comfortable to discuss this topic there. This choice is particularly important when discussing sensitive topics, as it gives the participant the agency to define privacy for themselves, and therefore worked well in the data collection process.

However, when conducting online research, it's important for researchers to be mindful of the 'digital divide' – acknowledging that participants may have unequal access to internet services, appropriate devices, and the skills to access them (Scheerder, van Deursen & van Dijk 2017). The Covid-19 Pandemic has exacerbated the digital divide enormously, with public resources closed, shared devices in households in high demand, and lower bandwidth rates, to name just a few of the issues (Lai & Widmar 2020; Watts 2020). To combat this, researchers should plan to work flexibly with their participant's digital limitations (Nchafack & Ikhile 2020). My personal preference for conducting interviews was Zoom, due to my own familiarity and access via the University's licence. Zoom also does not require both parties to have an account, meaning that any participant could use it.

Video calls are the most valid replacement for face-to-face interviews because they facilitate non-verbal communication, such as facial expression and body language. Despite this, the required styles between the two are slightly different. Whereas face-to-face interactions benefit from the use of neutral words such as 'uh-huh' or 'I see' to demonstrate active listening from the researcher (Mack et al. 2005), I found these phrases can have an awkward affect when used on a video call, as it can appear as if the interviewer is attempting to interject rather than simply agreeing. Therefore, non-verbal indicators such as nodding or smiling should be used to demonstrate attention (Seitz 2015). A poor internet connection is also a common complaint (Ndhlovu 2020), that might require either party to repeat themselves: while this occurred a few times in the interviews, it had little impact on the data collection process.

3.6 Data analysis

3.6.1 Transcription

Poland (2003) in particular raises the difficulty of translating the 'messiness' of verbal communication to a coherent written format. 'Tidying' language- removing filler terms such as 'erm', adjusting slang, or reformatting responses- runs the risk of changing the meaning of words and suggesting that we as researchers know better than participants what they 'really' mean to say. By contrast, transcribing words as heard without interpretation may lead to 'transcriptional stereotyping' or presenting a person as a 'caricature' (Jefferson 1996; Jefferson 1983). Transcription style and convention can also be a difficult decision to make. Jefferson's (1983) style of transcription is among the most detailed and often used in conversation analysis; Silverman (2001) offers a similar but more concise version. Faced with so many options on transcription styles and practices, I decided to make use of Bucholtz's (2000) reflexive transcription practice' which is defined as:

> One in which the researcher is conscious of her or his effect on the unfolding transcript, and the effect of the transcript on the representation of speakers whose discourse is transcribed…. most crucially, a truly reflexive transcription practice will involve a discussion both of the choices we make and of their limitations (2000, p.1462).

This interpretation argues that there is no 'right' way to transcribe, but several choices that must be given careful consideration and addressed.

When choosing a style, it's recommended to assess the level of detail required for your analysis, while considering the logistical and time restraints (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015; King & Horrocks 2010). I ultimately decided that immensely detailed transcription styles would be both too time consuming and provide unnecessary detail for a thematic analysis, which relies more on the content of what is said rather than the delivery. Instead, I chose a simpler transcription style as advised by Poland (2003). This involves transcribing the words 'verbatim' (not 'tidied up') and in full, including elements such as pauses, laughing or coughing, interruptions, overlapping speech, garbled speech, or emphasis. I also made the decision to include tone and note when participants were using sarcasm. I observed participants would often laugh or make use of sarcasm when discussing certain areas of their experience, and hence this context was needed to make the written word accurate to the meaning of what was being said. I also included verbal and facial gestures where relevant– participants at times used air quotes, shrugged, or emphasised emotion on their face to express meaning. To ensure consistency, I noted down my transcription patterns in a 'transcription

plan', created from guidance provided by the UK data service (Van den Eynden et al. 2011). This plan acted as a reference point as I transcribed each interview.

I transcribed the interview data manually, with use of a foot pedal. Transcribing by hand (without transcription software) can be "a tiresome and stressing job" which forces a researcher to revisit the "social and emotional aspects of the interview" (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015, p.206). Transcribing was a lengthy and arduous process, and at times upsetting due to the nature of the interviews. At times, I would have to take breaks from the act of transcribing for my own wellbeing. Despite this, I felt the choice to transcribe in this manner gave me a greater and deeper understanding of the dataset. Brinkman and Kvale (2015) argue that transcribing one's own data oneself allows for analysis from the outset, and I also found this to be true, as common elements and themes of the data became evident to me during the transcription process. While the slow process of manual transcription was at times frustrating, it offered more time to reflect over what was being said, and my memory became a secondary place of storage for the data collected. Listening to a person's voice and transcribing their words in such detail facilitates a much greater human understanding of that person; when reading their words, I can hear their voice and tone, and feel I can better appreciate and understand their experience.

3.6.2 Thematic analysis

Once transcribed, the data was imported into NVivo for analysis. NVivo is a qualitative research tool which allows for the easy identification, discovery, and categorisation of themes. The data was then analysed using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) offer a comprehensive step-by-step guide to thematic analysis, advising the best manner in which to conduct it. The first step involves familiarising yourself with the data, which began during the transcription process. During transcription, I began to note similarities between accounts, identifying and noting down some broad concepts and themes on which I might build my thematic analysis. The second step involves generating initial codes: working through the data systematically to code notable features. Some notable themes which emerged at this point were emotions and feelings: for instance, statements such as "it was embarrassing" (participants Greg, Toby, Beth) or "I felt so angry" (participants Greg, Simon). As per Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidance, the data was coded widely, including as many potential themes as possible; the codes included large sections where additional context was relevant, and data was often coded with multiple themes if more than one theme was relevant. The codes were

then sorted into potential themes, which were also placed in a hierarchical structure involving themes and sub-themes.

The process of coding was done a few times. Each interview was transcribed and coded shortly after it was conducted, which meant that, as my data collection period took place over the course of a year, my analysis also stretched over this time. Earlier interviews were re-examined when new data was introduced, and the dataset was additionally examined as a whole piece once the data collection was concluded. Steps four and five, which involve reviewing and defining themes, were done a few times as a result of this repeated coding. Other (offline) methods were used; what Braun and Clarke (2006, p.89) call "visual representations". This involved mapping out themes with use of pens, paper and highlighters, and engaging with these themes in a more 'physical' manner. Printouts of the anonymised transcripts were highlighted and annotated, to help provide a visual mode of analysis.

3.6.3 Pseudonyms

This project has already spoken to the importance of a name. As outlined in section 2.2 and 3.3, non-consensual sexual image sharing is a problem of many names, each of which frame and conceptualise the phenomenon very differently. This leads us to another methodological naming problem: that of how to name our participants. Pseudonymisation of participants is a common part of social research but does not come without criticism. While necessary in some cases to anonymise participant contributions, the act of re-naming someone- while still using their highly personal accounts in your research- is a contested act, which some argue strips a participant of their identity and agency (Moore 2012). Names reflect ideas around gender, culture, age and even class, which all must be considered during the pseudo-anonymising process. Pseudonyms or anonymising data is often advised as the most responsible choice when it comes to sensitive research, as participants may suffer further if they can be identified. Potential identification presents a very particular risk for those who are involved in this project, as if your images were shared with your name or other personal data attached, your name can be a key through which your images are further accessed (Powell & Henry 2017; Citron & Franks 2014). This, in addition to potential upset or humiliation should identities be uncovered, means that the decision of naming must be given a great deal of thought.

In Bate's (2017) study on revenge porn, pseudonyms were used for all participants based on the above reasons. All except two participants were pseudonymised, who had spoken publicly about their experiences and were therefore happy to use their real names. I also followed the

precedent of pseudo-anonymising my participants. I did not take the act of providing a pseudonym for my participants lightly, but felt it was necessary to do so in the interests of fully protecting their identity. While some advocate for allowing participants to name themselves, I felt it likely that participants would select names that bear some personal significance to them- names of family members, preferred characters or historical figures, for example. While unlikely to reveal a person's identity to a stranger, this method might compromise anonymity for a person who knows them well, and as one participant was recruited through snowball sampling, letting participants choose for themselves was too much of a risk.

In choosing names, I endeavoured to use replacements which were 'thematically' similar in some way. I made use of the Office of National Statistics '100 most popular baby names 1904-1994' (ONS 2014) where my participants had common Anglo Christian names, seeking names that were of similar popularity and commonality. If participants gave me a shorter or abbreviated name in place of a conventional one (e.g 'Dave' instead of 'David'), I sought a similar name. One of my participants was Irish, and another from Spain, so I sought to replace their name with another of suitable cultural origin. Another problem was presented with one participant, who is a trans man. In his name, I sought to choose a replacement that was as 'gendered' as his provided name.

3.7 Ethics

Stroud (2014, p.181) concludes his paper on the growing problem of online revenge pornography with the following statement:

> A few words of methodological caution are in order. First, in studying such sites, one is directing attention toward them… scholarly attention must take care to mitigate (and not increase) the publicity given to these sites (2014, p.181).

While this project doesn't directly engage with revenge pornography websites, Stroud's argument about reflecting on the real-life implications of your research remains relevant. A balance must be created between the need to research private and sensitive areas, and the idea of broadcasting a person's intimate account to the world. For this reason, the anonymity of my participants is paramount. I also chose to omit the name of any publicly available location where sexual images have been shared, such as the name of a host website. This is not just for the privacy of participants– after all, there is no guarantee that an image published in this location won't be re-published at some point - but additionally for the privacy of other people who may have had their images shared non-consensually. Non-consensual sexual image

sharing is a fairly sensationalised topic (Salter & Crofts 2015), and it is therefore unlikely that this thesis will act as an introduction to this area, but I will take care to not inadvertently offer any guidance as to where an interested party might find such content.

The ethics around working with people is of paramount concern in any piece of sociological research which engages directly with others. For projects such as this one, ethical considerations take on an even higher importance. This is partly because of the sensitive nature of the topic– naturally, participants might be reluctant to share information about experiences that relate to their sexual lives, details of which they might feel embarrassed or uncomfortable to discuss. As other studies on the experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing all agree that the impact of this experience can be severe (Huber 2023b; Aborisade 2021; McGlynn et al. 2020; Bates 2017), the research must take as much care as possible to minimise the potential harm done to participants. Additionally, Kara and Khoo (2020, p.2) argue that as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, "a magnifying glass has been placed on research ethics, and it is vital to revisit key questions of need, burden, benefit, protection, care and transformation". As a result, researchers have an even greater obligation to ensure their research is not causing additional harm to their participants.

It was incredibly important that all participants contributed to the project in an informed, enthusiastic, and consensual manner. The project's methodology received approval from the University of York's Economics, Law, Management, Politics and Sociology Ethics Committee prior to data collection. All participants were obliged to initiate contact with me to participate, rather than being approached by myself- making them the instigator and giving them control in the dynamic. All participants were provided with an information sheet and invited to ask any questions (see appendix C). The information sheet outlined several key features of the project as defined by Mack et al. (2005). This includes the overall aims of the project, what to expect from the data collection interview, and details about their data privacy and rights. In particular, the information sheet made clear that the research was aimed specifically at the individual's experience of having sexual images shared without their consent, and that information about the participant's sexual history or habits would not be directly asked during the data collection process. It also asked the participant to think carefully about what impact (if any) participating might have on their own wellbeing, and to consider this before participating.

Participants were then asked to sign a consent form, indicating that they fully agreed to and understood the project (see appendix B). Participants had to confirm at this stage that they were over 18, and that their experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing also occurred over the age of 18. This information was also asked of the participant again at the start of the

interview, to ensure all participants were of a suitable age to consent and eligible to participate. During the interview, participants were informed that they had the option to skip any question they felt uncomfortable answering and could end the interview at any time they chose. At the end of the interview, participants were given a debrief sheet (see appendix E) that detailed how to withdraw from the project up to three months from the date of the initial data collection. The debrief sheet also gave the details of several resources where a participant could find support. The Revenge Porn Hotline was an obvious choice for inclusion, as it offers specific guidance on how to take down distributed images, and direction on what to expect if a person chooses to report their experience to the police. The charity Victim Support also offers specific guidance for those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing. For more general support for people struggling with mental health issues, The Samaritans charity was included. Finally, the National Domestic Abuse Helpline and Respect: Men's Advice Line were also included, in the event of participants who have experienced the sharing of sexual images as part of a wider pattern of abuse.

For sensitive topics, it is common for the researcher to conduct 'emotion work' (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007)– a form of personal management that permits the researcher to show empathy and compassion with the participant, conducting their own assessment of the participant's mental state and being aware of when to offer a pause or break to the participant. Kelly (1988, p.11) identifies this as an extension of methods used by feminist researchers, which argues that objective "aloofness" during the data collection process is impossible if one wishes to show empathy for their participants, especially when discussing personal or difficult subjects.

As well as considering the care of the participant, care for the researcher was also a facet of research planning. Establishing clear boundaries of discussion in the participant information sheet, alongside practising discussing those topics in pilot interviews, helped to ensure that I could redirect a participant that was divulging excessive or necessary information about irrelevant topics– for instance, overly discussing details about their sex life. Of course, when studying sensitive or upsetting topics, there is always a risk to the researcher, including feelings of guilt, vulnerability, desensitisation or emotional exhaustion (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007). A field journal was kept for this purpose, which allowed for me to decompress after interviews and note down any feelings. Wherever possible, interviews were not scheduled too close together, so I did not feel too over-burdened in one go.

Another important ethical principle was to protect the anonymity of my participants. Data security was of paramount importance. All materials were stored on the University of York file store, backed up via the University of York Google Drive, as per university guidelines. Where possible, files were saved directly to this location. This was not possible for the interview

recordings, which were recorded using the native recording function on Zoom, which autosaved the files to the device of use, which was a personal, password-protected laptop. A backup recording of the conversation was recorded and saved to my password-protected smartphone. Both files were moved to Google Drive and removed from the device within twenty-four hours of recording. Identifying materials, including consent forms and interview recordings, will be destroyed once the project is finalised.

Section 3.6.3 already outlined the methodological basis on which the decision to use pseudonyms was made. Any 'raw' data was only seen by myself, as anonymisation was done during the transcription process. All names were removed. Other identifying details, such as age, occupation, location, or career, were generalised- for example, if a participant named the city of 'York', this would become in the transcription 'Northern University city'. This was particularly important due to the use of snowball sampling in the recruitment process, which indicates some level of familiarity between participants. The data also included at times the names and details of others, often also affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing. In one case, a participant had been targeted alongside a group of her friends; in two other cases, the images shared depicted both participants and their partners, and it was not uncommon for the impact of the image on the other parties to bleed into my participant's narrative. These stories, too, were anonymised, and discretion was used regarding how much to reference the occurrences of these people. As a general rule, they are referred to only vaguely throughout the thesis, and only where it is relevant to my participant's own account, based on a reluctance to use stories that have not been shared with me freely and first-hand.

3.8 Locating myself in the research

3.8.1 Mutual disclosure

Many researchers, particularly feminist researchers, have argued for the importance of the role of self-reflection in the research process. Self-reflection allows for an examination of how my identity might have a bearing on my perception of the data, and by acknowledging these gaps, I can seek to acknowledge my areas of potential bias. Morris (2018) provides a clear example:

> There is also much scope for reflecting on my own identity and the myriad ways in which I present (or perform) my own sexual identity in research encounters, my positionality as a white, educated, mostly heterosexual, mostly middle-class woman in

> relation to participants and this is a complex area with no easy or obvious answers (p.310).

As another white, educated, mostly heterosexual woman, Morris' reflection forced me to examine how I might appear to participants, and what impact these elements might have on the research process. Throsby and Gimlin (2010, p.109) argue that there is little acknowledgement of "the role of our embodied selves on the research process". It is uncomfortable to acknowledge that our physical appearance has any impact on our research outcomes, but the researcher's physical body remains "impossible to escape but very difficult to write about" (p.109). As with any professional role, I sought to make my appearance as professional as possible in these interviews.

It is a difficult decision to make when deciding how much of oneself to reveal in this research process, particularly in projects concerning sex and sexuality. Discussing one's sexuality is often considered inappropriate in academia and the working world at large, and researchers naturally feel a reluctance to divulge this information about themselves (Irvine 2014; Taylor & Davidson 2010). On the other hand, it is perhaps unfair to ask participants to provide so many details about their intimate lives without providing any of my own. Campbell (2001, p.39) reflecting on her experience of interviewing rape victims, reflects that "there is no line that separates us, the researchers, from them… we knew we could be or could have been on the other side of the interview".

This is the stance I too position myself in. I did not enter into this project identifying as a person who has had sexual imagery shared without consent, although I certainly knew those who had been affected by it, and it was only too easy to picture myself 'on the other side' of the interview. I felt this particularly as someone with experience of sexual harassment- the placing of this phenomenon in a continuum of other forms of sexual violence made me feel that I had first-hand knowledge of similar experiences (McGlynn et al. 2017). It was not until months into the project, after determining my eligibility criteria, that I realised I would be eligible for my own project. A friend had taken a photo beneath my clothing and shared this without my knowledge or consent, many years prior to the research project- something I had completely forgotten about until this point.

This suddenly raised the problem of whether to engage in 'self-disclosure' (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007), which was a difficult decision. While some feminist researchers advocate for the benefits of doing so in facilitating mutual reciprocity in the interview process (Hesse-Biber 2014; Stanley & Wise 1993; 1983), I was concerned about the risk of 'inserting' my own experience and drawing attention away from the participant and to myself. Similarly, I felt

self-conscious about discussing my own experience in comparison to some of the more harrowing accounts of my participants. While I would be eligible to participate in this project, I struggled with the idea that my experience wasn't 'severe' enough to be relevant- ironically, a sentiment that many of my participants also expressed. The fact I didn't recall my experience until months into the project additionally made me more cautious about presenting myself as a person affected by it. To suggest I had built this project on the back of my own experience made me feel like a fraud.

In the end, however, I did share my experience with my participants. This was motivation in part as a desire to make myself as vulnerable as I felt my participants had made themselves in sharing their story with me; but also because I felt it would be dishonest to talk about the topic for so long without divulging my own relevance to it. While I anticipated I might find this uncomfortable, it felt natural to share my own perspective once the interview had ended and our conversation was winding down. I did not feel obliged to give details; simply to say to the participant that I knew how they felt and had experienced it myself.

3.8.2 Gender

Edelman (2018, p.66) argues that the female feminist researcher should "acknowledge, interrogate and embrace" how the experience of being a woman impacts their research processes. I did question if my role as a woman would be beneficial in an interview setting. This is based on the traditional "cultural assumption that women are better listeners" (Grenz 2010, p.58). Others have gone as far as to argue that interviewing is an "intrinsically female" (Smart 1984, p.155) form of data collection due to our societal role as natural and active listeners, when interviewing participants of any gender (Finch 1993). Additionally, some feminists have argued that there is a kinship or 'sisterhood' (Oakley 1981) between female researchers and participants, a shared understanding based on gendered experiences. As discussed in section 2.3, the harms that come from non-consensual sexual image sharing for women may be a result of a culture that restricts and shames female sexuality (Powell & Henry 2017; 2014; Gavey 2005;), meaning that a female researcher and female participant are both subject to these experiences to some degree. It is important to not overly-romanticise the concept of a 'shared female knowledge'. Gender is just one factor of many that may affect a person's experience of perception, and it is important to remember that "sisterhood cannot be assumed to be universal… acknowledgement of differences in power, social identities and social capital becomes an intrinsic part of the feminist project" (Ryan-Flood & Gill 2010, p.4).

Despite this, I do feel that my gender had some effect on the research process, particularly when interviewing other women. For some female participants, their experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing was rooted in their identity or cultural perception as a woman. It was framed by these participants as a phenomenon that happens *to* women, *by* men, and as part of a wider culture of forms of sexual harassment. As a result, my womanhood distinguished me as a person likely to have had similar experiences of sexism. Some female participants would express things to me based on a mutual understanding, saying things such as "you know when men say horrible things about you, such as…" (participant Katie). Other times, they would express the idea of non-consensual sexual image sharing as a feminist issue, with statements like "us as women, we have to put up with this" (participant Beth). While it is impossible to say whether this would have been phrased differently had it been told to a male researcher, I did feel that my femininity was drawn in by participants as a relevant element of the interview.

Another element of the research which was shaped by my gender was the harassment I experienced during the recruitment process. When recruiting online, one must ensure their profile is set to public and their direct messaging services are open, practices I do not follow on my private accounts to limit online harassment. One is also obliged to be a 'real person' on these accounts-as discussed in section 3.6, participants value knowing exactly who they will be sharing their story with (Kelly 1988), so my face, first name, and location were publicly available on my profile. This marked me publicly as a woman, and ultimately this meant fielding inconvenient and bothersome messages from men. Online harassment against women is a well-established phenomenon (see section 2.5) that I unfortunately experienced during my research. O'Neill (2018) discussed this in her research on men involved in the pick-up industry, describing a sense of self-consciousness, feeling taken advantage of, and harassment experienced during her fieldwork, which she described as "disconcerting for me as a researcher… [but] not unfamiliar to me as a woman" (p.176). I concur with this sentiment; while alarming from a professional perspective, this was not a surprising interaction.

I received messages from men via direct message who simply wanted to chat with me. I was not aware that on certain platforms, accepting a message from a person gives them the ability to 'call' you via that media, and on one occasion, I had to repeatedly deny calls from a man trying to talk to me. On another occasion, I shared a picture of a stack of literature I was reading, including one titled 'Girls and Sex' (Orenstein 2016), and the post received a comment from a male stranger offering his (inappropriate) opinion on that topic. While usually I ignore messages from strangers to avoid such harassment, the recruitment process meant I had to engage with every message in good faith, obliging me to partake in conversation with these

men until I determined they were not eligible participants. This was both frustrating and irritating. There is a certain level of irony that in studying a topic defined by online harassment- often directed against women- I have experienced a fresh wave of this experience. As a result, this was a distracting and difficult part of the research process, and I ultimately felt relieved once my data collection period was over and I could cease these interactions.

3.8.3 Emotion

Emotion and empathy are elements of the research process which are not often discussed, but I felt played a large role in my research project (Blakely 2007; Goodrum & Keys 2007). While not everybody I spoke to felt severely harmed by their experience, at times the stories I heard were deeply upsetting. Feelings of powerlessness, shame, and vulnerability were shared with me in multiple incidences. Two participants in particular expressed to me that they had been raped before, and that this experience of sexual violence impacted their experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing. While I had anticipated to hear upsetting stories, I had not predicted to hear what were at times detailed accounts of sexual violence, and this naturally quite difficult to process.

While I had anticipated that some of the interviews would cover incredibly upsetting ground, the reality of hearing them is something difficult to prepare for. I did not try to hide my reactions from my participants but sought to express them as and when they occurred. When transcribing one interview, I was surprised to hear myself responding “oh, that’s so sad” (interview with participant Yasmin) to one particularly upsetting account. While some traditional research texts advocate for planned neutral responses to indicate to the participant that you are listening, I simply allowed for my sympathy to be expressed as it would in any other scenario.

Other times, I felt surprised by the story I was being told. The phenomenon of non-consensual sexual image sharing is so diverse, that almost all participants came with stories that consisted of surprising factors in one way or another. I was expecting my stories to be, largely, based around the traditional ‘revenge porn’ narrative, a script that none of my participants particularly fulfil. I was also surprised by the openness of my participants. During the data collection process, I advised participants that I would never ask them for intimate details about their sexual behaviours, but that they were welcome to share them if they felt it would provide context to their response- and many did. I thought I might feel embarrassed by hearing such details, but instead all I felt was sympathy for the person sharing their incredibly intimate story with me.

While the interviews were at times hard to hear, I found the hardest part of the research process was the recruitment period. While I expected recruitment to be difficult, I did not realise just how exhausting and frustrating this time would be. A great deal of this difficulty came from interacting with potential participants. On several occasions, an eligible person would reach out to me via social media and share their experience with me in varying degrees of detail. It was not uncommon for these stories to be quite harrowing- one in particular, which stuck with me for days afterwards, involved a scenario where the images had been shared to [redacted]. It was difficult to process these stories. While I had measures in place to prepare for interviews- preparing myself beforehand to hear upsetting accounts and allowing myself time to process what I had heard afterwards- I did not expect for people to share detailed stories with me, unprompted, via the direct messaging service on social media. These messages would come in at any time of day or night and were quite disruptive.

The sharing of these stories placed me in a difficult position. I sympathised intensely with the stories I was hearing and wished to convey that. I also understood that there are very few avenues in which one can share these harrowing accounts; several participants who proceeded to interview discussed how rarely they had the opportunity to share their experience with anyone, and how this silence can perpetuate feelings of shame (see section 6.4.1). Despite this, if a potential participant declined an interview, as many did (see 3.4.4), I was very aware that I had no ethical basis on which to hear these stories, and to continue to encourage disclosure would be wrong. Whilst taking part in research on a personal or sensitive topic can have therapeutic side-effects (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007), my role in this endeavour is not a therapist but that of a researcher. Informing these people that I could only continue to hear their story if they agreed to interview made me feel guilty, as if I had let them down. This is further reason, if any were needed, for future researchers in this area to consider data collection methods that offer greater privacy and anonymity to potential participants.

3.9 Data overview

The dataset consists of interviews with nine participants. Two participants had experienced non-consensual sexual image sharing on two occasions, which creates a total of eleven incidences for analysis. The participants were varied in terms of age, gender, and 'type' of image sharing; consisting of both men and women, with an age range of late teens and early 40s. The content shared greatly varied; while some participants felt the images on their own were not sexual at all (participant Katie), others had content shared which depicted explicit and graphic sex acts (participants Nathan; Greg). The images were additionally taken with

varying degrees of consent; while some had originally recorded the content consensually, others were recorded entirely without their consent. Content was shared by sexual partners, romantic partners, friends, acquaintances, and unknown parties. Content was shared to pornographic websites, websites for finding sexual partners, social media, group chats, and to social groups. In the interest of providing a clear guide to my participants and their stories, each participant and a short summary of their experience can be found in the below table (table 2).

Name	Summary
Nathan	Nathan experienced two incidences of image sharing. In the first, he was recorded having sex with a man without his knowledge. This material was then posted to a pornographic website, which was only discovered when a friend found the video and showed it to him. In the second incident, a man Nathan was "somewhat dating" showed explicit images (which were originally taken consensually) to his friends, people Nathan 'somewhat' knew.
Greg	Greg also experienced two incidences of image sharing. In the first, his friends recorded him having sex with his girlfriend at a party without consent and shared the content publicly on Facebook. In the second, his ex-girlfriend shared consensually taken explicit content of the two of them engaging in sexual acts to his new girlfriend, with the intention of disrupting that relationship.
Katie	Katie had non-explicit pictures taken from her Facebook account by an unknown person and posted to a pornographic site with personal and explicit commentary, along with her full name. Commenters on the website also contributed to this explicit dialogue. Katie is the only person in the dataset to have reported her experience to the police.
Yasmin	Yasmin was engaging in online escort work with her romantic partner. A (different) sexual partner of Yasmin's took screenshots of the profile and shared them to Facebook, with the purpose of disrupting her relationship.
Grace	Grace shared 'lingerie' pictures with a sexual partner. Later, she was made aware that the recipient of the pictures had posted her images on a 'swingers' website, posing as a couple seeking sex.
Toby	Toby identifies as male, but wears skirts on occasion. Toby had images taken beneath his skirt by a friend without his consent, who showed the pictures to his friend group.
Beth	Beth had nude images of her taken by a friend while sleeping in a hostel on holiday. She later discovered these images were being shown to others. Beth was in her forties at the time of interview; her images were taken and shared in the 1990's.
Simon	Simon was taking part in a fitness challenge with colleagues who were also friends. The fitness challenge involved taking regular photos of one's body to monitor progress. One of these pictures, in which Simon was nude, was shared to a larger group chat of Simon's colleagues.
Sol	Sol was recorded having sex while drunk and cannot fully remember whether they consented to the recording. This recording was shown to Sol's abusive ex-partner.

Table 2: identifying participant's names and briefly describing their accounts.

3.9.1 Type

Choosing the neutral term 'non-consensual sexual image sharing' appears to have been successful in gathering a range of experiences. Several 'types' of non-consensual sexual image sharing were present in the data, although not everybody explicitly categorised their experience in such a way. Applying a typology to the concept of non-consensual sexual image sharing is difficult- as McGlynn et al. (2017) argues, the concept is better described as a series of practices which blend into one another without requirement for clear distinctions or definitions. Nevertheless, I will attempt to discuss the experiences of my participants within the context of different 'types' of image sharing for the purposes of clarifying the experiences represented within my dataset. Indeed, the data reflected here offers evidence to support the idea that 'categories' are a poor way to define these experiences.

Revenge pornography

Two participants experienced the closest to a typical 'revenge pornography' narrative- that where an ex-partner shares the images with a clear aim to hurt or denigrate. As a reminder, revenge pornography in its most conventional sense can be loosely defined as "an ex-partner (usually a man) distributing private sexual pictures of their former partner (usually a woman) online in order to exact 'revenge' following the break-up of their relationship" (McGlynn et al. 2017, p.537). Greg's second experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing involved his ex-partner sharing explicit images with his new partner, with the clear intent of convincing his new partner that the images had been taken more recently than they were. Yasmin's images were shared by a person she was engaging in a sexual relationship with, in a deliberate effort to break up Yasmin's relationship with her partner. While clearly intended to harm, these stories differ from a typical 'revenge pornography' narrative in a few ways. Greg differs in the gender of those involved, as Greg is a man and his image-sharer was a woman. Yasmin also differs in that the images shared were screenshots of her and her partner's escort work" profile. Sex work and non-consensual sexual image sharing are rarely discussed where they intersect, and Yasmin's account offers a unique perspective on a 'type' of non-consensual sexual image sharing that would merit further research (Redman & Waring 2021).

Another narrative that might be best placed under 'revenge pornography' is Katie's. Katie had non-sexual images taken from her social media, alongside a number of friends, and these were posted to an adult website, along with identifying information (such as her name) and explicit commentary that described her in derogatory terms. The use of non-sexual images is rarely discussed in the literature on this phenomenon- Harder's (2023) comes closest to discussing this in her work, which highlights the ways in which images are 'pornified'- made explicitly sexual- by those who share them. Katie doesn't know who shared her images, although she

does suspect a man she was once friends with who sometimes behaved inappropriately towards her. Katie also doesn't know why the images were shared, and this was a factor that contributed to her feelings of anxiety and fear following the incident. However, the derogatory description which accompanied Katie's picture suggests a clear intent to harm or embarrass her, which situates her experience best within this category, even if the image-sharer was likely not an ex-partner.

Voyeurism or sexual motivations

A number of participant's experiences can be situated under the concept of voyeurism- a situation where the images were shared for sexual gratification. Both of Nathan's experiences fit here. In the first, recordings of him engaging in sexual intercourse were recorded without his consent and then uploaded to an adult website. In the second, a person Nathan was "somewhat seeing" shared consensually taken images with his friends, people Nathan "somewhat" knew. In both cases, Nathan believes that the images were shared for sexual reasons, to "show off" the content recorded.

Grace's account also fits here. After sending "lingerie" pictures to a sexual partner, she later found out that her images were being used by him on a "swingers website", under the pretence that they were a couple looking for another sexual partner. While the images of her displayed her face, his images were simply of his genitals, without any identifiable material. It is unclear what the intended outcome of this endeavour was, as Grace was not engaging in any kind of relationship with this person at the time of the image sharing. However, in sharing the images to a website intended to find sexual partners, Grace assumes the motivation was a sexual one.

Upskirting

One participant also experienced what was described as 'upskirting'. Toby, who says he wears skirts on occasion, had a photograph taken beneath his skirt by a friend, which was then shown to the rest of Toby's friend group. Similarly to Greg, however, the 'typical' narrative is altered here because of Toby's gender, as normally 'upskirting' is experienced by women.

Pranking

A type of non-consensual sexual image sharing that was present in the dataset but has rarely been discussed in the context of non-consensual sexual image sharing, was that of image sharing motivated by a 'prank' or 'joke'. While Toby's account was described as upskirting, it also fits neatly here; Greg, Simon and Toby all had sexual images shared without their consent by male friends, who shared the images under the guise of humour. Greg's story establishes that this was a pattern amongst his friends; at social events such as house parties, they would

"burst in" on people having sex and photograph or record the activity without their consent. This footage was then shared on social media, and any requests to take the content down would be met with further assurances that it was "just a joke". Simon's account involved friends and colleagues he was tracking his fitness with, who would regularly post 'progress photos' into a small group chat. The other members of the group made a joke of taking these pictures with increasing nudity. When Simon joined in, the images ended up shared into a larger group chat of Simon's colleagues, again under the guise of humour.

Beth was photographed during a group holiday by some male friends as she slept nude and later found out the group had been circulating the images in social settings. Beth's account was difficult to categorise- she certainly felt that some of the gendered power structures typical in revenge pornography narratives were present in her own account. Ultimately, however, she felt that the intent of the images was to 'laugh' at her, and she was not directly targeted by the image sharing- in fact, were it not for the fact that the images had been seen by someone who knew her, she never would have found out about the incident at all.

The presence of narratives where this phenomenon occurred between friends is surprising. Narratives around non-consensual sexual image sharing often focus on stories where content is shared by "a vengeful ex-partner, opportunistic hacker, or rapist" (Franks 2017b, p.1528), and as such, stories such as Greg's, Toby's, Simon's and Beth's– where the photos were distributed by a person with no romantic or sexual connection to them– are covered to a lesser degree in the literature. The notion of 'pranking' in relation to non-consensual sexual image sharing is a particularly novel finding of this research, which will be discussed in further detail within the analysis.

This typology, while helpful in loosely categorising these experiences and relating them to definitions which are more broadly understood, should offer further evidence that applying narrow definitions to this phenomenon ultimately fails to reflect the nuanced and varied ways in which it may occur. Voyeurism, pranking, and revenge porn, for instance, are both defined by the motivations of the perpetrator, which might be unknown or too complicated to discern. The sheer variety in these stories- between where the image was shared, who it was shared by, and what the aim of the image sharing was- cannot be fully captured with narrow definitions. Instead, this dataset supports the notion of a continuum of image-based sexual abuse (McGlynn et al. 2017). Having a data set that consists of a variety of types or variations of non-consensual sexual image sharing, however, is an advantage, as it will allow for the analysis to take into account a wide range of experiences. As McGlynn et al. (2017) argue, this continuum-

based approach allows for focus on the harms experienced by non-consensual sexual image sharing, rather than focusing on narrow definitions.

More evidence in favour of a continuum rather than category-based approach can be found in the analysis of the terminology participants used to refer to themselves was also an interesting aspect of the data collection. While 'non-consensual sexual image sharing' applied broadly to all participants, those interviewed expressed the problem of not really understanding how to name their experience Nathan in particular expressed firmly that he felt "revenge pornography" wasn't an appropriate term to describe what had happened to him, and referred to his own experience throughout as not "proper revenge porn", as he felt his own experience wasn't malicious or harmful enough. Grace also suggested that simply didn't know where to categorise her own experience in terms of "revenge pornography". Further, Sol also noted that he did not consider himself a "victim", on account of not '"surviving" anything.

Beth and Katie further stated that they were aware of worse accounts of this experience, and that they were "lucky" in some ways that the experience they had was "not as bad as it could have been". Toby and Simon, additionally, gave their accounts with the caveat that they were sure their stories were not as "extreme" as others I might have heard, particularly women's stories. This suggests that the 'cultural' narrative around what non-consensual sexual image sharing is, and who it affects, is narrower than the reality of the phenomena, echoing Harper et al.'s (2022) assertion of the difference between academic and public understandings of non-consensual sexual image sharing.

3.9.2 Gender, sexuality, and ethnicity

The dataset contains some surprising elements in terms of gender dynamics. Non-consensual sexual image sharing is often framed as an act that happens to women, enacted by men (Citron & Franks 2014). As a result, the literature often discusses the phenomenon in the context of this specific gender dynamic. The dataset does indeed contain accounts which correspond with this assessment. Yasmin, Katie, Beth and Grace were all women who had their images shared by men. Themes of objectification and sexualisation were common in their narratives. Additionally, Katie, Grace, and Beth drew comparisons between non-consensual sexual image sharing and other forms of sexual harassment, abuse or violence. For these women, the experience was highly gendered one- it was done to them by men *because* they are women, and *because* this is how society treats women in a broader sense.

This data set additionally includes experiences which disrupt that narrative, both by the presence of men in the dataset and in their personal stories. Nathan, as a gay man, had images shared by male sexual and romantic partners; for Greg, Toby, and Simon, male friends were the perpetrators. Greg's ex-girlfriend also shared sexual images of him, which completely inverts the traditional gendered narrative. Sol was also affected by a male sexual partner, and as a trans man was able to offer a unique perspective on his assessment of this phenomenon more generally both before and after transitioning. The presence of a trans man (Sol), a gay man (Nathan), and three bisexual participants (Greg, Yasmin, and Sol) are additionally a welcome addition to the dataset; the presence of male and LGBTQ+ identifying individuals helps this research to contribute to a gap of this knowledge in the literature.

These male accounts may further offer some evidence to support Stroud's (2014) suggestion that focusing only on women affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing- and therefore framing every occurrence of it through the lens of misogyny- is an oversimplification of a much more complicated issue, and that the phenomenon must be discussed in the lens of other elements (Stroud suggests the phenomenon is more about "quick and anonymous revenge" (p.179) than misogyny). Alternatively, it may suggest that non-consensual sexual image sharing is still based on sexist power structures; much like sexual violence more broadly, men can still be victimised, but that the ways in which the experience affects men is less visible and less researched. There was some indication that this experience was also felt in a gendered way amongst men, which will be discussed throughout the thesis.

In terms of ethnicity, the dataset was largely white and British, with the exception of two members who were of a different nationality- Grace, who was Irish, and Sol, who was Spanish. Both Grace and Sol described their countries of origin as quite conservative in their sexual values and indicated that this cultural background contributed to how their experience was felt and understood. For Grace, this contributed to feelings of shame; for Sol, he feels this contributed to the incident occurring in the first place, as he believes the image-sharer "genuinely did not believe they had done anything wrong" because of this conservative climate. This mimic's Aborisade's (2021) findings in his study on image-based sexual abuse, which found that 'culturally conservative' societies in Nigeria exacerbated feelings of shame, and self-blame amongst those affected. The lack of discussion of ethnicity, however, is a limitation of the dataset. There has not been a great deal of research on the intersection of ethnicity and the experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing, an intersection which requires further examination. The presence of non-British accounts, however, particularly with relation to how the conservative cultures of these nations shape the experience of having sexual imagery shared without consent, is a further addition to the limited research conducted in this area.

3.9.3 Themes

The analysis of the data revealed three main themes. The first of these themes is harm, which offers a view into the ways in which this experience causes pain or upset to those affected. The experience of harm is not universal; while for some the experience is "annoying", for others it is "traumatic". This theme explores the sexual nature of this experience, and some of the factors which shape it, such as pre-agreed codes of conduct and the intention of harm. This theme also acknowledges the far-reaching nature of this experience, including collective, enduring, and embodied harms.

The second of these themes is loss. Loss explores the ways in which this experience takes something away from those affected, beyond simply the image. It explores the loss of control felt after the image-sharing, and the difficulties in re-gaining control or managing one's reaction to the experience. It also explores the loss of one's reputation, including feelings of judgement and objectification. Finally, it explores the impact to one's ability to trust, and the ways in which this kerbs a person's digital freedoms.

The last of these themes is shame. Beginning with the difficulty in defining shame, this theme explores how the content of the image can cause feelings of shame, which can be perpetuated long after the experience. It also speaks to the ways in which those affected often blame themselves for having their sexual imagery shared. It examines incidences of deliberate, targeted humiliation found within this phenomenon, and additionally, ways in which shame can be navigated and resisted.

4.0 Harm

4.1 Introduction

The presence of harm in the analysis is not a surprising one. The idea that non-consensual sexual image sharing causes harm has been noted already in qualitative studies on the subject (Huber 2023b; Aborisade 2021; McGlynn et al. 2020; Bates 2017;), and indeed, most participants expressed some manifestation of harm in their interviews. It's important to note, however, that the harms felt from non-consensual sexual image sharing were not universal across all participants. Most research in the area of non-consensual sexual image sharing focuses on the most extreme or impactful experiences; naturally, these accounts attract and merit the most attention. What this chapter seeks to do is offer a more diverse and nuanced account of the many ways in which non-consensual sexual image sharing can harm a person. Despite the fact that descriptions of the experience as 'traumatic', 'horrible', and 'humiliating' exist, there also exists 'annoying', 'irritating', and 'frustrating'. Furthermore, while there are many ways this experience continues to harm and affect people, there are other ways in which those affected move on, develop, and grow from their experience.

Similar studies in this area have followed a trauma-based model in conceptualising harm (Bates 2017), and while this has its uses, McGlynn et al. (2020) argue that this can apply narrow definitions to- and place undue emphasis on- traumatic symptoms of social problems. They instead advocate for a concept of harm based on the idea that harm is any form of impact which "forms a fundamental disruption of one's being-in-the-world… this feminist phenomenological approach to theorising harm… centre[s] everyday experience with an analysis of how this is inflected by the ways that we are situated" (Vera-Gray & Fileborn 2018, p.85). This broader definition which focuses on impact rather than trauma allows for discussion of harms which may not meet medical definitions, but still negatively changes or impacts a person's life.

Discussing narratives where the impact from an experience is 'less' than expected can be difficult, particularly where that experience relates to sexual violence. Gavey's (1999) description of this with regards to rape outlines this well. She argues that to fully understand what it means to be impacted by sexual violence, we should:

> Be open to accepting, for example, that not all women are traumatised by rape. While many of us have accepted these complexities 'in private', we have perhaps been reluctant to emphasise these possibilities in public because of the perceived political dangers of misrepresentation… a small step in this sort of transformative direction would be the opening up of all sorts of narratives of resistance- by making room for stories about how potential rape was successfully fought, about how some women are raped but do not experience overwhelming psychological dispair, and so on (1999, pp.70–75).

This is a further framing that this chapter shall take. In seeking to include a diverse range of experiences regarding harm, the thesis seeks to produce a more comprehensive understanding of the experience.

Gavey's 'political dangers of misrepresentation' are also noted here. She describes this as:

> The potential cost of this strategy is that it may do violence to the experience of women who are victimised and traumatised by rape. Sensitivity to this possibility is necessary so that stories of particular kinds of resistance don't come to be privileged in ways that contribute once again to a silencing of women's experiences of victimisation (Gavey 1999, p.75).

This is a danger that must be discussed. In accepting that narratives of reduced harm exist, we must not invalidate the experiences of those who suffer greatly as a result of having sexual imagery shared without consent. It is especially pertinent for non-consensual sexual image sharing, which has only recently begun to be considered as a serious violation, that we maintain the idea of this experience in and of itself as a 'cultural harm' (McGlynn & Rackley 2016; Rackley & McGlynn 2015), a phenomenon which- beyond individual accounts- negatively impacts society itself in its existence. As such, this thesis will take care not to present narratives which indicate 'lesser' incidents of harm as any more authentic, real, or valid than more intense experiences. Instead, by examining accounts that demonstrate varied degrees of harmful impact, we might better comprehend what factors, contexts, or elements render one experience more harmful than another.

This chapter discusses the range of harms that might be felt as a result of non-consensual sexual image sharing. It establishes the presence of a 'scale of harm' felt in response to incidences of non-consensual sexual image sharing, which involves a range of experiences, from mild to extreme. It situates the experience as both a sexual harm and a gendered harm,

discussing the ways in which this experience overlaps with other forms of sexual violence, and in which it is caused by- and reproduces- traditional gendered discourses. It also discusses how ideas of breaching established boundaries can cause feelings of harm, and how these harms can 'ripple' out into social groups and 'endure' beyond the original incident. Additionally, the chapter discusses the ways in which these harms are 'embodied'- felt, located, and experienced directly in the physical form. Finally, the chapter concludes by discussing how those affected manage their perpetrator's 'intent of harm' in their experience, and the degree to which this intent impacts how harms are felt.

4.2 "Annoying" to "traumatising": the scale of harm

The dataset contains a wide range of experiences in regard to the degree of harm felt. For some, the impact was relatively minor, while for others, the experience was devastating. Nathan occupies quite clearly the 'minor' part of the scale. In his first experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing, in which he was recorded engaging in sex without his consent, and later finding the video online, he described the experience as "a bit of a shock", which he later considered "funny". The second, which were sexual photos shown to acquaintances by a person he was 'somewhat dating'- he felt "a bit more annoyed" and "a bit disappointed by", but ultimately said of both occurrences: "yeah, it's not really bothered me that much". Similarly to Nathan, Toby felt 'humiliated' by his experience, but ultimately said "I don't think it's really had too significant of an impact on my life". Nathan and Toby's perspectives sit in contrast with the stories of other participants, where more severe harms were reported. Greg's assessment of the image sharing was described as "one of the most humiliating things of my entire life, it was awful". The impact for Grace caused significant upheaval in her life, and she stated that "how I dealt with it… it actually led me down a darker, more traumatic route". These accounts establish a broad overview in which we might map where the experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing falls with regard to harm.

Others may sit somewhere in the middle or even move between the two points at various stages of their lives. Beth used the word 'traumatising' to summarise her encounter but also felt that having sexual images shared without her consent (alongside having experienced other forms of sexism) led her ultimately "to challenge [herself] and do more and be a stronger person". Similarly, Katie described her experience as both "'scary' and "really uncomfortable and violating" but later said: "I'm pleased to say I have full trust [in her current partner] and I don't think it's affected me that much". Yasmin also sits somewhere on this spectrum- while she found her experience upsetting, she is able to reflect on the time without pain: "at the time it

was fucking horrible… everything happens for a reason and at the right time, and it did, as horrible as it was". Yasmin's image sharing, which was maliciously intended to break up her relationship with her partner, ultimately brought them closer together, which allowed her to comprehend the harm as a fleeting incident which was ultimately for the better.

Progression on the scale, however, is not linear. While these examples indicate moving away from feelings of harm, the experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing is not bound by temporality. Factors such as being reminded of the experience, fear of the image re-emerging, or changing one's perspective on the experience can all contribute to new- or returning-feelings of harm. Simon, said that despite not "thinking about it day-to-day", the images still exist in the world and have the potential to cause serious harm if they ever returned:

> This picture is out there now, somewhere… it hasn't been mentioned since, so touch wood, that's- that's what's going to happen [the image remains unmentioned]. If it ever re-emerges again, I'll deal with that at the time, but that would be a pretty disastrous thing.

Katie also gave an account of how, despite generally feeling unaffected by the experience at this point in her life, one incident in particular set her back when she saw the man she thought had shared her images in public:

> You know when you're just like, fight or flight, cos I was like, I don't want to speak to him. I don't want him to see me, I don't wanna look him in the eyes, I felt uncomfortable…. I remember feeling really frightened and it churns it all back up.

Katie's example gives a clear example of how reminders of the experience can trigger negative emotions; for Katie, it "churned up" her negative memories and feelings and triggered what she describes as a "fight-or-flight" response- an intuitive, bodily, protective reaction to negative or stressful stimuli. Beth further describes how her own experience was something she thought about for years afterwards:

> Those first few years, I would think of it a lot… if there was ever that kind of trigger. If [the country of the incident] was mentioned, or if an ex was mentioned, or anything that could lead back to that, would bring it back into my mind.

Beth goes on to describe how her emotions changed, from worry, to anxiety, to anger, each time the incident was recalled to her memory, and as she dwelled more on the experience that had happened to her. What is particularly telling here is the innocuous material which had the capacity to evoke these feelings- something as simple as mentioning the country the incident

took place in, in a completely unrelated discussion, was enough to recall this experience for years afterwards.

This suggests there is not only a clear range and variety in the manner in which one may experience non-consensual sexual image sharing, but also a range in the harmful impact of this experience. There exists alongside McGlynn et al.'s (2017) 'continuum of image-based sexual abuse', a 'continuum' or 'scale' of harm– which encapsulates everything between minor and minimal harm, and severe harm or trauma at the other. People who have experienced non-consensual sexual image sharing might sit at any point on this continuum or even sit at various points at various times.

It was common for participants to bring to the interview a perspective of how their own experience fit within a broader 'scale of harm'. Participants made references to other people's experiences of non-consensual sexual image sharing, and how these accounts related to their own degree of harm. Usually, this was to compare their own perspective in a negative light- Grace, Beth, Katie, Nathan, Simon, and Toby all expressed some form of sentiment that they knew 'other people' (from stories heard in the media) who had had worse or more severe experiences with this phenomenon. Grace, for instance, said:

> It could have been so much worse. Obviously, it probably wouldn't have went viral, but it could have been a video, it could have been on a porn site, it could have been accessible to my family, I could have been nude, there were so many could-have-beens that it negated what actually happened.

This demonstrates the significance of the 'big scandals' which dominate the media around non-consensual sexual image sharing; clearly, these stories are shaping conceptualisations of the context, severity, and circumstance of this experience (Harper et al. 2022; McGlynn et al. 2020). These manifested in Grace's case as a series of "could-have-beens", a catalogue of ways in which she might have been alternatively affected. In Grace's case, this decision factored into her choice not to report her experience to the police, believing that the potentially 'worse' experiences of others negated her own harms. This demonstrates a clear difficulty in 'owning' one's experience when affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing.

Interestingly, although Nathan didn't feel greatly harmed by his own experience, he reported to the adult website hosting his content both the video depicting himself, and other videos uploaded by the same person depicting strangers. In explaining why, he said:

> I was quite chill to not do anything but when you went to the creator's page, there were lots of videos that seemed very similar… really, we were trying to get the whole page

> [taken] down, cos we were very certain that most, if not all, of these videos were attained without the consent of the people involved.

Here, we can see that although Nathan's personal response to the image sharing was fairly 'low' on the scale, and his general attitude towards his own content was fairly apathetic, his general perception of this experience is that it is one of violation- although he didn't feel harmed, he was aware that others might and took steps to mitigate this. While Waldman's (2019) research demonstrated some concern that gay men using online social apps may not consider sharing sexual images without consent an inherent privacy invasion, because of the ubiquitousness and normalisation of this experience within this community, Nathan's account here demonstrates the opposite. This demonstrates that while 'big scandals' may be shaping perceptions of individual experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing, there also exists a conceptualisation of this experience as a 'cultural harm' (McGlynn & Rackley 2016; Rackley & McGlynn 2015), and this wider conceptualisation of what it means to be affected by this experience shaped Nathan's actions.

This clash between the degree of harm the participant has experienced, and the degree of harm they feel they *should* be experiencing, continued. How participants developed this sense of what they 'ought' to experience is unclear, however given the fact that many expressed feelings that their reaction was more extreme then it ought to be, this perhaps provides evidence for Harper et al.'s (2022) argument that 'beliefs' or 'myths' around revenge pornography have caused a public opinion of the phenomenon that is at odds with academic understandings of image-based sexual abuse. While Nathan felt less harm than he expected others to feel, others in the data felt more. Katie, for instance, said of the time of her image sharing: "it's stupid that I'm getting this worked up". Beth, additionally, described the impact her image sharing had on her in these terms: "I felt really traumatised, actually, [laughs] even though it was just a picture, I felt really traumatised by it, it's really silly". While neither participant outlined what they thought an acceptable reaction or response to this experience should be, we might infer that using the phrase "just a picture", Beth is, at least, reducing her experience to a level of insignificance at odds with how she actually feels

The concept of non-consensual sexual image sharing as 'just a picture' fits with the work of academics working in the area of techno-social harms, who argue that image-sharing is not taken seriously for this reason; it is perceived as easily dismissible because it is enacted upon a 'digital body'- not Beth's physical form, but simply a picture of it (Franks 2017b; Powell & Henry 2017; Henry & Powell 2015; Citron & Franks 2014). Powell and Henry (2017; 2015) argue that conceptualisation of digital harms being enacted against a 'digital' body rather than a 'real' body– and therefore being perceived to have lesser or no impact– is an outdated and

unhelpful way to conceptualise this phenomenon and contributes to a climate that struggles to address the lived experience of digital harms. With Beth's account, we can see that this concept has been internalised by her. Her lived trauma is perceived as "silly"; she does not feel that the severity of her reaction is appropriate and hence struggles to rationalise the degree of harm she has experienced.

Katie additionally struggled with conceptualising the harm she felt, at one point describing her reaction to her image sharing as "mak[ing] it feel so much more than what it actually is". Her image sharing experience involved a picture (which she did not perceive as sexual in nature) taken from her social media and posted to a pornographic website. As a result, there was a disconnect between experiencing what she perceived as a relatively 'low harm' incident of non-consensual sexual image sharing, and the level of actual harm she had experienced in response:

> I'm really conscious that people will have had heightened situations than what mine was. And scarier situations than what mine was. And things that go on longer. I think that makes me- grateful's not the word, but I think I felt… 'oh god', it could have been worse. But then I think, what happened was still really crap. [laughs]. Like, it felt really shit. Just because somebody else might have a different kind of situation, doesn't take away from [my experience].

This dissonance between actual 'felt' harms and 'expected' ways of reacting to this experience is clearly a point of contention for those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing, which hampers free expression of feeling. The awareness of other, worse situations limits Katie's ability to embrace the harms she actually *does* feel. This lack of sufficient recognition of the harms of this experience echoes findings from McGlynn et al.'s (2020) study, which found that the inability to properly name or claim the harms felt was a form of 'hermeneutic injustice' (Giladi 2018). They argue:

> Because the harms of image-based sexual abuse are not sufficiently recognised, victim-survivors struggle to understand, narrate and name their experiences. Many participants in our study knew that their own experiences had been profoundly devastating, but struggled to make sense of that in a society where such acts of abuse are so often excused, minimised and normalised (2020, p.17).

The concept of denying or reducing harm, and the ways in which this contributes to feelings of shame and self-blame, will be discussed further in section 6. However, the data here does demonstrate that despite 'knowing' and 'feeling' harm, participants expressed difficulty in conceptualising their own experience as 'harmful'. These accounts also suggest that there is no

clear, straightforward link between an imagined or objective severity of non-consensual sexual-image sharing, and the harms enacted. This suggests that the experience of harm is very personal, and that additional factors beyond severity or type of non-consensual sexual image sharing contribute to a person's interpretation of the experience as 'harmful'.

As such, we can surmise that people affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing are likely to experience some form of harm, but the degree of harm is subject to a range of factors. This scale of harm includes experiences that could be very severe- 'traumatic', 'humiliating' or 'scary', but equally could be as simple as 'a bit upsetting'. The existence of minor harms in response to this phenomenon is not meant to invalidate the existence of major harms or suggest that one feeling of harm is more appropriate or superior to another. Indeed, both Nathan and Toby, who experienced 'minor' harms, were clear that they did not wish for their account to be interpreted in this way: "I don't want to, sort of, downplay anybody else's reaction to a similar experience" (Toby). This indicates a sense of solidarity with others affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing, as already indicated in Nathan's desire to get more content than simply his own taken down. Simon also expressed that he was surprised by the support he received from others- while expecting 'mick-taking' he received support from people he believed could 'sympathise' with him:

> I imagine a lot of people could sympathise with people now. Or empathise with people around it. So, hopefully the view on this kind of thing is perhaps changing. Though, I didn't expect to get much support from- I expected to get a load of, erm… mick-taking, really, you know. I didn't really get any of that, actually, it was- I got a few people contacting me saying- well, initially, the people were laughing, on the [group chat]- but that was very quick, and then I got people contacting me saying, 'what was that about?'

This offers us an optimistic look on what is so often a pessimistic experience. Those who experience non-consensual sexual image sharing not only express sympathy for the perceived harms of others but also feel that sympathy is expressed to them.

This scale of harms is a natural companion to the 'continuum of image-based sexual abuse' (McGlynn et al. 2017). If we accept that there are multiple ways in which non-consensual sexual image sharing may be enacted against a person, it stands to reason that the degree of harm to which this experience impacts them may also vary. There are also specific aspects of non-consensual sexual image sharing which seem to exacerbate harms, which will be discussed at various points in this chapter.

4.3 “Have I been sexually abused”: the continuum of sexual violence

Kelly’s (1988) work on developing sexual violence as a continuum based the concept on two principles. The first is that a continuum can be used to unite a number of experiences which contain a basic common characteristic- in the circumstance of sexual violence, Kelly defined this as “abuse, intimidation, coercion, intrusion, threat and force men use to control women” (1988, p.76). The second principle of Kelly’s continuum asserts that sexual violence does not consist of a linear series of well-defined categories, but instead is a more complicated experience which cannot be clearly and neatly defined, where more and less ‘extreme’ forms of sexual violence bleed into one another. McGlynn et al.'s (2017) work offers an interpretation of Kelly’s continuum with the inclusion of non-consensual sexual image sharing. They assert that:

> Drawing on Kelly’s pioneering work, we make two arguments: first, that there is a continuum of practices that together form our concept of image-based sexual abuse; and, secondly, that image-based sexual abuse is on a continuum with other forms of sexual violence (p.25)

Findings within this data offer evidence to support McGlynn et al.’s (2017) argument. For some participants, their own experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing was definitely considered as part of a wider spectrum of sexual harm. This was demonstrated by either comparing the experience to other forms of sexual violence, or by expressing areas of commonality between non-consensual sexual image sharing and sexual violence more broadly. Many academics have noted the overlap between sexual violence and non-consensual sexual image sharing, so this finding corroborates other work in this area (Bates 2017; Bloom 2014). In addition, other qualitative studies have noted reports of the experience as ‘like rape’ (Huber 2023a; Aborisade 2021; McGlynn et al. 2020). For Sol, the overlap between his image-sharing experience and sexual violence was incredibly clear. Sol’s imagery was recorded while he was drunk, which led him to question not only the violation inherent in the taking of the footage, but also in the sexual encounter itself:

> I’ve also started questioning the consent of the whole interaction. Because, like I said, I remember almost nothing, I was [stressed] *very* drunk. I don’t know how drunk *they* were, and to be able to take a video- because I know I wouldn’t have been able [sober enough] to take a video. So, it’s kind of been like– unpacking the, ‘have I been sexually

> abused' on top of the video itself, which is a violation of consent. So that's been what's affected me, mostly- re-thinking that interaction.

Sol's account here demonstrates the importance of discussing non-consensual sexual image sharing as a form of sexual violence. In Sol's experience, as in many others, it is impossible to separate the act of recording and sharing the encounter from the legitimacy of the sexual act itself. Both involve what Sol defines as a "violation", both demonstrate a lack of consent, and therefore both must be discussed in tandem. Sol's account further demonstrates the difficulty in neatly categorising elements of sexual harm; the experience is not either rape *or* non-consensual sexual image sharing, but both at the same time. Kelly's (1988) idea of sexual harms as a series of intersecting or overlapping elements is apparent here- the lines between these two experiences are clearly blurred.

Other participants, such as Katie, also offered evidence to support the framing of non-consensual sexual image sharing as an act of sexual violence. In Katie's interview, she drew a direct parallel between her own experience of having images taken and sexualised without her consent, and the threat of being attacked at night:

> It's like how they say, 'you can't walk down the street in the dark', well, now you can't even take a photo and put it online… we should be able to walk down the street or take a photo or whatever… I think it makes you think of all of these other things and situations that women are put in, where we're just doing everyday normal things, and things happen to us, and we're violated and then the police, or society, or whatever are like 'oh, well, she should have had a light. She shouldn't have taken that photo. She shouldn't have done whatever'… and that's why I think I draw links with stuff like that, because to me, it's the same thing. A girl taking a photo and having it taken out of context or permission or whatever and being put somewhere, it feels very similar to a girl walking down the street and being attacked. They're both harassment. They're both us being sexualised or taken advantage of, manipulated, and for something that is not our fault at all.

Katie's description highlights some of the commonalities between non-consensual sexual image sharing and other forms of sexual harm, which justifies the placement of both experiences on the continuum of sexual violence. Katie's assessment of the similarities is based on three points- the first, being sexualised or objectified, the second, in being harassed, and the third, in the experience of not being taken seriously by others. Being sexualised is particularly pertinent in Katie's case, as a 'normal' (not explicit or sexual) photo of her was

uploaded to an adult website. In doing so, the image was 'made' pornographic. Sexual objectification is covered in more detail in section 5.4.1, however here, it suffices to argue that sexual objectification- which is certainly often present in non-consensual sexual image sharing- is often cited as a factor which contributes to, and helps to uphold, a culture that permits sexual violence (Gavey, 2005).

The second reason that Katie cited was that of harassment of women. Beth's account echoed this statement, placing her own experience in a backdrop of patriarchal power structures. When discussing the impact that non-consensual sexual image-sharing had on her, Beth said:

> I think it made me more wary of men… it was just another notch on the confirmation that men are shit. I have a very low regard for men… and that's [the image sharing] just one of any number of numerous things that has caused me to feel that way. Because sexism is so entrenched in society, and male privilege is so entrenched. The fact that they thought they could do that, and it was absolutely fine, because they knew they could get away with it. So yeah, I don't have a particularly high level of esteem for men and that, and these little things, is what it stems from.

Beth's response clearly situates her experience in "entrenched sexism", relating her incident to wider cultures of misogyny (Bates 2020; Powell & Henry 2014; Gavey 2005). We might relate this to gendered power structures, a situation which permits the harassment of women from those with "male privilege" who can simply "get away with it". Ruvalcaba and Eaton's (2020) analysis, which found a relationship between sexual script theory (Simon & Gagnon 1986) and non-consensual sexual image sharing, is relevant in supporting Beth's argument. From this perspective, non-consensual sexual image sharing can be argued to be a new manifestation of a culture which emphasises male sexual dominance and female sexual submission (Powell & Henry 2017; Gavey 2005).

The third principle highlighted by Katie was that of the 'accepted' presence of non-consensual sexual image sharing and other forms of sexual violence; as she outlines, women are simply doing "everyday normal things" when sexual violence occurs. This presents this phenomenon as permitted, accepted, and mundane parts of a woman's life. Beth's description of her distrust of men stemming from "these little things" further supports this- a number of incidences of violence, large and small, which contribute towards building her experience of a sexist culture. This concept of non-consensual sexual image sharing as contributing to an overall climate of sexual harm echoes Laura Bates' work on 'Everyday Sexism' (2014), the concept that sexual harm occurs in a thousand different forms, big and small, over the course of a woman's life.

This further situates non-consensual sexual image sharing in the context of continuum of sexual violence; these experiences detailed above have clearly contributed towards a larger tapestry of sexual violence in both Beth and Katie's lives.

The 'accepted' presence of sexual violence commonly extends to the treatment of those affected by it by the police. Both Beth and Grace, who have previously been sexually assaulted, discussed their reluctance to report the image-sharing, based on responses they had had to more 'severe' incidences of sexual violence. When asked if she reported her experience, Beth said:

> It never occurred to me to go to the police, ever… it didn't occur to me at the time. I didn't think it was a thing that the police would be interested in. And interestingly, this must have just been the way we got brought up, because two years later than that in [year], I got raped, and it didn't occur to me then to go to the police either. I didn't think the police would have taken that seriously, so I certainly didn't think, previously, that the police would do anything about a photo.

Grace offered a particularly bleak account of her reasoning for not going to the police. Grace had been raped previously and felt that her experience of reporting this to the police had had largely negative consequences, including being told by the police that she was 'asking for it'. This naturally informed her reluctance to report her experience of image sharing:

> If they're going to tell me that me being raped was me asking for it, you know, the worst sexual offence that you could have, what are they going to say if I turn around and say, 'an image I consented to… has entered the internet'?

Police interactions with those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing are notably poor (Huber 2023b; Bond & Tyrrell 2021), and other authors have noted, as Grace does, that blame is applied to the person affected for "an image they consented to entering the internet" (Cecil 2014; Citron & Franks 2014). Again, this creates a common thread between being raped and having sexual imagery shared without consent. Both Beth and Grace use their experience of the former as a predictor of how the latter will be conceived and shaped, suggesting they perceive a clear link between the two concepts.

An important element of situating non-consensual sexual image sharing within a continuum of sexual harm is addressing that it remains a highly personal experience, which is interpreted in the context of a person's other experiences and perspectives on sexual violence. Grace made

clear the distinction between her experiences of image-sharing and her experience of being sexually assaulted. When discussing which was easier to talk about, she said:

> This [the experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing] is much easier. This is much easier because there's a barrier of the physicality of it. So this is a photo that you maybe took in your room, took in your mirror, away in the safe space, and it was shared. Whereas when you have the sexual offences- you know, if it's assault, or rape, or groping or anything like that, it's more physical. And it triggers a kind of deep-rooted reaction in your body. If I think about this topic, I can picture the website, and I can picture the photos. That's it. Whereas if I am talking about the rapes, I can feel the hands on me, it like, opens up all your senses, your smell, your awareness, your sight. I developed PTSD after the first one, which was before the image sharing issue.... being violated physically is so much worse, being violated visually is nothing in comparison to being violated physically. It's just not on that level, this is so much easier to talk about, as horrible as it is. And that shouldn't be a sentence that I have to say, that this is easier to talk about, but it is.

Critics of the continuum of sexual violence as a concept may argue that it trivialises more 'serious' or violent incidences of sexual harm- discussing things such as catcalling, flashing, or even sexual image-sharing in the same conversation as sexual violence ignores the difference between this experience. However, the continuum of sexual violence does not seek to present all aspects of sexual violence as equally harmful, or to create a 'hierarchy' or 'order' to this abuse (Kelly, 1988). As Grace's account indicates, this is certainly not the case here- she can clearly distinguish between the two experiences, and while she may discuss the similarities between them, she certainly does not present them as having a similar impact upon her. Vera-Gray and Fileborn's (2018) assessments of street harassment asserts in response to this criticism that the continuum of sexual abuse is intended to display the ways in which incidences of sexual violence are "overlapping and cumulative" (p.80), embedded in the everyday lives of women, and related to meanings across a woman's life: "meanings [of sexual violence] are made through relation— to the past and the future, reality and possibility; a process in the lives of women and girls rather than a one-off event" (2018, p.80). The fact that Grace finds her experience of rape relevant to how she comprehends and discusses her experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing demonstrates this- it has contributed to her broader conceptualisation of sexual harm.

This framing of non-consensual sexual image sharing as a sexual harm has also been presented in the accounts of Katie, Grace, and Beth as a *gendered* harm. Yasmin did not explicitly

reference gendered power structures in her account, but her description of the circumstances of her image sharing further speaks to this dynamic. She said of the man who shared her images:

> The guy I was seeing started getting more and more clingy. It was like, 'Oh, well, when are you gonna leave her [Yasmin's current partner]', and I was like, 'I'm not going to'... it probably would have happened one way or another, because he wasn't going to go peacefully. He was a little bit tapped in the head, and all of his friends said that to me from the beginning.

The description of "clinginess" and "not going to go peacefully" suggests an uncomfortable level of pursuit here, a hounding of Yasmin despite her assertions that she wished to remain with her current partner. This situates her experience, much like the other women in the dataset, in a firmly gendered dynamic of male sexual domination and female sexual submission (Gavey 2005). Katie's description of her perspective is situated more explicitly in the context of women's lived experience of sexual violence; something that is done to women, by men:

> I think because it is mainly women that are targeted, it feels really uncomfortably scary, thinking that it's probably men that are doing the sharing... It's much more unlikely that something like that would happen to a man- obviously I'm sure it happens, I'm not saying it doesn't happen ever, but it's much more unlikely. So I think it's harder for them [men] to empathise.

Grace's view was similar. While she did express that the experience could be harmful "no matter the person's gender", she confirmed that her perception of this experience was one in which women were the more likely targets: "I think society is failing- particularly women, I think.". Beth in particular was very clear about the gendered element of her experience. When speculating on how the problem of non-consensual sexual image sharing might be rectified, she said:

> It shouldn't all be on girls. Men are the predators here; men are the abusers. Not saying that, you know, there are no women that don't do bad things, but they don't do bad things to anywhere near the degree that men do bad things. And that culture that boys and men grow up in and take part in, is the problem.

Again, this offers further evidence to support the positioning of non-consensual sexual image sharing as an act of sexual violence formed by gendered power structures (Powell & Henry 2017; Dodge 2016; Gavey 2005). This sentiment was not simply expressed by women, but also by other participants. Simon, for instance, who situated his own experience as one that was likely to be 'less than' the experiences of others, also cited sexual harms against women as a more 'extreme' example:

> I don't consider this [his experience] to be anywhere in the same league as probably a lot of the people you've spoke to, for example if there was a young woman who's had something sexual shared. I don't consider my story to be even in the same league as that. But, I suppose, it's probably still relevant.

Simon here is also describing his experience in the context of sexual harms and womanhood, but is deliberately excluding himself from this category and quantifying his own experience as lesser in comparison. If we accept that sexual violence such as non-consensual sexual image sharing is created- or supported- by a system which emphasises male sexual aggression and female sexual submission (Gavey, 2005), it stands to reason that men may have some difficulty in conceptualising sexual harm where is does occur to them. Male victims of rape, for instance, may minimise the harm felt or refuse to acknowledge their experience as such (Javaid 2015). This is based on ideas of hegemonic masculinity, which constructs male identity through strength, sexual prowess, and dominance (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Gavey 2005; Connell 1987).

While I did not ask Simon to expand further on why he felt this experience would be worse for young women, I think his inclusion here of gender- rather than for instance, suggesting more extreme or widespread incidences of images-sharing- would be worse, is significant. Gavey (2005, p.191) argues that comprehending men's victimisation is a difficult task: "are men constrained from telling the 'truth' of harm and victimisation by the discourses of hegemonic masculinity, or do these discourses seamlessly constitute men as invulnerable to that kind of harm?" It is difficult to say where Simon situated himself here- whether he feels unable to articulate harm, or genuinely considers himself less vulnerable. What this does signify, however, is that Simon's experience is shaped by his perspectives on gender, masculinity, and femininity.

Sol additionally offered a highly interesting contribution to this discussion, with regards to how he felt his gender related to his experience.

> I do think they felt like it was more okay [to take/ share the images] because I've always performed very hyper-sexually, because I'm a trans-masculine person, and therefore I always really feel the need to perform this heightened sexuality that is expected of masculinity. So they probably assumed that I would be okay with that, because I'm a very forward and loudly sexual person. I just genuinely think that has influenced a lot of the situations of blurring of consent or sexual abuse I've been in… I'm supposed to 'always want it'. Because I'm a man, and especially because not everyone is going to see me as a man, so I need to further highlight that I am a man by performing this to even a higher degree than I normally would.

This offers more evidence to support the idea that male or masculine experiences of non-consensual sexual image sharing are shaped by conceptualisations of gender, just as female or feminine experiences are. The idea of performing sexuality as a part of gender identity invokes Goffman's (1959) idea of interaction as a performance, and further to this, Butler's (2004) theory of gender as performance. Sol makes clear here that he considers his presentation as a "hyper-sexual" man a "performance" designed to make clear his masculine presentation, and to convince others to see and perceive him as such. While masculinity as performance has been discussed by various academics (Messerschmidt 2018; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Connell 1987), how trans men or trans-masculine people display this has received less attention. Aboim et al.'s (2018) work on 'trans masculinities' argues that trans men may be able to tell us *more* about masculinities, as their masculine attributes are not 'naturalised'- perceived as coming from the body- in the same way that cisgender men's sexuality often is. From Sol's perspective, the obligation or need to perform this masculine performance has had the counter-effect of making him *more* susceptible to sexual violence.

Furthermore, the idea that men 'always want it' is a known myth that permits and excuses sexual violence against men (Javaid 2016). The performance of masculinity has been discussed in the context of non-consensual sexual image sharing, but largely as it pertains to perpetrating the image-sharing (Renken et al. 2024; Hall & Hearn 2019). Hall and Hearn's (2019; 2017) study, one of the few to include male experiences of non-consensual sexual image sharing, found that images were often shared of men with captions that denigrated their masculinity and cited their promiscuity as a motivating factor in sharing sexual content. Sol's discussion of his experience here offers further evidence to support both non-consensual sexual image sharing as an incident of sexual violence, and to suggest it is a gendered experience for both men *and* women. This fits with wider research on men as victims of sexual violence, where the gendered power structures which largely focus on women as victims render men's sexual harms invisible- masculinity is incompatible with discourses of victimhood (Javaid 2017;

Hlavka 2016). Sol's masculinity was perceived by him as a direct causal factor in creating his experience, much like with Beth, Grace, and Katie's accounts of how their experience intersects with womanhood.

4.4 "He asked me not to share them": pre-agreed boundaries

One element of the experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing which was found in the data was that 'pre-agreed boundaries' exist around consensual sexual image sharing. Sharing sexual images, sometimes known as 'sexting' or 'sending nudes' has quickly become a normal and accepted part of modern relationships (Krieger 2017; Hasinoff 2013). As such, it is not uncommon for the people sharing the content to agree to conditions and terms around the images; for instance, where the images are kept, how long they can be kept for, and who can see them. Consensual sexual image sharing in committed relationships is an act of 'relationship maintenance'- it works to demonstrate trust and intimacy by making oneself vulnerable, and is subject to 'risk management' practices that involve negotiating boundaries such as how the image will be shared and how identifying the content of the image will be (Amundsen 2019; Liong & Cheng 2019; Hasinoff 2013; Jones 2005). A breach of these arranged conditions can be more of a breach of trust than the sharing of the images themselves, and contributes a great deal to the level of harm felt.

For Nathan, who is a gay man, the sharing of nude images is a normal and expected feature of what he identifies as 'Grindr hookup culture' (Tziallas 2015). Nathan stressed this to me in a joking fashion: "in the gay world, it's almost like fucking Pokémon cards". Sol, who is a trans man, also echoed this statement.

> I got no 'dick pics' [when I was presenting] as a woman, as a female-presenting [redacted]-year old, which I think is the prime audience for receiving unsolicited 'dick pics'. Since I've been on Grindr, I've had loads. And I feel like not many people get to see the comparison like I have. Now on Grindr, it's just a normal natural thing to do. When I've spoken to female friends who have received 'dick pics', they've said they feel that there's this element of people getting off on being insulted. Like crossing those boundaries is a part of it. Being on Grindr, as a gay man, it's like first base to them. That's just how you flirt, it's not about breaking boundaries… it's far more normal there.

As Nathan described the sharing of nude images as a normal part of his life, he had a certain level of expectation that his images had been shared elsewhere and seemed to see this as a

natural hazard of sharing such content. While Nathan contributed his experiences of a few incidences of non-consensual sexual image sharing, when asked if there had been other incidences, he replied quite cheerfully: "Probably. Like, you send out your dick pics on Grindr[when people ask for them consensually [laughs], and then I'm sure they get sent on".

As a result of this worldview, Nathan was overall fairly "unbothered" by both his incidences of image sharing, one of which was a sexual act recorded without his consent and shared online, the other was images shared by a person he was "somewhat dating". This offers evidence to support Waldman's (2019) research, where he argues that queer men have different expectations and norms around the sharing of sexual imagery without consent. Nathan's discussion of the different relationships he had with each image-shared does offer evidence that personal relationships do affect the degree to which this impacts a person. He states of his "somewhat dating" partner:

> I was more annoyed about the hypocrisy of it, to be honest. That he'd very explicitly asked me to not share it with anyone, and I'd explicitly said 'yeah, I won't share it, you don't share it either' and then he did.

Nathan stressed here that the content of the imagery wasn't a particular concern to him– even though his face was visible, he was involved in the making of the content and told me quite comfortably that he was "quite proud of it all, to be honest [laughs]." Nor was he particularly bothered about the audience the content was shared with, a group of the perpetrator's friends who Nathan described as "people that I didn't really know still, it was friends of a friend at that point". While he described the sharing of content with this audience as making him "a bit more annoyed" in comparison to his other experience of image sharing where the content was posted anonymously online, this was the extent of his reaction, even considering that these people had access to this footage. Nathan even commented that while the content "was sent to their phones", he wasn't concerned about what they might do with it: "I guess they could send it on, but I don't know why it would be in their interest. But whatever."

Nathan's account offers evidence to Gilden's (2023) theory that queer people are placed at more risk of sexual image sharing, based on different sexual norms within that community. This is both from "comparatively high rates of online dating, sexting, and hooking up" and "from a fairly low threshold of familiarity required for users to share sexual images with each other… especially within gay male social networks, such as on the dating/hookup app Grindr" (p.816). He is clear to link this to cultural norms around gender, sexuality, and interaction- while most literature on non-consensual sexual image sharing discusses the 'risk' women take in engaging in sexual image sharing with men, gay male social networks are not defined by

risks of sexual shame. Rules of 'mutual reciprocity' with regard to sexual image sharing, combined with overtly sexual queer spaces, creates a culture which requires a 'low degree in familiarity' for sexual image exchange (Gilden 2023; Waldman 2019; Tziallas 2015). This is demonstrated clearly in both Nathan and Sol's accounts, who identify this cultural space as one where sharing sexual images like "Pokemon cards" is a normal and expected part of interaction This suggests that these pre-agreed boundaries are shaped by cultures and norms around sexual interaction, which influences to what degree we view image sharing as a *breach* of boundaries. As per Nathan's account, he considers image sharing as somewhat 'normal' and therefore demonstrates less upset regarding the images being shared on.

To further emphasise this, Nathan's 'harm' – however 'mild' he considered it in comparison to the experiences of others– came directly from the breach of the *explicit and pre-agreed* conditions arranged by himself and his image-sharer. Nathan made this even more clear by noting that his annoyance came less from the image-sharing itself and "more [from the fact] that he hadn't asked- if he'd asked, I'd have probably said yeah". This discussion of breaches of boundaries also relates to ideas of trust, something which will be discussed in more detail in section 5.5.

This concept of agreed boundaries also plays into notions of self-blame, something that will be discussed in more detail in section 6.5. While Nathan had explicitly laid out 'rules' for his images before sharing them, the lack of doing so in other accounts can contribute to how responsible a person feels for their 'role' in the image-sharing. For Beth, this appeared in her inability to predict that something like this would be done to her: "it just did not occur to me that that's what he'd done… It was partly my fault… [because] I didn't realise quick enough what had gone on". For Grace, she was concerned that her original consent would be seen by others as consent to the image being shared more broadly: "It's the mentality that… it must have been a missed communication… this was, of course, the natural progression of this".

The very need for a 'code of conduct' regarding image-sharing practices relates to the idea that consent in regard to sexual practices is not specific, but general: "outside of sexual practices, most people recognise that consent is context-specific" (Citron & Franks 2014, p.348). It also relates to a common rhetoric around sexual violence, that prevention on the part of the victim is a more viable plan than prevention from the attacker. With regards to non-consensual sexual image sharing, this manifests in 'risk management strategies' that seek to give people guidance on how to prevent sexual images being shared, the result of this ultimately being that those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing are blamed their experience on not taking steps to prevent it (Aborisade 2021; Bates 2017). Whereas Nathan is able to (rightly) use the pre-agreed terms between him and his partner as a justification that his partner was

in the wrong, for Beth and Grace this harm is turned 'inwards'. Rather than being 'annoyed' with the image-sharer, as Nathan is, the blame is laid with themselves for failing to prevent the occurrence. Harm here, then, comes from the failure of others to uphold pre-agreed boundaries, or the (perceived) failure of oneself to establish them. Grace's description of having the images shared beyond her agreed boundaries as a "natural progression" or inevitable consequence of sharing them in the first place is a common dialogue that feminist scholars have worked to fight against (McGlynn & Rackley 2016; Bloom 2014; Levendowski 2014b; Franks 2013) and this framing of image sharing as a boundary breach as opposed to a natural progression is key to acknowledging the harmful impact this experience can have.

4.5 "It doesn't leave you": outward repercussions

One of the defining factors of non-consensual sexual image sharing, particularly images shared online, is the fact it is subjected to a "staggering means of amplification" (Citron & Franks 2014, p.350). This references the fact that the impact of this experience can be far-reaching and intense. McGlynn et al. (2020) describes this in their own research as a "social rupture", which speaks to "the totality of harm experienced, conveying at that time a sense of complete devastation" (p.11). This can occur both socially and temporally. An example of this is in the 'collective harms' of this experience- the extension of impact to others within your social circle. Another example is in the 'enduring' nature of the image, which references the inability to be sure that your image is 'gone' and won't return. Both of these examples illustrate the ways in which harm ripples outward from the experience, stretching into one's social circle and hovering in one's future.

4.5.1 "It felt like I was dragging them into it": collective harms

One key concept within the experience of having sexual images shared is that the act incites repercussions which stretch far beyond the inciting incident. One way this emerged within the data is the extent to which the image sharing harmed others within the social circle of the person affected. Powell and Henry (2017, p.139) refer to the "collective harms of image-based sexual abuse", and the impact these harms have on the affected person's "full civic participation". Within the data, the idea of 'collective harms' emerged, but on a much more macro level; the people affected were partners, friends, or family members, who were harmed themselves by the image sharing. Disclosure and discussion of the image-sharing incident with these groups also contributed to a larger feeling of harm within the affected person. Greg, who has experienced two incidences of image-sharing, had partners that were affected on both

occasions. In the first incident, where friends played a 'game' of trying to film and share other members of the group having sex, Greg's girlfriend was also targeted:

> She was fucking mortified by it. She was really, really upset… She had a lot of self-confidence issues as well anyway, and was really quite quiet and quite timid, but this thing just made her really, really upset. It really affected her at the time.

This mimics the findings of DiTullio and Sullivan's (2019) study, which noted the impact that non-consensual sexual image sharing can have on all forms of relationships in people's lives, causing upset and social withdrawal. In this case, Greg's girlfriend was 'collateral damage' in the incident, which represents one of the ways in which harm can multiply. The second incident, where images were shared by an ex-girlfriend to deliberately cause strife between Greg and his new partner, displays a similar pattern:

> After we had broken up, she'd [Greg's ex-girlfriend] sent photos of me and her together and photos that I'd taken and sent to her, she'd sent them onto the new girl that I was seeing at the time, and started saying that, 'this was last night, why are you with my partner', and all this kind of stuff.… It was obviously really upsetting my partner at the time, and she was really angry with me, she believed it.

On this occasion, the image-sharing- which was accompanied by a deliberate and malicious narration intended to disrupt Greg's relationship- succeeded. Not only was Greg obliged to deal with the "humiliation" (as he described it) of having his images shared, but it also ultimately resulted in the loss of his new relationship. Bates's (2017) study included accounts of image-sharing being used to disrupt relationships and noted that the particularly spiteful nature of image-sharing in this context prevents those affected from living a 'normal' life following their experience.

Yasmin's account possibly has some of the most severe repercussions- the 'social rupture' to her life was twofold. Yasmin was, at the time of the image-sharing, in a relationship with [redacted] and the two were 'escorting' online. Yasmin began cheating on her partner:

> I was with my ex-partner, who was [redacted] transitioning [redacted], but it was only me and close friends [who] knew… And I started cheating on [redacted] with someone else, because we weren't communicating very well. I went off and was seeing this other guy. And [at first] he was really nice and really like, understanding of everything, so I'd gone behind my partner's back and cheated on [redacted], and outed [redacted] to this person.

Eventually, the person Yasmin was seeing became jealous of her existing relationship, and shared screenshots of the escort profile of the two of them online.

> Eventually, he was like ‘oh, enough's enough’... and he had found the pages and screenshotted it and posted it all over Facebook. But before he'd posted it everywhere, he had told me he was going to do it. So I'd rang my partner... for me to basically go, ‘I'm about to blow your world up’... But being outed as an escort and having my partner outed as trans, that was the worst part.

The use of the word ‘outed’ is key here. It has been noted that queer people subject to non-consensual sexual image sharing are at risk of ‘intersectional surveillance’ (Franks 2017a), where harms can be doubly applied both from the image sharing and from the risk of revealing stigmatised sexual or gender identities, which would subject them to greater harm and risk (Gilden 2023; Ruvalcaba & Eaton 2020). Yasmin accounts that her partner was confronted with severe repercussions as a result of having sexual imagery shared without consent. [redacted]

> [redacted] I think that did kind of push [redacted] with the transition, so to say. [redacted] but I was like, ‘ah, you’ve kind of got to do it because we're gonna get outed anyway, so rather you do it on our terms than on his terms’... [redacted]
>
> hasn't had contact with them since.[1]

This account demonstrates that the potential risk that comes from non-consensual sexual image sharing is severe, even to those who are unintended targets; the fallout for Yasmin’s partner has caused a severe disruption to [redacted] life. Beyond that, it offers evidence to suggest that transgender people are particularly vulnerable to these harms. The limited research on how queerness affects this experience largely examines gay or bisexual men, with gay or bisexual women as a far second (Gilden 2023; Waldman 2019; 2017; Lehart et al. 2016). Yasmin’s partner’s account demonstrates the particular type of risk transgender people face as a result of this image-sharing, a risk that has likely grown given the rise in hostility towards transgender people in the UK (Connolly et al. 2025; Newey 2024).

Furthermore, Yasmin and her partner were both exposed as escorts. Sex work is not often situated within discussions of non-consensual sexual image sharing. However, a report by National Ugly Mugs on the ‘visual violence’ sex workers are subject to note the many ways in which sex workers are placed at risk from the sharing of image-based content, including the

[1] Yasmin’s partner's story has been heavily anonymised, as they were not interviewed directly for this project.

risk of being 'outed' as a sex worker (Redman & Waring 2021). Other studies on the practice of digital sex work more broadly have highlighted the threat of being 'doxxed' (having personal information shared online) (Sanders, Connelly & King 2016; Jones 2015). Much like with queer identities, sex workers are subject to stigma that could have a significant impact on their professional and personal relationships with others (Redman & Waring 2021). As was the case here, Yasmin's experience (and by extension her partner's), led to a double victimisation (Franks 2017a), as she was forced to manage the impact of both having sexual images shared and being identified as a sex worker.

Katie also had people around her who were affected. Some of the pictures taken from her social media webpages featured other people- while Katie was the 'target' of the incident, some of the uploaded photos depicted her in a group with friends. She felt obliged to let them know what had happened:

> I obviously had to contact my other friends… I was like, 'I'm really sorry, cos I feel like I've dragged you into this, because somebody's decided to do this to me, and obviously I'm one of their 'targets' if you like, but now you're dragged into it too, just because you happen to be in these photos with me that they've chosen to put on there'. And so that was really hard, and I remember saying to them… 'obviously we don't know what's going to happen and I'm really sorry'.

As Katie was the common element in these pictures- they included different social groups, with her being the only common aspect- she felt quite keenly that she was the "target" who had "dragged" her friends into this experience with her. Katie also outlined how this fact led to feelings of guilt:

> And then they [the friends] were telling their family and loved ones and whatever [laughing], and their family were like, 'what?! Why has this girl got you on this website?' And I was like, 'oh my god, I haven't!', but obviously it felt like in some way I was responsible, even though I hadn't done anything. You know, it wasn't my fault or intention or whatever, but I felt responsible for these friends- like I say, it felt like I was dragging them into it, if that can even be possible [laughs], because I didn't even do it in the first place, you know?

Guilt is covered in more detail in section 6.5. However, we might discuss its relevance here as a secondary form of harm resulting from non-consensual sexual image sharing. Just as Katie's friends are, like in Greg and Yasmin's case, another form of 'collateral damage', Katie must also bear additional forms of harm from the guilt she feels for inflicting harm upon others regardless of how illogical that feeling may be.

Katie also spoke of sharing the experience with her mother. Her mother showed support to Katie at this time, assisting her in reporting the experience to the police. She said of her mother's reaction:

> My mum must have been like, 'oh my god'. Like, 'what?' And I think she was probably concerned about what the images were… I think she was really shellshocked, because I think, nothing like that's ever – well, they're a different generation, our parents and stuff, aren't they, they haven't really grown up with the internet and things like this happening, and I think that she was scared.

This represents a different form of outward repercussion than covered previously- while Katie's mother is not directly implicated in the incident, she is experiencing her own feelings of harm in the aftermath from this experience. Family and friends of those who have experienced violence are sometimes referred to as 'secondary victims' of an incident and can experience their own distress and trauma as a result of the event (Christiansen, Bak & Elklit 2012; Davis, Taylor & Bench 1995). If we conceptualise the far- reaching harms of non-consensual sexual image sharing as a 'social rupture', the presence of 'secondary victims' is unsurprising. The impact of the incident extends out from the person targeted, affecting those close to the person depicted, and demonstrating the far-reaching capacity of this experience.

4.5.2 "This picture is there now, somewhere": the enduring image

Another way in which the harm of the original incident 'ripples' out is through time. Powell and Henry (2017) describe this as 'the enduring image', which refers to the idea that once a sexual image is shared digitally, it is uncontainable. This manifested largely in two ways in the data- concern about who has seen the imagery, and concern about if- or when- the imagery might return. This mirrors findings in both McGlynn et al.'s (2020) and Huber's (2023a) studies, where it was found that the 'existential threat' of images re-emerging is one of the more pernicious elements of harm for those who have experienced non-consensual sexual image sharing.

Katie's account illustrates fear- both of a returning image and a more widely spear image- in detail.

> I imagine it's like that for a lot of women, that it doesn't leave your presence, even if it's like, the back of your mind or you forget about it- it doesn't leave you. So I think it has longer lasting effects. It's not just that week, or 2 weeks, or whatever it was back then that affects you. You carry it with you, cos then you're always worrying, it's like you're always over your shoulder, is something like that going to happen again, are they going

> to do it again?... Will people gossip about it, will other people find out about it, will other people then go and look at it?

Harm is rendered a heavy weight in Katie's account, something to be carried, that is never far from the back of one's mind. Katie's description highlights the ways in which the enduring image results in an enduring harm, constant and inescapable. Similarly, Greg discussed how his fear that his images may be seen by others is also carried with him:

> I think my main worries were, as soon as I blocked her on everything, and made my profiles hidden, was- who else would she send it to? Would she send it to friends, would she send it to family members, or something like that?... Even a few months down the line, I was still really, really worried that these were gonna resurface again.... [I was worried if] somebody else had seen them and I don't know that they've seen them, and they're just keeping quiet and nice.

Greg and Katie's phrasing of their concerns as questions speaks to the enduring and unending nature of this phenomenon. There will never be a firm answer to the question- knowing whether the image has returned or not, knowing if it has been seen or not, knowing if you are being talked about or judged as a result of it, are eternal dilemmas for those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing. This enduring harm can interrupt or prevent healing from this harm, as there is never a firm or defined end point to this experience, rendering it impossible to 'move on' (Huber 2023a; McGlynn et al. 2020).

In addition to Greg and Katie's accounts, Simon's images were shared publicly, in a group chat with colleagues. While certainly not as severe as the case of 'outing' in Yasmin's account, there is certainly a crossing of boundaries here- a conflation of a personal 'sexual' identity with a professional one. Simon's account corroborates Gilden's (2023) definition of privacy as a flexible, context-dependent factor- "privacy entails the active, if imperfect, management of boundaries between disparate social contexts, and can occur at the level of the family, the office, the online platform, or the community" (p.830). Curating separate 'personal' and 'professional' identities is an important factor in identity management (Goffman 1959), particularly in digital contexts, and as Simon's account indicates, the breaching of this boundary can have a severe impact (Kietzmann et al. 2011; Mendelson & Papacharissi 2011; Papacharissi 2011). As a result of boundary-crossing, his greatest concern was how the proliferation of this image might hurt his career. While at the time of the interview this had not been an immediate concern, Simon noted that it was nonetheless a worry that plagued him:

> I'm immediately thinking to myself, I've got a 20–30-year career ahead of me here, [but] the picture's there now. There's 20 people there [in the group chat], I could delete every trace of it I've ever seen, but there's 20 people who have now got it on their phone. And in all likelihood, it still exists somewhere.

This demonstrates that when we consider the harms caused by non-consensual sexual image sharing, it is insufficient to simply focus on the incident itself. Even where images are only shared once, or shared and then removed, the capacity for them to re-emerge remains, and so too, therefore, does the fear. The lack of closure means that there can be no 'end' to the harm, no point at which a conclusion can be reached and the person affected can move on.

Additionally, the idea of the 'enduring image' is often based on the digital element of non-consensual sexual image sharing– the idea that once an image is on the internet, it's there forever. Simon noted that the images in his incident had been shared to twenty devices, and were "probably on someone's blooming cloud, somewhere". Those who favour the term 'technology-facilitated sexual violence' value this framing, as it emphasises the role of digital technologies in enacting these harms (Henry & Powell 2018). While not everyone in the dataset had their images shared digitally, those who did were certainly concerned that the digital technologies which facilitated their image-sharing might enable further harm.

Even where images were not shared digitally, those affected expressed concern that their images might be digitised. Toby, whose image was taken on a smartphone but was shown to others in person rather than shared online, expressed a fear that it would be shared digitally:

> I think my strongest sense was worry that it would get out in some way. Cos I hadn't considered that friend trustworthy for a long time before that incident, so that was kind of my key concern. Maybe if I'd trusted him more, I wouldn't have felt as worried, I'd have just- well, I still probably wouldn't have appreciated it, but I probably wouldn't have been as worried.

For Toby, the fear of further image-sharing is a greater factor upon him than the impact of the image sharing himself, demonstrating the real weight of a lack of temporality in this experience. This is further encapsulated by the experiences of Beth, whose images were taken and shared in the 1990's. Instead of being shared online, Beth's images were 'passed around' physically in the pub. Beth expressed a few times that she felt grateful she had experienced the image-sharing before the digital age:

> I just think, 'thank god, it was pre mobile phones and photos and that kind of thing'. Because I presume that photo will have been destroyed or lost or whatever, you know…

> I was very lucky it didn't happen later on. Because if it had been part of the digital world, then that would have been horrific, and I can only think how awful it must be for women who are out there, knowing that there are images on the internet that they can never control.

Despite this thankfulness, Beth also discussed just how much the threat of the images re-emerging haunted her.

> Weirdly, at the back of my head, I've always had this thought, I can never become famous… I'd never want to do that in case that picture surfaces [laughs]… it's always just been in the back of my head, 'what if', that I wouldn't want to ever become publicly known…. But it's the kind of thing that would've gone onto the internet, and then you have no control.

This demonstrates that while digital technology is certainly a catalyst to concerns about sexual imagery spreading, online environments are not entirely the problem. This would support those who argue that while the digital nature of non-consensual sexual image sharing certainly exacerbates the harm felt, it is not necessarily a direct catalyst for them (Hall & Hearn 2017). Beth has been concerned about the re-emergence of her image ever since she first found out it was shared- and while she notes it is the kind of thing that "would have gone onto the internet" now, the presence of online sharing would simply accelerate an existing fear. While online environments and a digital sharing culture certainly exacerbate the harms, it cannot be held solely responsible for them.

4.6 "Sick", "ill" and "gut-wrenching": embodied harms

While non-consensual sexual image sharing involves exposure of the digital representation of the body, many participants expressed a physical reaction to discovering their images had been shared. Within the data, there were a number of incidences where participants described the physical effect of non-consensual sexual image sharing upon the body. This contributes to Powell and Henry's (2017; 2015) argument that non-consensual sexual image sharing represents a form of 'digital embodiment', a lack of separation between the physical and virtual body. They state that "digital embodiment straddles a blurry line between the body and the mind, and the human and the machine" (2017, p.67), and accepting this concept is a key element of taking the harms of non-consensual sexual image sharing seriously.

Yasmin offered a clear example of the 'embodied' feeling of harm. She described her experience as:

> Well, when he told me, you know [about the image sharing]- have you ever been so nervous or something that you get like, a hot tingly feeling across your chest and down your arms?... It was absolutely gut-wrenching having to explain everything that had happened.

Katie expressed a similar sentiment upon finding out: "it just came from nowhere, and then it felt– you know, like, when your heart sinks and you just feel really sick". Beth's physical reaction was the greatest. She shared that in the year following her discovery of the sexual image sharing, she experienced:

> Not panic attacks, exactly, but it used to make me feel so ill that I wanted to throw up. I remember that… it definitely impacted my sleep for a while in the months afterwards and would make me feel very sick… it just made me feel ill, it made me feel really ill.

This suggests that the harms of non-consensual sexual image sharing have a very real and tangible effect upon the physical bodies of those affected. This is not just in emotions felt, but in feelings of nausea, sleeplessness and nerves. Beth's account of "not panic attacks, exactly" but similar enough to warrant the comparison, corroborates Bates's (2017) finding that some affected by non-consensual sexual image-sharing are later diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, along with other mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety. The impact and harms felt as a result of non-consensual sexual image sharing are therefore frequently embodied in the physical form of the person experiencing them- not remote, abstract sensations but ones felt in the guts, heart, and mind.

There also follows the potential for harm to move from the digital to the physical world. Sol's video was shown to his abusive ex-boyfriend, a person Sol described as being well-known "a quick-to rage, anger outburst, person. Like, even the people who are the closest to him know that he's not a person who takes things lightly". When Sol found out, one of his paramount concerns was the reaction of his ex-partner, and the potential ramifications that may have upon him:

> Basically he took the video, showed it to my ex, and he flipped out. My ex got very angry at this friend. But for all the wrong reasons [laughing] essentially, because he was jealous… at that point I was already fully no-contact with my ex, and I had been very clear with the friends there as well, because this was a very abusive relationship, so I had no interaction with my ex… I was worried that he would come and message me or

> find me even, because I was still in [ex's vicinity] at that point. I was just there for the winter break, and I was, for a few days, worried what would happen.

The idea that non-consensual sexual image sharing may incite physical harm from others is not a new one. Citron and Franks (2014) offer examples of affected people who live in fear they will be confronted 'offline' and cite this as one of the many reasons against the myth of revenge porn being a trivial experience. For Sol, the threat of physical interaction with his ex was a very real concern and provides more evidence that conceptualising non-consensual sexual image sharing as a solely 'digital' harm is insufficient.

For Grace, similarly, the after-effects of the image sharing had repercussions upon her physical body. When speaking about the impact of her experience, she said:

> It had me spiralling a bit, because I've dealt with quite a lot of sexual trauma. And I don't mind talking about it, because I'm not ashamed of my past and the things that were done to me, but one of the things at the time when I was healing, and this was during that time, was I would get hyper-sexual with dealing with things. So because of that, I spiralled, I took on more partners, and I got myself into a situation where I was raped and choked to the point where I nearly passed out. And I'm not saying that the fact that my nudes were leaked is why all of that happened, but it's not just as simple as 'getting over it'.

The sexual violation Grace experienced in having her sexual images shared led to her compensating with what she defines as 'hyper-sexuality'. Hypersexuality is a noted response to sexual violence for some, with some studies noting an increased likelihood of engaging in 'risky sexual behaviours', which has the consequence of placing these people at risk of further sexual victimisation (Marshall 2023; Weaver 2009). Grace is careful to specify that it wasn't simply the sharing of these images that caused this 'spiral', but that this experience, as part of a tapestry of sexual trauma, jeopardised her healing and placed her in a position where she experienced further sexual and physical harm. This once again demonstrates the fact that the physical 'body' is subject to harm as a result of non-consensual sexual image sharing; the impact it has can cause further damage in a range of ways

These examples offer evidence to support Henry and Powell's (2017; 2015) argument that technology-facilitated sexual violence has the potential to enact very real impact "both bodily and physical" (2015, p.765) upon those affected and should not be considered as a 'lesser harm' simply because it occurs in a virtual environment. The distinction between a physical and virtual form has been steadily broken down as our reliance on, and frequency of use of, technology has increased. We now inhabit:

> A thoroughly postmodern body in an intersubjective, rapidly changing digital world that is characterised by flesh, perception, subjectivity, feeling, emotion and relationality with other bodies as well as machines. Moreover, machines are increasingly becoming extensions of our bodies (both metaphysical and physical) and our relationships with others, leading to dramatic transformations in social relations, communications and identities (Powell & Henry 2017, pp.60–61).

In considering "a thoroughly postmodern body", the concept of a separation of virtual and physical representations of the self becomes redundant. The embodied harms displayed in this analysis emphasise the futility of attempting to separate the two – while Yasmin, Katie and Beth experienced no harm directly enacted against their body, their harms are nevertheless experienced in the 'flesh' (Plant 1998). Similarly, there is definitely a threat enacted upon the body in the 'aftershocks' of the image-sharing experience, which might manifest in ways such as fear of physical violence, 'risky sexual behaviours' (Marshall 2023; Weaver 2009), or other repercussions.

4.7 "He didn't mean to hurt me": intent to harm

Section 2.2 has highlighted how most existing terms for non-consensual sexual image sharing focus largely on the intent of the image sharer. Within the data, it was found that the perceived motivation of the person who shared the image is a factor in how a person categorises their experience, and has a further impact upon the scale, scope, and extent of harm experienced.

For some who thought the image had not been shared with malicious intent, the lack of intended harm lessened the actual harm experienced. Nathan described the person who shared his images in one incident, a person he was "somewhat dating", as "just this lad who, you know, was mostly harmless, he made a mistake". This position of relatively innocent motivations on the behalf of the image sharer was a large part of how Nathan conceptualised his own experience. Nathan placed himself at the "low" end of an imagined scale of severity (see section 4.2), clearly citing a lack of malicious intent as reason for this:

> This is on a scale. And of the scale of experiences mine are both reasonably low down… if it's 'proper revenge porn' [air quotes], I guess it makes more of an impact on your day-to-day life because the idea is to hurt the person and obtain some emotional response, whereas in both my cases I don't think there was even an intention of provoking an emotional response.

Nathan went on to explain specifically that "his [the image-sharer's] motivation for sharing this was more, 'look at this interesting stuff I've got up to', rather than 'let's make Nathan feel shit and get revenge". In describing his experience in this way, Nathan clearly demonstrates that the intention of the image-sharer has contributed to his assessment of the impact of the incident.

A lack of malicious intent can clearly lessen the harmful impact of non-consensual sexual image sharing for several reasons. Firstly, and perhaps obviously, it is easier to rationalise a harmful experience when you have been harmed by 'mistake', as Nathan has, when compared to a deliberate desire to cause injury. Secondly, it is easier to correct mistaken, rather than malicious, behaviour. It's important to note that while Nathan considered his image-sharer's behaviour to be non-provoking, he still identified it as inappropriate, both in the interview and in confrontation with him: "well, he was a dickhead, but… I confronted the guy… I called him out, and there's not a lot else to do with it, I don't think". Thirdly, an intention to share images for non-malicious reasons is easier for an affected person to understand. Nathan assesses his image-sharers motivations as a desire to "show off" the content they created together, content Nathan described as material he was "proud" of and would have considered sharing if permission had been asked for.

Sol described his own image-sharer's motivations in a similar way:

> To this day I don't fully blame him [the image sharer]. Because I know he probably just didn't understand the gravity of it… I'm positive he didn't mean to hurt me… he probably, most definitely, doesn't understand what was wrong with it… what has happened here was someone wanting to brag about a cool thing that happened, so like, the feeling was positive about it. It was still hurtful, but the feeling behind it was positive… this person wasn't shaming me or slut-shaming me, they were just having fun [laughs]. And taking a video of us having fun, which wasn't okay, but also wasn't mean-spirited.

Similarly to Nathan's image sharer, Sol expresses his belief that the intention was to show off or brag about the sexual act, rather than to maliciously harm the person depicted. This offers evidence to support Waldman's (2019) research, which noted that queer men may not understand the privacy invasion inherent in sharing sexual images without consent- the normalisation of sexual image exchange in this community allows for this act to be perceived as less of a violation. Furthermore, we can again see illustrated in Sol's account the notion that a lack of malicious intent has lessened the amount of harm felt. That is not to say it has

rendered the experience neutral, but from Sol's perspective, the impact has been lessened by the fact his image-sharer was misguided rather than "mean-spirited".

At one point in our interview, I asked Nathan, who had overall been rather unharmed by his experiences of non-consensual image sharing, if there were any contexts in which he felt the impact might have been more severe.

> The only thing that I think I would be properly unhappy about would be if my family saw the photos, or found the videos, or if it was sent to them. That would have a much more malicious undertone I guess… at least I'm 'out' to my parents. I could imagine it would be worse for people who weren't out… that adds an extra leverage of blackmail on it.

While both of Nathan's actual situations involves the sharing of images for what are most likely voyeuristic reasons, a more 'malicious' act of sharing sexual content with the intent of deliberately exposing Nathan's sexual identity to his family, or for the purposes of blackmail, would have more potential to cause him harm (Gilden 2023). This relates to section 4.5- Nathan's account here is that of a potential outward repercussion, a wider-reaching side effect that would make Nathan's experience significantly worse.

This offers further evidence to support the argument that context is an important factor in determining the harms felt as a result of non-consensual sexual image sharing, particularly when it comes to queer men. Queer men have spaces which are relatively free of sex-related stigma and where sexual image exchange is normalised (Gilden 2023); images shared in this space, while still a violation, can easily be considered as an act of 'showing off' rather than an act of malicious harm. Sharing *outside* of these spaces- as Nathan indicates, such as sharing to his family, or as with Yasmin's transgender partner, which was discussed in section 4.5-- goes outside of these safe boundaries, and would be more impactful. This is perhaps why research in this area has rarely covered experiences of reduced harm. It has largely focused on women, who are generally not privy to sex-positive and judgement-free spaces in the same way men are; images shared publicly will automatically expose women to a culture that demeans and shames their sexuality, regardless of whether the image sharer intended to do this or not (Plaha & Panorama 2022; Aborisade 2021; Marwick 2017; Gavey 2005).

Due to the nature of non-consensual sexual image sharing, it is sometimes impossible to assess who has shared the images, let alone what their motivations were for doing so. A lack of understanding about why the content has been shared can be even more harmful than circumstances where the motivations are clear, be it malicious or not. Katie, who had images taken from her social media accounts by an unknown person and posted to a pornographic

website with personal and derogatory commentary, demonstrated in her interview that the 'mystery' of who shared her images and why exacerbated the harm she felt.

> The fact that we never found out, or it never felt like there was a resolution… it never really felt like it came to a culmination of understanding, why somebody did that. Or why they chose those photos or those comments, or *us* [emphasis]… it felt very, very, targeted, to have all those photos and information about me… calling me by name, it wasn't obviously just random, somebody knew my name or knew small things about me. So it feels like it could be somebody that we really know, and then… who would do that? Who do we know that would do that to us? Is it meant to be a joke? Is it funny to them? Is it some kind of prank? It's not funny to us.

The unknown intentions of Katie's image sharer- she considers both malicious and non-malicious intent and evaluates the likelihood of each- is something she still considers now, years after the image sharing incident. In contrast to the experiences of Nathan, who was able to identify, understand, and confront his image-sharer about their behaviour, Katie is unable to reach this kind of conclusion; there is no closure or final note to her experience. The idea of not knowing 'why' was found in other accounts. Sol found the image-sharing "deeply puzzling", Simon "unbelievably short-sighted", and Toby found the motivations of his image-sharer confusing: "it's really hard to pin down whether he's intentionally being malicious, or if he just genuinely took it a little bit too far without thinking. It's honestly a 50-50". This is a contributing factor to the lack of temporality that often occurs when sexual images are shared without consent. Where participants are unable to assess why this was done to them, they get none of the reassurance of knowing it couldn't happen again. In describing this continued state of anxiety, Katie said: "this could probably happen to you at any time, and you wouldn't know. It could be happening to me now, and I just don't know".

Of course, not knowing *who* has done this to you– in addition to the *why*– is another exacerbating factor in causing harm and impeding trust. Katie described the anxiety of knowing that someone you know has done this to you, but not knowing who:

> The idea that people that are supposed to be close to you, or care for you, can do that to you, is awful… you kind of lose a bit of faith in humanity to think people are violating us in that way.

Not knowing who has shared your images contributes to a climate where anyone who is close enough to have access to your images becomes a potential suspect. Katie's potential pool of image-sharers was larger than in the average experience of non-consensual sexual images, because her pictures were not inherently sexual in nature and she had felt comfortable sharing

some of them within her social networks. Katie took the typical precautions for a social media user regarding this, noting in the interview:

> We have social media, and everything's all set to private, some of these photos will be from social media. And I was like, some of those [images], I don't know if I have put them on social media anyway. So where have they got the photos from?

The impact of not knowing the image-sharer, for Katie, manifested in a few ways. One of these was a generally pessimistic view of the world, one she was clear to tell me didn't happen all the time but generally occurred when she was thinking about her experience.

> In a way maybe it's a good thing that I don't know [who did it], because I'm not like, 'oh, they did that to me, that person did that to me'. But then sometimes I think it would be nice to channel it somewhere [laughing] instead of just thinking that the world's out to get me, because you don't know where it's come from. Whereas at least if you know it's one person, you're like, 'they did that. And they did a bad thing, but it doesn't mean that everybody will do a bad thing'. But I don't really have that.

Here, Katie is demonstrating the importance of closure and reaching a resolution to move forward from the image sharing experience. Without it, she is faced with the prospect of considering which member of her social network did this to her, and dwelling on this any time she is reminded of her image-sharing experience. This naturally takes a toll on one's ability to perceive the world positively.

I asked Katie if she ever suspected anyone in particular and she discussed that there was one person she considered; a friend that sometimes displayed "aggressive" behaviour and whom Katie had distanced herself from as a result. Katie felt incredibly conflicted about her assessment of this person as a potential image-sharer. She felt unable to confront this person about his involvement.

> You feel like you're overthinking it all, because you don't know? And yes, he said some horrible things to me, but it doesn't mean he did that. Is it really awful of me to think that he did that? [laughing] But I don't know! And this is what I mean, it makes you question things, it makes you question people.

The uncertainty of not knowing who did this to her has contributed to Katie's experience of harm. Alongside a general sense of pessimism and the feeling that "the world is out to get her", Katie will always be considering who in her life might have hurt her this way. Inevitably, this causes feelings of guilt- it is not a positive experience to consider which of your friends and acquaintances intended to do you harm, and inevitably this provokes feelings of stress.

Similarly to section 4.5.2, where the enduring nature of the image was discussed as a factor of harm, this enduring mystery is a lasting factor in Katie's experience.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to offer a clear perspective on what it means to be 'harmed' by the experience of having sexual imagery shared without consent. It establishes that response to this experience can be identified on a 'scale' of harm, which incorporates minor and major incidences of harm. Moving away from a trauma- based model of harm to one which "centre[s] everyday experiences" (Vera-Gray & Fileborn 2018, p.86) has therefore been effective in allowing these more 'minor' harms the space to be voiced and acknowledged. While some may be 'traumatised' or 'upset', others may be 'irritated' or 'annoyed', all of which should be considered as valid responses to this phenomenon (Gavey 1999). The 'scale of harm' also demonstrates a difficulty in owning or claiming one's degree of harm, indicating that there is a difficulty in accepting that this experience is indeed a harmful one. A level of dissonance was at times felt between what participants expressed as their experience, and what they felt they *should* be feeling. This additionally offers evidence in favour of the presence of myths around non-consensual sexual image sharing, identifying a gap between public perception and actual lived experience of this phenomenon (Harper et al. 2022).

Additionally, this chapter offers evidence to support the argument that non-consensual sexual image sharing is a form of sexual violence, as per Kelly's (1988) continuum of sexual violence (McGlynn et al. 2017). This link was made by participants drawing clear links between this experience and other forms of sexual violence, situating them in the same gender-based power structures (Powell & Henry 2014). In addition, this experience was highlighted to be a gendered experience- it draws on dominant ideologies of femininities and masculinities to shape the way this experience is felt, for both male and female participants.

Furthermore, this chapter outlined factors that affect how harm is experienced. It argues that harm is shaped by pre-agreed boundaries, suggesting that it is a breach of these boundaries that incites feelings of harm, rather than the sharing of the image itself. Additionally, it suggests that the intent of the image-sharer has a bearing on how hurtful the experience was. This has clear links to the concept of trust, which will be discussed further in section 5.3. Finally, it highlighted that the harms of non-consensual sexual image sharing are both deep and far-reaching. The chapter highlights factors previously outlined by research into technology-facilitated sexual violence, arguing that the 'enduring' nature of the image- the

omnipresent nature of images shared online- exacerbates harms (Henry & Powell 2018; Henry & Powell 2015). It also argues that the experience is far-reaching into a person's social circle, resulting in a degree of 'secondary victimisation'. Additionally, it offers evidence in favour of 'embodied harms', an argument which asserts there is very little difference between harms enacted on the 'physical' body versus the 'digital' one.

5.0 Loss

5.1 Introduction

Non-consensual sexual image sharing can be fundamentally characterised by a sense of loss. It detracts from those who experience it, leaves them with less than they had before. This begins with loss of control of the image. Both Bate's (2017) and McGlynn et al.'s (2020) study found that loss of control was a significant consequence of being victimised by non-consensual sexual image sharing. What occurs in the immediate aftermath is what I am terming a loss of reaction- participants express a desire to act in some way, either by reporting the incident or expressing anger, but are ultimately unable to do so due to fear of further repercussion or sharing of the image. In terms of longer-impact losses, there are three of note. The first is loss of reputation, and within this a loss of humanity by being 'objectified'. Participants are subject to real or imagined damage to their reputation and must navigate this post-reputation world carefully. Next is loss of trust, which affects how participants interact with others and build relationships based on the impact to their ability to have faith in others. Last is the loss of 'digital freedoms', which centres on the participants' limited ability to exist online freely post-image sharing.

Bate's (2017) study invokes the work of Frazier (2003), whose work approaches the concept of 'loss of control' following experiences of sexual assault from a temporal model. Frazier divides loss of control into three categories. The first is past control, referring to the incident itself; the second is present control, referring to the current aftermath of the incident, and the final is future control, referencing perceived or imagined developments beyond the incident. This presents a neat framework onto which to approach the presence of loss within the dataset. Losses found in the data are either derived from the incident of image-sharing itself (5.2- loss of control of the image), from the immediate way in which one reacts to or experiences the effects of the image sharing (5.3- loss of reaction), and how this experience shapes one's life long-term (5.4-5.6).

5.2. "It felt really out of control": loss of the image

We will first examine what Frazier (2003) refers to as past control. Past control refers to the ways in which the incident itself resulted in feelings of being 'out of control'. Frazier refers to

the many ways in which a feelings of a lack of control displayed by people affected by sexual assault can manifest in feelings of self-blame, which is also relevant for the experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing and will be covered in more detail in section 6.5. This section, however, seeks to highlight the ways in which the image-sharing was described in the dataset as a 'loss of control'. This was both in the initial loss of the image, and the ways in which the incident triggered feelings that others had gained control over them.

Ownership of one's image- both in terms of *direct* ownership of a tangible piece of media, and in a sense of being in control of one's 'image' in a broader sense- are relevant for discussion here. In legal terms with regards to media, the person who took the image typically 'owns' it, and it is not unheard of for copyright law to be invoked in legal discussions around non-consensual sexual image sharing (Citron & Franks 2014; Levendowski 2014b). With Katie, whose images were taken from her social media and posted elsewhere, she very clearly considered herself the owner of the images.

> It's my life. It's my body. It's my picture…. [but] somebody took those pictures without my permission and said all those horrible things. And put them on a website, without my permission… it felt really out of control, I guess. It was scary.

The description of these images as being "taken" and "used", alongside her emphasis regarding her lack of choice in the matter, emphasises the concept of these images as something which was 'stolen' from her. Katie also notes that the loss of the image felt 'out of control', something we will touch on later.

Sol also noted how the concept of ownership applied in his own images. As discussed in section 4.7, Sol asserted that his image-sharer had not acted maliciously. He noted that because his image-sharer was the one to record the content, he assumes that he doesn't perceive anything wrong with showing it to others: "If I'm speaking from his [the image-sharer's] perspective: 'here's this video of me having sex with Sol, right? So, if I'm sharing it and I'm the person having sex, that must be fine, right?". Here we see a clash in the principles of ownership, as both Sol and his image-sharer are both depicted in the content recorded, and Sol's image-sharer was the one recording it. Sol said of being recorded without his consent- speaking in general terms of being recorded at *any* time without permission, "even outside of sex":

> I hate it. People are just existing and didn't consent to being in your video. I know in different countries there's different laws about what you can take- I don't know what the UK law is- I think in Italy, you cannot take videos or pictures where anyone is

> recognizable. But that's not enforced unless someone sues, so it still happens, it's just like, the law does not allow you to do it.

Sol's account here displays a problem with some discussions around non-consensual sexual image sharing which focus on ownership of the image itself. While in some cases the owner is very clear, in Sol's case the image itself as a tangible piece of media is subject to joint ownership between himself and the image-sharer. What has been lost here is control of his image in a broader sense- the right to deny consent to appear in the footage or restrict where it was shared. While Sol invokes legal discussion here, he also notes that this is futile as it is so difficult to enforce. Levendowski's discussion (2014b, pp.426–427) on the futility of using copyright law to combat 'revenge porn' echoes this sentiment: "Once a single, sexually explicit image is posted, the uploader loses control of the image". Ultimately, any original ownership is voided as soon as the image is distributed, particularly if the image is shared publicly online.

Patella-Ray (2018) notes that in many accounts of non-consensual sexual image sharing, little distinction is made between an image of the body and the body itself- images become an *extension*, rather than simply a *representation*, of the form. They argue that the greatest harm from this experience comes from the violation of our bodily integrity, which they define as the assumption that: "we have a privileged relationship to our own bodies– a right to determine what happens to them and, above all, how other people relate to them" (2018, p.787). This perhaps explains why technical or legal ownership of an image is irrelevant. The physical representation of a body *becomes* our body, and therefore the sharing of it results in a loss of bodily autonomy.

Nathan also expressed a sense of loss of control following the image-sharing. Nathan said this in relation to his first incident, where he was unknowingly recorded having sex:

> After the shock, I kind of thought it was quite funny, more than anything else… it was out of my control at that point, I guess there wasn't loads to do. So it was better to find it funny than anything else.

Nathan's reaction to the image sharing as 'funny' stems not solely from finding the experience humorous, but from the loss of control of the situation, which he acknowledges by addressing the limited options available at the time. Bates (2017) also acknowledged humour as a coping mechanism amongst revenge porn victims to "lighten the mood" (p.38). We might infer here that Nathan's choice to find humour in the situation "because it was better to find it funny than anything else" is a sort of 'gallows humour' in the face of a situation he cannot control.

While Nathan expressed this loss of control relatively neutrally, in others the loss of control was depicted quite clearly as not simply a loss but a *removal* of control, a powerlessness created by the gaining of power by another person. With Beth, for instance, she said that having the image taken and shared was:

> My most shameful thing that I had [choked up]. But weird, because I'm a really exuberant, outgoing person. And, you know, I don't feel shame about a lot of things. But it was because it was out of my control, because it was something that I didn't have any power over, or say in… [it was shameful] someone having that control over you.

We can see here that this loss of control had a significant impact on Beth, causing her feelings of shame that contradict her usual personality. Her framing of the images as "someone having that control over you" situates this loss of control within a hierarchy of power. In Beth's case, as her photos were created by the person who shared the image, this loss of power is two-fold- the perpetrator took control of Beth's image in photographing her and exercised this control by distributing it without Beth's 'say'. Much like Patella-Ray (2018), McGlynn and Rackley (2017, p.535) identify one of the key violations of 'image-based sexual abuse as the "loss of dignity, privacy and sexual autonomy", all of which can be found in this broader term of someone- as Beth states- "having that control over you".

The ability for these images to be 'used' by others without your consent has the potential to be particularly damaging, because they can be used to perpetuate narratives or ideas you do not agree with or consent to. While in Katie's case this 'use' without her consent was for sexual purposes (which will be discussed further in 5.4), in Greg's case his sexual images were used in a malicious attack on his character. Greg's ex-partner sent content which had been recorded consensually while the two were together to Greg's new girlfriend, with the clear intent of disrupting the new relationship. Greg accounted aftermath of the image sharing as follows:

> The girl [ex-partner] that sent the photos, she knew my routine and everything… so it was dead easy for her to be like, 'this is what happened, he still comes over and sees me, what are you doing with my partner', and I didn't have a good way of defending myself there at all, it was my word against somebody else's word who was going into extreme detail… and these photos are there. So I didn't stand a chance at all, because, even if I had a way of proving it, in her [current partner's] head it was like, 'I don't want this much drama from a relationship that's just started'.

Understandably, this had a severe impact on Greg. Similarly to Katie and Beth, he expressed the sentiment of control being taken from him: "I didn't really know what to do, I just felt, completely fucking powerless with it and it was just– she's sent these to my new partner– that was it. What do I do in this situation?" Greg's account here expresses the futility in fighting- the statement "that was it" expresses just how easy it was for Greg's ex-partner to discredit him, and how futile engaging in a 'he said, she said' battle was. Greg's example illustrates the clear link between control over a person's sexual images and control over that person more broadly. The presence of the images, at least from Greg's perspective, was a key part of making the false narrative convincing- he repeats twice that the fact "these photos were there" made his ex-girlfriend's claims very hard to refute. This appeals to the argument of the power of the image, the notion that visual representations offer proof that other forms of information do not (Sontag 1979) even if this 'proof' is a misrepresentation of the truth. Butler (2007, p.960) echoes this statement, while additionally acknowledging the power of photography to present specific 'types' of reality:

> If the photo represents reality, which reality is it that is represented?... So we are seeing what is true in the sense that this really happened, and yet, the truth of what we see has already been selected for us, and in that way we do not know precisely where the happening begins and ends.

Through Butler's example, we can see how the 'reality' of Greg's images was manipulated. The images depicted a 'truth' in the sense that they depicted something that actually happened, but this 'truth' has been carefully constructed and presented by Greg's ex-partner. The power of these images can't be denied here; Greg felt powerless to defend against them, his partner at the time was convinced by them, and ultimately, this led to a breakdown of his relationship. The sexual images in the control of a malicious actor had a severe impact on Greg's life that he was impossible to defend against, robbing him of control of his own "sexual autonomy" (Citron 2019; McGlynn & Rackley 2017). From this data, we can surmise that having sexual images shared without consent can result in feelings of having a loss of control, both over the image itself and over the wider repercussions that may come from the distribution of the image.

5.3 "It's easier to forget than fight": loss of reaction

Continuing in the use of Frazier's (2003) framework, this section moves to 'present' losses of control, which deals with the immediate aftermath of an incident. This section speaks to forms of control which are:

> Focused on the present and on what one can do about the impact of the event now rather than on whether the event could have been avoided in the past or can be avoided in the future (2003, p.1258).

Within the data, these present forms of control manifested largely in two ways- a desire to regain control by managing one's reaction to the image-sharing, and a loss of control over one's reputation (which will be covered in section 5.4). In the aftermath of an incident of non-consensual sexual images-sharing, participants expressed a contrast between their *desired* course of action and the *actual* course available to them. They felt unable to express their feelings, act against the image-sharer, or seek justice for their experience. The period immediately following the loss of the image offers little space for those affected to regain control.

Within the data, a number of participants had experiences where their imagery was shared to a website- two to social media, three to pornographic websites. In every circumstance where this was an option, participants tried in some way to get their images taken down. This is a recommended course of action for those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing where the images have been shared publicly online, however it is met with varying degrees of success- websites can be inconsistent with their takedown policies and practices (Citron & Franks 2014). This was found in the dataset- the process was more successful for some than for others. In Yasmin's case, the images were uploaded to Facebook and Instagram for just a short period of time, although it is unclear whether the social media sites were responsible for the prompt removal, or if the image sharer took them down himself: "we reported it on social media… and everything was taken down within like the hour it was posted anyway." For Grace, similarly, this process of removing images from a "swingers website" was quite simple- Grace and another person "spammed the website until they took it down". For Greg, however, the reporting process was much more drawn out:

> It was on Facebook for ages as well- some of the stills [of the video] were on Facebook. And they didn't get taken down for *ages* [stretched out for emphasis]. I would report them, or other people had reported them, or my partner at the time had reported them, they just stayed there for ages. Cos Facebook, you know. It's a bot programme.

The role of social media in preventing or removing sexual images shared without consent is well debated (Henry & Powell 2018; Franks 2017b; Henry & Powell 2015). Although distributing such content on platforms like Facebook is banned, sites which rely on content provided by users struggle to control the uploading of this imagery, and sites can further

decline requests to have images taken down (Oppenheim 2024; Rose 2018; Franks 2017b). The action taken of reporting imagery to the outlet which hosts it is one of the few ways in which a participant can attempt to gain control over their image again- although of course, they have little recourse beyond this request and must rely on supportive website policies and practices. The recent Online Safety Bill is seeking to enact changes in this area, but it is too soon to determine their effectiveness (Ofcom 2025)

The question of the responsibility of the host website to manage such content also applies to adult sites. In 2020, a New York Times article (Kristof, 2020) gave voice to several people who were sexually assaulted as children and later found footage of their abuse on the adult website *PornHub*, owned by the company MindGeek. Nathan had his footage shared to [redacted], an adult site also owned by MindGeek, and faced some difficulty getting the footage taken down:

> We made some effort to get the videos taken down, but it was quite tricky… I gave up quite quickly, I won't lie. One of the issues was the anonymity actually, well– you know, relative anonymity. When we were dealing with the website, they wanted some more evidence that it actually was me in the video, and that was quite hard to give.

This burden of proof is an especially concerning request in light of the fact that the page contained a number of videos which Nathan felt were also shared without consent, and it was on behalf of concern for these parties, more for concern for himself, he reported the content:

> I wouldn't have been able to find out who these people were, but there were lots of videos where the camera– you know, I [wasn't] aware that this camera was there, it's from the same camera angle, so I assumed that it was a similar story with these people, that they weren't aware of it.

In Nathan's case, regaining control of his imagery was a bar ultimately made unreachable by the terms of the website. Claiming ownership of a video which wasn't recorded by you and in which your participation cannot be easily proved ultimately means that efforts to control it become futile. While [redacted] has now closed down- something Nathan theorises comes from a "lack of money", perhaps as a result of their decision to remove a number of unverified videos in the wake of the backlash (Scheller 2015)- it demonstrates how the online pornographic industry can contribute to withholding control from the people involved. Nathan's story further echoes the experiences of several gay men who found themselves on an online forum[2] dedicated to sharing sexual images of men. In trying to get these images taken down, those affected had to jump through several hoops, including proving their identity; those who failed

[2] As this website is still live, its name has been omitted.

were faced with cruel taunts, and in some cases had further personal information shared on the site (Beresford 2018; Rose 2018). This cavalier attitude towards non-consensual sexual image sharing further offers evidence that websites are complicit in removing control from those affected.

In addition to the difficulties in reporting the images to websites, participants expressed a tension between the desire to 'fight' back against what had happened to them- such as confronting the perpetrator or reporting them to authorities- versus the desire to allow the incident to become 'forgotten'. This is not uncommon amongst survivors of sexual violence; a desire to 'forget' about the experience or being unable to meet the emotional demands of formally responding to it can override any desire to report the experience (Stewart et al. 2024; Reich, Anderson & Maclin 2022). Participants expressed on a few different occasions the sentiment that what they wanted was for the images to be made completely absent from their lives. Beth described how her experience "was just one of those things I brushed off". Similarly, Toby's initial reaction to the experience was that "I didn't really know how to react, I just tried to kind of forget about it". When asked in an ideal world, what outcome he would want from the experience, Greg answered:

> At the time when you're so angry you want 'an eye for an eye' kind of response. So you want something embarrassing to happen to them, but in hindsight the only thing I really wanted was for just these pictures to not exist, just to be gone- I wanted the photos to be gone and the videos to be gone, and I just wanted that person to have absolutely no input in my life at all.

We can see some of the tension between 'fighting' versus 'forgetting' here- Greg's desire for the images to be 'gone' (as in, to never reappear again) overrides a desire for retribution. Simon's experience was similar:

> In an ideal world, that picture never re-emerges. And it's never talked of again. And that would be the ideal outcome for me… I didn't want this to be one of *those* [talked about] things. So I was just like, forget about it- well, not forget about it, but, don't make a big deal out of this, and just try and laugh it off and move on, and hopefully it's forgotten about.

The reasons behind this desire to forget were varied. In some, there was a desire to 'downplay' the experience, to make accepting and moving on from it easier. As Grace argues:

> I was like, 'right, I'm just gonna forget about it now. Move forward'. In my mind, worse things have happened. That's what we're taught to do, we're taught to downplay those experiences, especially women. It's easier to forget than fight, which kind of sucks.

'Downplaying' experiences of sexual violence is not uncommon, particularly among those affected who choose not to report their experience (Kahn et al. 2003). Grace's reference to 'especially women' is perhaps a reference to the ways in which sexual violence is made a normal, rather than an extraordinary, interaction between men and women (Bates 2014; Gavey 2005). Powell and Henry (2017, p.28) additionally argue that sexual violence online is particularly 'downplayed'- 'digital forms of sexual violence and harassment [are] regularly dismissed, minimised or excused as 'normal' online behaviour'. As such, in many cases the easiest way to react is in not reacting at all.

This desire to 'downplay' experiences continued into Simon's account.

> Very quickly I realised that if I displayed that [irritation], if I responded in anger, then that would make it more of a memorable event. Do you see what I mean? And I just wanted this to be forgotten straight away. Well, as soon as possible.

Simon's notion of the image sharing as a 'memorable event' speaks to the desire to limit the reach and scale of this experience from the perspective of others. If we accept Patella-Ray's (2018) argument that non-consensual sexual image sharing is a violation of bodily autonomy, and this is defined not just by what is *done* to our bodies, but additionally how others *relate* to our bodies. Simon's desire to render his experience a less "memorable event" can be interpreted as an attempt to retrieve control of the way he is being related to by those who had seen the image.

Downplaying the incident may also be a more palatable way to react in certain circumstances. Simon said that "on the WhatsApp group [where the images were shared], I tried to avoid responding… I just had to try and laugh it off". Downplaying sexual violence is common in male victims- a reluctance or inability to claim harm, as discussed in section 4.3, may contribute to shaping how a man reacts to sexual violence (Javaid 2016; 2015). Research that endeavours to create a more comprehensive comparison between gendered reactions to non-consensual sexual image sharing may benefit from examining the potential for this further.

Downplaying may also be shaped by the 'jokey' nature of the image sharing, in Simon and Greg's case. 'Laughing off" the incident contributes to presenting the act as a joke, as was intended by the image-sharer, rather than as a genuine act of harm. Situating these incidences in 'lad culture', which perpetuates gender inequalities against men and women under the guise

of humour, will be discussed more in section 6.6. However, we can discuss here how failing to accept 'jokes' or 'banter' is met poorly within such circles, and can ultimately make the experience worse (Fishman, Nielsen & Esthappan 2023; Nichols 2018).

This can be seen in Greg's first experience of image sharing, where the images were being shared by a group of his friends as a 'prank', and reaction to the experience with any kind of earnestness simply spurred them on:

> There were about six people at the time that were doing it. One of them I ended up in like, a physical confrontation with… it was all just sort of like, 'what the fuck, why are you doing this, it's causing all these problems for me', and I did try messaging them and things like that, but a lot of the time they were just playing it up- it was part of the joke, and my reaction just made it more appealing for them to continue the joke on.

Here we can see that any attempt to confront the image-sharers, or to get them to acknowledge what had been done as a serious incident, was futile. Greg's attempt to take any control of his reaction to the situation was met with little reward.

In Greg's second incident of image-sharing, where the imagery was shared by his ex-girlfriend, Greg expressed further frustration about any form of action may instigate further action on her part:

> I was thinking, if I retaliate or if I report it, is that going to make it worse? Because I don't want to aggravate her. I'll tell you one thing I felt about it, I've never felt it before, it was just like total, impotent rage- I was so angry and ashamed and powerless, knowing that anything I did would only make it worse.

In Greg's first experience, his attempts to control the situation were futile, and in his second, attempts to do so were deemed too hazardous. The notion that action 'would only make things worse' demonstrates that navigating the aftermath of image-sharing can be a risky and impossible task, and Greg's use of the terms 'impotence' and 'powerlessness' speaks to the way this inability to act made him feel. Fear of retribution is, again, common in those affected by sexual violence (Taylor 2018; Aakvaag et al. 2016).

In addition to Greg's account, Simon, Grace and Sol expressed the sentiment that addressing the image-sharing in any way may escalate the incident and hence managed their reactions to minimise this fallout. For Grace and Sol, their decision not to report their experience to anyone or confront their image-sharer was motivated by a desire to preserve their peace. Sol said:

> I just felt like it was going to be more of a burden on me, than any of the impact it would have had. Because I know him, and he's not necessarily a very receptive person, or, erm- smart, frankly [laughing]. So I don't even know if he would have understood the nuance, even if I explained it to him, and I know it would have taken so much out of me, that the investment and outcome didn't feel worth it.

Grace similarly expressed:

> It's kind of a hard topic because actions should have consequences. But in the society we live in, they don't. Not in that regard, they don't. Because I could go through it, and I'm only gonna be ruining my life, it's gonna be more hardship for me, because they [the image-sharers] don't care. If they did, they wouldn't have done what they did…. to be honest, I feel like if I had reported that, and it would have been a very easy thing to do, I think it would have followed me and haunted me more than it has.

Sol's "burden" of reporting, and Grace's statement that it would "ruin her life", can also be found in wider research. Huber's (2023b) study on police responses to non-consensual sexual image sharing found that many who reported their experience expressed the ways in which this exacerbated their feelings of harm. A lack of anonymity, a lack of perceived concern from the police, and low sentences for perpetrators can all contribute to making formal reporting feel like further punishment. Much like in section 4.5, the idea of Grace being 'haunted' by this experience speaks to the enduring nature of this loss of control; the fastest route to regain even a semblance of control here is not through seeking compensation or or justice, but through moving on as soon as possible.

Simon's decision not to report his experience at work came from similar reasons. He expressed concern about being labelled as someone who makes a fuss.

> I could have made a massive deal out of it and, you know, it could have gone down a disciplinary route for somebody, but that would have potentially given me a name for myself in the [workplace] of, you know, trying to spoil someone's career and that kind of thing, and it could have had quite a damaging effect on someone's career, I imagine.

Getting a "name for oneself", and the impact to one's reputation after experiencing non-consensual sexual image-sharing, is something that will be discussed in section 5.4, and Simon's reluctance here to impact someone's career will also be discussed in section 6.4. Here, however, we can see how the burden of reporting risks causing further problems for Simon in both of these areas; reporting would place control of the situation in the hands of other parties, leading to consequences Simon would have little say in.

As a result, the data demonstrates the many difficulties in seeking to claim back control of images shared without consent. Those affected might fear further provoking their image sharer. They might be concerned that "making a massive deal of it", as Simon expresses the problem, might expose the incident to a wider audience or make the experience into a more memorable event for others. In some cases, they may decide that prioritising their peace is more important than seeking justice from an unjust system. We can determine here that the loss of control stretches beyond the original image sharing, into the aftermath of the image- the routes to claim back control are difficult to identify, hard to enact, and in some cases, more harmful to follow.

5.4 "You don't want that attached to your name": loss of reputation

Another 'present' form of loss (Frazier 2003) which manifested in the data was a loss of reputation. Many participants expressed concern about how the experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing affects the way you are perceived by others. It's a concern that an association with a sexual image- even one shared non-consensually- might manifest a loss of reputation, amongst friends, family, colleagues or romantic partners. McGlynn et al.'s (2020) study noted the harm of being seen as a 'sexual being' to those you do not wish to perceive you in this way. In some cases, the sexual images are shared with the deliberate intent to cause reputational damage, as was the case within the data set for both Greg and Yasmin. For others, this loss of reputation- or fear of such a loss- came simply from the association of the individual with a sexual image, and the implications of this sexual framing.

Both Greg and Yasmin had images shared without their consent with the intention of deliberately inflicting damage to their reputation. We have already discussed the ways in which Greg's images were manipulated in section 5.3 to present him as having cheated on his girlfriend, and from Greg's perspective, the image-sharing was an act deliberately intended to damage his reputation. Greg discussed how he felt compelled to defend his reputation, and the difficulties of doing so: "I couldn't deny it without making myself look more guilty, and as I was explaining what I was doing the night before, I then started thinking, 'well, would I believe that?". Greg's account here demonstrates the ways in which engaging with the loss of reputation- attempting to explain or defend oneself- can be futile. In Greg's account, denying the narrative- particularly when 'proof' has been put forward in favour of it- might only cause further damage to one's reputation. This parallels the limits of reacting to non-consensual

sexual image sharing, as discussed in 5.3, and demonstrates another way in which one's reaction to the images has the capacity to further increase the impact.

In Yasmin's case, the deliberate attempt to harm her reputation came in the form of exposing her and her [redacted] at the time as an escort, by posting screenshots of their escorting page to social media.

> On said screenshots, there [were] pictures of both of us [redacted], explaining what we do and who we are. Obviously under fake names, but he'd tagged both of us in it, so everyone we knew, on Facebook, on Instagram, could see everything... everyone found out: [redacted] some of them were like, 'oh, okay', and then others were like, 'oh, my fucking god'.

The 'tagging' function on social media allows for content about you- with or without your permission, depending on your settings- to be broadcast to your entire network. As Yasmin describes it, this includes close friends and family, but also "broader friendships". This demonstrates another way in which the digital nature of non-consensual sexual image sharing exacerbates the impact of the experience. In sharing this content online, Yasmin's image sharer was able to expose the screenshots to Yasmin's entire network instantly. Although in Yasmin's case these images were only live for a short period of time, this was enough time to expose the images to a significant number of people in Yasmin's social circle. One theory which can assist in our understanding here is Goffman's (1959) 'performance of the self', as applied to digital identities (Mendelson & Papacharissi 2011). This posits that the way we represent ourselves online is a carefully curated 'front stage' version of ourselves, which is 'audience specific'- therefore, we present different versions depending on who our viewers are. The loss of reputation comes from where these images are shown to a 'front stage' without our consent, or shown to a different 'audience' than intended. Yasmin's curated 'sex work' identity was displayed to the wrong audience, inviting judgement and scrutiny.

The images exposed both Yasmin's identity as an escort, and additionally her sexual identity as well. Yasmin further said:

> I've always been 'out' as well, I came out as bisexual, and then later figured it's not really a 'I like girls. I like guys', it's 'I like the people for who they are', so then came out as pansexual.

The exposure of this 'front stage' was less harmful to Yasmin, as she describes herself as 'always being out'- while the images may have been a surprise, Yasmin stated that this did not

alter how Yasmin was perceived to them: “my family didn't give a shit. They were just like, ‘alright. And?’”. [redacted] This highlights how the sharing of sexual images without consent has the capacity to move people between ‘front stage’ and ‘backstage’ presentations without their consent, erasing control over one’s identity.

While Greg and Yasmin display fairly extreme examples of the risk to reputation that comes from non-consensual sexual image sharing, in the case of other participants, this risk can come from simply being associated with a sexual image. In Simon’s case, while the images were shared as a ‘joke’ and, he believes, not shared with the deliberate intent to discredit him, he still expressed concern about how the images would affect people’s perception of him. Simon describes the impact of his image-sharing as such: “It was like panic, really. The initial feeling. And then utter humiliation. Because it’s not me at all, I don’t do that kind of thing.”

We can infer that when Simon refers to “that kind of thing”, he is referring to the act of taking and sharing nude images, something he is very clear to state is not a typical part of his character. Simon felt obliged to explain himself to those who had seen the images:

> I did [respond] a little bit, just to sort of explain what it was. Because out of context, it was just a picture of me naked, and that’s a bit strange. Why on earth is this picture on this other guy’s phone?

It is unclear what specific concern Simon has here with these images being on the phone of another man. Regardless, we can interpret that being seen to engage in “that kind of thing” was a fear for Simon, and he was concerned that an out-of-context nude picture might be perceived as “strange”. It is not unreasonable that Simon would be concerned about how a naked photo might be perceived. One area which overlaps with the study of non-consensual sexual image sharing is the sending of nude images without permission, sometimes known as ‘cyberflashing’ or the sharing of unsolicited nude images. A similarity between the two areas is a large body of literature that conceptualises men as perpetrators, and frames the unsolicited sharing of a sexual image as another form of technology-facilitated sexual violence (Durán & Rodríguez-Domínguez 2023; Karasavva et al. 2023; McGlynn & Johnson 2021; Mandau 2020; Paasonen, Light & Jarrett 2019; Hayes & Dragiewicz 2018). A nude image of a man out of context has the potential to be construed as a form of harassment, in a way that a woman’s nude image cannot- Simon’s ‘strangeness’ and desire to explain himself here might be motivated by a desire to counteract the potential threat inherent in a nude image of a man.

Simon additionally demonstrates that desire to contextualise these images was at odds with his desire to ignore them. He expressed the fear that discussing the images, even simply to defend himself, might contribute to him being a source of gossip in his workplace: "I didn't want it to then be a talking point across [workplace]. Because it is a rumour mill, really, in the [workplace]. Every [group] talks about various exciting things that are going on." As discussed in 5.3, Simon's options for reacting to his experience are limited- while he can choose to explain or contextualise the images, engaging with them too much will make the images a source of gossip, entering into the "rumour mill" of Simon's workplace and extending the experience further.

Of course, as Simon's images were shared in a professional environment, his fear that the image may impact his reputation was heightened. Katie expressed a similar fear. Katie discovered the images online when a friend who had also been targeted in the same incident discovered them. Crucially, the friend found the images by searching her own name online before a job search, and as the images had been uploaded with their full names and email addresses included, the images were attached to the personal details of them both. This naturally concerned Katie, even after the images had been taken down, that they may still be searchable and therefore found by a future employer:

> Even though it's [the image is] down, will they put it back up again? Will it still be traced- like, findable? If you google yourself, will that image still come up and it'll say underneath that it's on that website? Which, obviously, the website name was something with 'porn' in the title. And you don't want that attached to your name when you're going for a professional interview or whatever.

What is crucial in Katie's experience was that the images weren't sexual in nature and were images she had comfortably uploaded to social media before they were uploaded to an adult website by another party. The non-sexual nature of the image, however, does not prevent the reputation damage that might come from being associated with an adult website. It is this association with sexual content which is damaging in a workplace context.

Simon also expressed the fear that this could impact his career in the long term.

> It could re-emerge ten years from now, when I'm trying to get a senior management position or something like that. I'm not saying that would preclude me from getting that, but- out of context, a naked picture of somebody, that's going to stick in someone's mind, and it might actually be a choice between me and another person and I'm the one who's got naked pictures flying around, from ten years ago or whatever. And the other person hasn't, so, let's go with that one.

From Simon and Katie's accounts, we can infer that not only actual loss of reputation, but the *fear* of loss of reputation, are both aspects of this experience to be discussed. As images shared online cannot be completely erased from existence - the notion that they could return or be re-discovered means the fear of reputational loss can never go away.

Greg's account similarly expressed fear that the sexual content of his images might negatively affect how others perceive him. Some of the particular ways that Greg was concerned about reputational damage will be discussed further in section 6.4. However, Greg noted that his concern about who had seen the image emerged as what he called "paranoia". He stated:

> It got to the stage where people that I was close to, if I hadn't spoken to them a lot at that period, I was thinking that they had seen it and felt awkward about talking to me. And I started building up all these scenarios in my head about: 'have they seen it? Do they think of me differently now because they've seen this?' Or 'do they now think I'm weird', or 'do they think I've got these strange ways of looking at things'?

The imagining of the perceptions and opinions of others, without actual evidence of this judgement, demonstrates another example where temporality affects loss of control. Greg has no knowledge of who has seen his image, and therefore no ability to regain control of his reputation, leading to this eternal wondering. The factor of 'not-knowing'- never being sure that these images are gone, never certain about who has seen them- makes the impact on non-consensual sexual image sharing even greater. Without a finite end or conclusion to the incident, participants are left to worry about their loss of reputation in perpetuity.

5.4.1 "Being part of porn, without wanting to be part of it": objectification

The concept of being 'objectified' or reduced to an object was demonstrated by a few participants in the dataset. To be objectified is to experience a specific form of loss. Nussbaum (2011) defines objectification as a cluster concept, which includes being used as a tool or instrument, stripped of autonomy and subjectivity, rendered inert and 'interchangeable' with similar objects, and something able to own or violate at will. This loss is one of personhood and agency and manifests within the data as feelings of objectification.

While the concept of 'objectification', particularly being reduced to a sexual object, is often discussed in the context of women's bodies, this concept did not solely occur in women within my dataset. Toby had photographs taken beneath his clothing, and described his experience as:

> I felt humiliated, and like I was the butt end of a joke that didn't really involve my autonomy at all. It didn't feel like I was the punchline of the joke as a person, I was just the punchline of a joke in the same way that you might- I don't know, just laugh at something that looks funny.

Toby notes that the incident completely disregarded his autonomy. When the image-sharer took the photograph, he rendered Toby's body a joke, making him feel simply like "something that looks funny" rather than "a person". What is interesting to note here is that non-consensual sexual image sharing can objectify those depicted even if the purpose of the image-sharing is not overly sexual, but instead to humiliate. While not *sexual* objectification per se, the act of photographing Toby's body still reduced him to an object of ridicule and left him feeling like his personhood was denied.

The concept of being sexually objectified also occurred within my dataset. Sexual objectification is the act of reducing a person to a specifically *sexual* object, to be used for sexual purposes without regard for their own wants or desires. For Beth and Katie, this was expressed by feelings of being made into pornography, or, as Harder (2023) refers to it, being "pornified". Beth described her experience as such: "you don't ever want to feel the way I felt afterwards. It was really horrible. And knowing that strangers [had seen the image]- it's like being part of porn, without wanting to be part of it." For Beth, the photographing and distribution of her body without her consent sexually objectified her in a very specific way- it made her into "pornography".

This notion of being 'pornified' was discussed in Harder's (2023) work on image-based sexual abuse. Harder's work found that the sharing of these images to adult websites placed them in a new sexualised context, regardless of how explicit the original image was. This could be done either visually, by sharing the image alongside other forms of pornographic content or altering the image to include pornographic elements, or narratively, by presenting the image with text or dialogue that recalls pornographic tropes. Comment sections on adult sites are a particular site where this narrative discussion "pornifies" the image- areas of "rough, bawdy, lad-ish comradery" (2023, p.661) where the stolen image is dissected and discussed in a highly pornographic framing. Hader's work emphasises that the *context* of the image is what renders it 'pornified' more so than the content- making it public, sexual, and violating. Being 'pornified' represents a very specific form of objectification, and therefore a very specific loss of personhood, as sexual objectification removes both sexual agency and personal identity.

An important debate here is to what degree a sexual image taken by oneself can be considered as 'pornification'. While there are certainly those who would argue that sexual images, taken

in the context of wider cultural discourses around sex, are inherently dehumanising in a way which renders them 'pornified' (Orenstein 2016; Levy 2005), this is by no means the consensus. Amundsen's (2019) work on women's use of digital technology in relationships supports this idea, arguing that private sexual images- pictures taken for a specific and intimate audience- only become pornography once they are shared beyond this intimate context: "private sexual images thus become pornography not because of their locution, but because of their contextually informed interpretation" (p.485). The application of this theory will be examined in the analysis of the data.

The act of being 'pornified', and the subsequent objectification, is present in a few accounts within my data set. In the case of one participant, Nathan, he notes that his sexual content was shared alongside "a lot of amateur stuff", and that his sexual content was presented as 'amateur pornography'. The use of the 'amateur' label is a known form of presenting stolen sexual content as a legitimate form of pornography. Much like the discussion on the use of the term 'revenge pornography' (see section 2.2), applying pornographic labels to stolen sexual content not only disregards the content of the imagery, it reframes it entirely. In presenting sexual footage of Nathan without his consent as 'amateur' pornography, Nathan's image-sharer very literally 'pornified' him, presenting a violation as a consensual sexual act.

'Pornification' is most obviously clear in Katie's experience, who had non-explicit images shared to an adult website. Katie explained what happened to her as follows:

> None of the pictures [of me] are explicit pictures. But obviously, then they're next to explicit pictures on this site, and it's got our faces. And for some of us it's got our names… so it was pictures of me, and then the caption things underneath of *their* [the image-sharer's] thoughts about me and those pictures. And then it would be [pictures] of my friend, and you'd keep scrolling, and then at the bottom of the page was the comments section for public comments. So on that bit, there was obviously comments about all of us.

Katies' account presents several elements which demonstrate 'pornification'. The first is in the presentation of the images. By uploading Katie's images to an adult website, the perpetrator changed their context- he made them pornographic in this sharing. The motivations of the image sharer- and indeed, the people who subsequently viewed and commented on her image- was a source of discomfort for Katie:

> I think it was confusing trying to understand what somebody would get out of that- did people find those things explicit? Even though we were fully clothed… are people looking at that and thinking of it in a sexual way? And that's why they've put it on this

> site? … I don't associate it with *that,* so, I think it felt quite strange thinking, 'oh, other people might be looking at me *like that*'.

Although of course we cannot fully understand the perpetrator's motivations, Katie's perspective is that her images were shared at least in part for sexual reasons- the commentary that accompanies her stolen images, coupled with the comments from other users, would suggest this is an accurate assumption. Based on Harder's (2023) work, we might argue that the mere presentation of these images on this adult site was enough to render them pornographic. Harder argues that "social media selfies thereby become situated as something pornographic by being used for the same cultural script as porn, namely male arousal, masturbation and climax" (2023, p.658). While in Hader's work this refers to a far more explicit presentation of social media selfies and masturbation (so-called 'cum tributes' (McGlynn et al. 2019), where the stolen image is depicted alongside imagery of a person masturbating or ejaculating), in Katie's circumstance the presence of *implied* masturbation- simply the possibility of being looked at "like that"- is enough to both render her images pornographic and to dehumanise her. Katie identifies this pornification as a loss of control, both of her ability to decide who sees her images and her ability to control how she is perceived sexually.

The second example of being "pornified" can be found in the image itself, despite the lack of explicit content. Harder (2023) describes the way non-explicit images can be made sexual by positioning them alongside explicit images. Using a term from film studies, Harder invokes 'the Kuleshov effect' (Monaco 2009) and argues that images presented alongside one another can lend meaning to one another- "however 'innocent' the individual image, they came together in a pornographic cultural script" (2023, p.659). Katie's concern about being presented alongside "images that I don't want to be associated with" offers evidence to support this:

> My face is next to somebody's penis!… What it actually is is a photo of me that I took, that I like, on holiday, or I'm with a friend, or whatever, that you wouldn't judge me for. But now that I've told you that that photo got put on a porn site, and it's next to a penis, and all these people said these things about me for whatever reason, you want to judge me.

The presentation of Katie's photo alongside explicit images renders them pornographic by association. They are made into 'more than they are'- the presence of genitalia or explicit imagery in neighbouring images transfers meaning to Katie's image, making it pornographic. Katie's natural concern here is that this transfer of meaning may also transfer judgement. As

already discussed in section 5.4, the presence of Katie's image on a pornographic website is a very real threat to her reputation.

The final example of the way Katie's image was 'pornified' is in the narrative which accompanied her image. This came in two forms; there was commentary provided by the original image sharer:

> The [image] had an image caption, kind of thing, so it would be a picture of me and then it would say… I remember it being words that at the time I was like, 'that's awful that somebody's said that about you', and I think I've tried to block it out of my mind, the exact words and stuff. But I do remember them saying like, 'slag', or… you know, awful phrases where it would be like, 'she'd get it', and I'd be like, 'ugh, [shudder] she doesn't want it' [laughing]. Like, she doesn't want it!

This narrative element mimics two strands found in Hader's work and other studies where commentary is applied to non-consensually shared images (Harder 2023; Hearn & Hall 2019; Hall & Hearn 2017; Langlois & Slane 2017). The first is the application of a clear sexual intent towards Katie, suggesting that "she'd get it"; a phrase which evokes the casual, laddish misogyny best encapsulated in shows like *The Inbetweeners (2008)*, where the expression was used often. Dialogue within the show has been argued to demonstrate the way in which young men specifically 'perform' young or boyhood masculinity, demonstrating that the objectification of young women or girls is a central tenet of hegemonic masculinity in young men (Clark 2018). The show depicts a sort of informal, 'mischievous masculinity' where the sexism is couched in humour; a 'boys will be boys' attitude that depicts 'laddishness' as a natural and harmless state of adolescent manhood (Nichols 2018). This dialogue is clearly meant to reduce Katie to an object to be used for sexual purposes. Further narrative elements were added in the public comment section:

> On the actual webpage, underneath the images, it had comments that were really derogatory. I don't know if I can remember exactly the words, but I remember it saying, oh, you know, 'Katie's a slag' and stuff like that, and nasty things, things like that. And I was like, 'this is really awful', to have people think those things, or comment those things… but they'd [the original image sharer] started it off. Like, they'd already said them things, and I think sometimes when somebody's said something, it makes it easier for other people to say that, because they're like, 'oh, they've said that, I can think that too, I can say that too, I can take it a step further'.

The derogatory commentary that accompanied Katie's image therefore corresponds to other studies that focus on the perpetrators of non-consensual sexual image sharing. Hearn and Hall

(2019) found that the use of 'sexual humour' is applied by men who upload revenge porn of women, both to objectify the target of the image and to position themselves as emotionally distant from her- framing themselves as 'one of the lads'. Similarly, Langlois and Slane (2017) discuss the ways in which perpetrators of non-consensual sexual image sharing "frame the victim as a porn object" (p.124) in their commentary, by making statements which reduce their target to a sexual function. Harder's (2023) assessment describes this commentary as an 'interpersonal script' which draws on common scenarios, tropes, and language of pornography. Henry and Flynn (2019) further describe these processes of objectification as a manifestation of harmful masculinities, appealing to a heteronormative system which seeks to assert male sexual dominance and emphasise female sexual subordination. The idea of something being made easier once another party has raised it is also highly interesting- Harder's (2023) work in particular raised the idea of community that emerges around these dialogues, where the objectification of women becomes a masculine bonding activity of sorts, that normalises and encourages this behaviour. This is certainly how Katie perceives it- her original image-sharer provided the platform and language for further degradation to appear.

Therefore, we can conclude that the commentary which accompanied Katie's image is a clear example of 'pornification', a deliberate act of sexualisation, objectification, and dehumanisation. Langlois and Slane (2017) note that this treatment "plays especially brutally on the victim's disempowerment, robbing her of her sexual integrity and of her dignity to inhabit her body as her own" (p.126). This is incredibly clear in Katie's case- the taking, uploading, and describing of her images has reduced her to a sexual object, leaving her feeling violated and objectified.

5.5 "It destroys your trust completely": loss of trust

This section looks towards Frazier's (2003) category of 'future control': "perceived future control refers to the belief that one has control over (i.e., can prevent or avoid) the occurrence of future traumas" (p.1258). A loss of control regarding the future can be identified in two ways within the dataset. The first can be found in a loss of trust, which affects how a person interacts personally with others, particularly in the context of romantic or sexual relationships. The second, in a loss of digital freedoms, will be covered in section 5.6.

Having sexual images shared without your consent can result in a significant blow to your ability to trust in the context of relationships, as having images shared by a person you had trust in can limit your ability to trust again. This finding supports research by Bates (2017),

who also found that loss of trust was a common experience for those affected by revenge porn. A number of participants in the data explored the relationship between trust and consensually sharing nude images. It is important to note that sharing sexual imagery does not always involve an act of trust- for instance, sending images in which your anonymity is preserved, or sending images to unknown parties, are not particularly designed to develop a mutual relationship or display vulnerability. However, some participants in the data established the sending of consensual sexual image sharing in sexual or romantic relationships as an act of intimacy, which involves both an element of risk- knowing your images could be shared- and an element of trust in relying on your partner not to do so (Amundsen 2019). Images shared in this context have a particular ability to impact a person's ability to trust. Outside of the context of relationships, loss of trust can apply more broadly- a loss of 'faith' in humanity, in the good of others.

Nathan described this distinction particularly well in discussing the difference between his practice of 'casually' sharing images, where he has no expectation of trust and therefore feels no impact if they are shared on, and images which were made with or for an intimate audience, which ultimately do impact how one trusts in relationships. Nathan establishes that when he engages in 'casual' sexual image sharing, he is sharing these images with unknown parties who he places no trust in:

> On Grindr you're explicitly messaging people that you don't know… you're there for a hook-up. People understandably want to know what they're getting into, but you don't know them, they don't know you, so trusting them is somewhat more naïve.

Nathan sends these images working on the assumption that they will be shared with others without his consent, arguing that "one is naïve if one sends out these pictures and assumes they stay with just the person you send them to." As a result, he takes certain precautions with his identity in these images, to preserve his anonymity:

> Pictures that I send on Grindr, for example, are more carefully thought about to preserve anonymity when there's more explicit things going on in them… if it has a penis in, my face isn't gonna be in it. You're only gonna know that that's my penis if you know what my penis looks like, which allows some plausible deniability.

The (assumed) sharing of these images has had no impact on Nathan by his own admission: "I still do hook-ups and one-night stands… I still send my nudes when people want them." We can infer that this is because there is very little trust involved in these interactions. This echoes

other research in this area which notes the normalisation of sharing sexual images. As Gilden (2023, p.816) notes, "within gay male social networks, such as on the dating/hookup app Grindr, there often is a fairly low threshold of familiarity required for users to share sexual images with each other".

For Nathan, this 'low threshold of familiarity' is highly relevant in shaping the type of images he sends. As Nathan doesn't know the image receivers, he expects nothing from them, and shares images which, while explicit, don't display intimacy in a way that is significant to Nathan- his anonymity. The image contains nothing which Nathan defines as requiring trust. This demonstrates further evidence of the careful risk assessment practices queer men take in sharing these images to relatively unknown parties (Gilden 2023; Waldman 2019; Tziallas 2015; Jones 2005). This also offers evidence to support the argument that the sexual content of a non-consensually shared image is perhaps less important than how intimate the content is. Breaches of trust come not from sharing a sexual image, per se, but instead from sharing an image that displays *intimacy,* something Nathan is careful not to bestow upon those he does not trust.

While this accounts for what Nathan defines as 'casual' image sharing, his other experience took place in a slightly more personal relationship. Nathan's shared imagery in this context was shared by "this guy I was somewhat dating, and we'd made videos together consensually and pictures together consensually". Without making too much inference about how Nathan defines his partners, the term "somewhat dating" combined with the use of the word "together" suggests a level of intimacy beyond Nathan's image recipients in more 'casual' image sharing. In addition to this, the imagery shared had none of the anonymity precautions of his more casual image sharing habits, with Nathan noting that the footage "explicitly showed face, you could work out who I was". Nathan framed image sharing in this context- made with or for an intimate audience- as more of an act of trust than casual image sharing and stated that (unlike more casual sexual image sharing) it wasn't "naïve" to expect the images created or shared within this context remain within that select audience. He drew parallels between sharing nude images in relationships and other forms of emotional intimacy:

> Once you're developing a relationship with someone, you know them more and you can make your own decision about how willing you are to share these kinds of images…. It's a trust level thing, and an existing relationship allows a development of trust and once you trust someone, it's up to you to decide what you want to share with them. Both nude pictures wise and like, emotionally… you're not gonna open up emotionally to your Grindr fuck. Hopefully you are to your partner.

This establishes that in Nathan's view, the stage of developing a relationship- or "somewhat dating" a person- is a place where trust is developed and established. Sharing sexual images consensually with a partner can therefore be an act of trust. This echoes Amundsen's (2019, p.486) analysis on the practice of 'sexting'. Amundsen found that creating and sharing sexual images in romantic or sexual relationships can be a form of expressing intimacy and conducting 'relationship maintenance'. In her research, she suggests that the "perception of sexting as inevitably intertwined with risk" (p.486) makes trust a key factor in relationship-based sexual image sharing- those who engage in this practice are aware of the risk that these images may be shared on, and therefore the act of sharing the image and placing oneself in a vulnerable position demonstrates that you trust the recipient not to do so.

When these images are shared beyond this relationship, therefore, the trust is broken. Nathan established that when this person shared his images, it was in breach of a clear agreement they had made together:

> He'd explicitly asked me not to share them, I was like, 'yeah, sure, you don't do it either', and then he did share it with his friends… So I was a bit disappointed- annoyed, disappointed is the word that came out automatically there, isn't it, with the hypocrisy there.

Ultimately, this breach of trust may not have changed Nathan's image-exchange habits where no intimacy is involved, but it has changed the way he practices sexual content creation in the context of relationships. When asked what impact the experience had had on him, Nathan answered:

> Just to make sex tapes with people a bit longer into dating them, wait a few more weeks… I think the mistake that I made in the second one [incident] was that those videos were made before we'd fully developed a level of trust. It's going back to that point about trusting them more rather than anything else.

While this doesn't demonstrate a complete loss of trust- and as discussed in chapter 4, it would be unhelpful to only discuss the most extreme effects of having sexual imagery shared without consent- we can see that this incident has impacted Nathan's trust in relationships. While he is clearly willing to engage in recording sexual content with a partner again, his "mistake" in trusting his last partner is something Nathan will seek to prevent happening again. Fully developing a "level of trust", however Nathan may wish to define it, is the new standard to

which he would feel comfortable sharing sexual images in this context. Nathan's ability to trust has therefore not been lost completely, but is clearly more guarded, placed under stricter control, and less likely to be given freely.

In some participants, this loss of trust was far more extreme. In Greg, for instance, the loss of trust was a clear effect of the image sharing. Greg described his experience by saying "it destroys your trust completely, not even just with her but with any of my partners, it took me a long time to engage in that kind of stuff again." With Greg's images, the factor of intimacy is once again an important element. The images displayed content that Greg felt made him particularly vulnerable to scrutiny (see section 6.4), and similarly with Nathan, he described the making of this content as a collaboration, something done 'together' with the image sharer: "at the time [of making the content] it was really exciting. You know, it's not something that people normally do, and you've connected with someone who's into the same stuff." This is further evidence that these images are in some circumstances expressions of intimacy or relationship-building, which then makes the breach of trust that comes with the non-consensual sharing of them even more apparent. In Grace, we see a very similar sentiment:

> I stopped sending nudes for a long time… you know, you're sending something to someone that you trust, and it wasn't until I got in a relationship that I felt comfortable doing that again, because there was already that level of trust there… so I stopped sending them for a while, I developed more trust issues.

In this case, we can see that when sexual images are originally shared consensually, this is often done to depict intimacy and trust in the context of a relationship. The impact of having sexual images shared without consent is that one's ability to trust in relationships more broadly is affected.

5.6 "I'm always googling myself": loss of digital freedoms

Another 'future' loss is in the loss or restrictions of digital freedoms. Image sharing can result in a person closing themselves off to the world. While in some cases this can be the physical world, as was the case with Sol, who feared that the image sharing might result in a physical altercation with his abusive ex-partner, in most cases this curbing of freedom is digital. Withdrawal from online communities is a well-known impact of having sexual imagery shared without consent (Citron and Franks, 2014; Bloom, 2014; Cecil, 2014). Many have expressed concern that the digital nature of non-consensual sexual image sharing amplifies feelings of

harm, because it moves beyond traditional spatial boundaries (Dragiewicz et al. 2018). A lack of 'online reputation' (Citron and Franks, 2014) can have a significant effect on one's ability to interact with others, either professionally, socially, or romantically. In addition, it is becoming increasingly difficult to live without a digital profile- while participants may withdraw from online communities, this is by no means guaranteed to be effective.

In some, the withdrawal from online communities manifests in the monitoring of 'privacy settings'. As Greg accounts:

> All my accounts are private these days. My Facebook is private, Instagram's private, you can't see any of my information anymore. Because it was so easy for her [the perpetrator] to find me and my new partner and pass these photos on.

With Katie, this manifested in two ways- both monitoring her online presence, and a reluctance to share content online:

> Since then, I've been quite hyper-conscious of anything that I share. And I'm always googling myself, which is stupid. Like [laughs], I don't need to google myself, but I feel like you're always worried that something like that is gonna happen again… [you wonder] did they get it off my social media, who do I need to delete off there, are my privacy settings even okay, you're always thinking about stuff like that, or like, 'oh, I'm not going to take that photo, because photos of me with more clothes on were shared in that way, so if I take that photo, what's gonna happen to that?'

As Katie's shared images were not overly sexual in nature, her reluctance to share *any* content that depicts herself is a natural response to the image-sharing. The incident has forced her to scrutinise the images she takes, trying to evaluate if it could also be "shared in that [sexual] way". Both Katie and Greg cannot simply exist 'freely' online anymore and must engage in this practice of managing their online profiles in an attempt to minimise repeat incidents or further harm.

The loss of digital freedoms can also extend, unsurprisingly, into the practice of sharing sexual images. A number of participants made the decision to alter or limit the ways in which they took and shared sexual images. While for some, such as Simon, this manifested as a complete withdrawal from this behaviour- "I certainly wouldn't send a picture like that again, obviously"- For participants such as Sol, the situation is a little more complicated. Sol's image-sharing incident contributed to what he refers to as a "patchwork of trauma" that has impacted

his ability to "be intimate" in ways that include sharing or creating sexual content. He explained that rather than ruling out engaging in sexual image practices again, he saw his experience as more of a 'setback' that he was hoping to overcome:

> It's definitely not something that now I rationally exclude. It's not something that I would just be: 'I choose not to engage in it because I've had this experience', it's still something that I would like to be able to engage in, and– I'm working towards it.

In others this resulted in altering their practices to better protect their anonymity and prevent repeated incidents. As discussed previously, Grace stopped sharing sexual content for a while, and only began again when she entered into a relationship with someone she trusted. She described how her habits around sexual image sharing had changed:

> I also altered the way I sent photos. So I changed to Snapchat for a while so that it could be gone in a couple of seconds. I also changed my settings on WhatsApp, so that if I sent anything, they could open it once and not reopen it or something like that. And I made sure that my tattoos and my face were not in any photos going forward.

We can interpret two main changes to Grace's habits here. The first is to change to software which allows for images to be sent with viewing restrictions, such as limiting the image to be visible for a set amount of time or a set number of times. Snapchat is an app which specifically offers 'self-destructing' messages, and therefore its role in 'sexting' practices, particularly among teenagers and young adults, is well documented (Poltash 2013). While some argue that Snapchat's main draw is less about preserving the security of your image and more about engaging in 'fun' or casual dialogue with others (Piwek & Joinson 2016; Roesner et al. 2014), Grace's account demonstrates the importance of time-based restrictions for safety purposes amongst those that share sexual imagery. Although this software is by no means foolproof- Birk Hansen Mandau's (2021) study found that the taking of 'screenshots' of a snapchat, therefore rendering the image permanent, was a common tactic used by perpetrators of image-based sexual abuse- it does provide at least the sense of an additional level of security when compared to other forms of digital messaging. If we consider the distribution of a sexual image to be a loss of control, we can interpret taking measures such as using time-sensitive apps to be an attempt to regain control.

The second change Grace makes is in removing identifiable features from her nude images. As another participant Nathan has described it, this offers "plausible deniability" in the case of the image being shared- if the image does not easily identify you, the chance of the image being

attached to you (in the event of it being shared further on) is reduced. The censorship of one's body we can interpret as another form of gaining control after sexual imagery has been shared. Greg's account of conducting similar measures makes this clear. Greg said of his sexual image sharing habits in the aftermath of his experience that:

> I was really particular about it. So I'd only let it be taken on my phone, so any time they'd want photos or videos or whatever, I'd agree, but only if it was on that condition, so I had total control of it. And then if they messaged me and were like, 'we want to see it or we want a copy of it', I'd edit it so I was less identifiable, I'd have complete control over how much I was in it… so, I'd edit it so my face was cropped out, or if the camera turned back to me and I was partly in it or whatever, you could only see part of my face. I wasn't too bothered about my voice or any other stuff because I don't think that's as easily identifiable.

We might also interpret this censorship of the body to demonstrate a loss of identity- those affected no longer feel comfortable depicting their body in an 'authentic' manner but must hide or censor identifiable parts of themselves to engage in sexual image sharing without risk. Greg's account further offers quite an extreme example of this loss of identity.

> When I did get back into it [sharing sexual images], I was doing roleplay with strangers, which obviously doesn't have the emotional side to it, but it felt a lot safer to go in and do it that way. I used a fake name, I'd see people not where I lived, I had a whole different persona that I used for it. I had a different email address, a different Facebook. And I had friends on that Facebook so it looked real, and pictures, you know, but all the friends were people I'd met online gaming. It was a space I fully controlled, if you know what I mean. And my story had to change and adapt so it seemed real, right, so my name was [fake name], I was a year younger than I actually was, I was studying [different subject] at [different] school [University] … it was insane. And I would find it so easy to like, move between the two identities. But it was all so I could feel that I had some control over what was happening.

For Greg to be able to engage in sexual image sharing, he has created a whole other identity- with a different name, age, location and university. Even though Greg was interacting solely with strangers, an act which feels "safer" than interacting with known people, these precautions around his identity remain. This offers us a clear demonstration of the impact non-consensual sexual image sharing can have on one's digital freedoms. Greg no longer feels comfortable engaging in sexual image sharing with his own identity. It is only by crafting

another identity, thereby minimising the risk and maximising his sense of control, that he is able to express himself in this manner.

5.7 Conclusion

'This chapter has outlined the presence of 'loss' in those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing. It argues that loss manifests in 5 forms- loss of control, loss of reaction, loss of reputation, loss of trust, and loss of digital freedoms. Loss of control of the image touched on debates about who really 'owns' an image. It argues that, regardless of who took the photo, images of the body *represent* the body, and therefore the sharing of these images feels like a loss of bodily control. Key factors here are the distribution of the images without consent, and the use of these images in specific narratives without consent; in both cases, the image is considered to be subject to the power of others, which causes feelings of powerlessness. This continues by affecting the participant's ability to react to their experience of image-sharing; the data indicates that there is very little recourse for those affected. Participants were acutely aware that reacting to the image sharing would serve to draw attention to this experience, and therefore prolong it, which left 'brushing off' or 'ignoring' the problem as the only available recourse. Additionally, where participants did seek to have the images removed, they faced barriers such as poor website 'take down' practices.

Loss of reputation submits that sexual image sharing breaches our privacy. This is not in the sense that the images were wholly 'private' before- instead, they were visible to a select 'audience', which breached as the images were shared. Participants felt exposed to judgement, ridicule, and objectification, which was exacerbated further by not knowing who had seen the image or what exactly their opinion on the image was. A subset of this loss of reputation was 'objectification', a loss of humanity that emerges from being specifically rendered as a sexual object. Non-consensual sexual image sharing also results in a loss of trust, both in romantic and sexual partners and in a sense of 'common' good. Finally, a loss of 'digital freedoms' limits a participant's ability to engage freely online and contributes to a sense of paranoid 'checking' and maintenance of one's digital representation.

6.0 Shame

6.1 Introduction

Feelings of humiliation, embarrassment, shame and self-blame have already been outlined as a common side-effect of having sexual imagery shared without consent (Mandau 2021; McGlynn et al. 2020; Bates 2017). Participants expressed "utter humiliation", feeling "embarrassed", feelings of "shame" or being "ashamed", feelings of being "uncomfortable" or "cringing", expressions of feeling "guilty", or that they are "to blame" in some way for their experience, either via deliberate action or by behaving in a "stupid" or "horrible" manner. What was also present, however, was a resistance to these feelings- participants discussed at times the expectation that they should feel ashamed, or the difficulty of navigating these feelings despite knowing that logically they have done nothing wrong.

This chapter begins by defining the concepts of shame, guilt and humiliation. It then discusses the ways in which feelings of guilt, embarrassment, or shame were expressed in the data. Shame and its related feelings manifested largely at three points during the experience. Shame may originate from the image itself- a person's approach to what the image depicts and the content it contains. Shame may also originate from how one feels others will perceive them as a result of seeing the images. Finally, feelings of shame may be tied to how much the image sharer *deliberately intended* to cause humiliation. Shame was then expressed and navigated by participants in one of two ways. The shame could be turned inward to become self-blame, which is where a person maintains that the experience is (at least to some degree) their fault; alternatively, shame could also be resisted.

6.2 "A hard concept to pin down": defining shame

Within the data shame was expressed in a few ways. These can largely be grouped into three categories. The first and most obvious is that of "shame"- expressing that the experience was shameful or that they felt ashamed. The second of which is the related term of "humiliation", which includes "feeling humiliated", "embarrassed", or being made to "cringe". The last is 'guilt', which includes expressions of feeling guilty, but also feeling "to blame" or responsible for the incident. Defining shame, and these related feelings, is not an easy task. This section

seeks to set out what difference, if any, is to be found between these terms, and the relevance of these decisions to the data.

Probyn's (2005) work on shame situates both shame and embarrassment on a continuum. She argues that "shame also comes in different hues of intensity. So shame is not always white-hot; sometimes it's felt in warm pink shyness, embarrassment, or in any of the variations along the continuum of shame-humiliation" (2005, pp.14–15). We can therefore conceptualise that shame and humiliation are related feelings, made different by the *degree* in which they are felt. Humiliation is argued by Probyn to be about how others perceive you- to feel that one is being judged poorly in the eyes of others.

Shame can be argued to take this definition a step further. It is not only about being perceived a certain way, but about how that perception corresponds to the way that we think about ourselves. Having failed our own beliefs, moral guidelines or personal standards, shame is the combination of failing both the self and others around you (Probyn 2005; Bartky 1990). Probyn argues that as a result of shame stemming from personal judgement, shame is therefore a highly personal feeling: "what shames me may not shame you. But whatever it is that shames you will be something important to you, an essential part of yourself" (Probyn 2005, p.x). She uses Bourdieu's concept of Habitus to better define this, arguing that "an individual's habitus will determine what is experienced as shameful" (2005, p.55). The personal nature of shame is key in understanding the presence of this feeling throughout the chapter. People affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing bring both their own insecurities, cultures, and agencies in navigating the experience, all of which naturally change the way shame is felt, expressed, and managed.

Probyn also uses the work of Tomkins to further explore the highly personal nature of shame, who argues that shame is rooted in the reduction of a positive feeling. As stated by Frank and Kosofsky Sedgwick (1995, pp.134–138) "the innate activator of shame is the in-complete reduction of interest or joy… one must have expected good things to have come". This concept also allows us to better understand the impact of having sexual imagery shared without consent. For some participants, the images were taken during a positive interaction, or for a positive reason- consensually photographing one's body or recording a sexual act can be an act of trust, confidence, or self-expression (Amundsen 2019). The expectation that these images would provide 'joy'- or at the very least, positive feeling- may exacerbate the feelings of shame when the images are taken beyond their consensual boundaries.

Guilt is set somewhat apart from shame and humiliation. While these feelings are rooted in behaviours, "Guilt is triggered in response to specific acts… [and] quickly paves the way to a politics of blame" (Probyn 2005, pp.45–46). Guilt is therefore motivated by reflecting on one's actions and considering the role of the self in instigating feelings of shame and humiliation. Aakvaag et al.'s (2016) scale to determine shame and guilt in victims of sexual violence is a useful tool in building on this definition. Whilst the questions in the 'shame' portion of the scale relate largely to how one feels they are perceived and perceive themselves, the guilt portion speaks more to how the victim feels about the incident itself, including blaming oneself, thinking one should have behaved differently, or thinking one should have behaved in a more correct or appropriate manner.

In applying these definitions to the context of sexual image sharing, embarrassment, shame and guilt are likely to be a common feeling. Non-consensual sexual image sharing as a rule shows us as vulnerable, and exposes parts of ourselves- bodies, sexualities, intimacies- which we wish to keep private. A clear factor in determining these feelings is in the concept of privacy. Privacy in the circumstances within the dataset means a few varying things. Images have been taken of intimate body parts without the consent of the person depicted or taken during intimate interactions. It is easy to understand how such situations can be considered 'private'; however, this becomes more complicated when we consider the use of publicly available images in non-consensual sexual image sharing. Privacy is context dependent: it is not simply about having a small audience, but more about having a specific and curated audience. Katie, whose pictures were taken from her social media, illustrates this well:

> It was a picture of me that I probably would have been happy to share, but it was the fact that the picture was shared in a way that I wasn't happy for it to be shared, and in a place where I wasn't happy for it to be shared. Like, that was more of a, 'I want to send that picture to my friends', not, 'I want this picture to be on a website that everyone in the world can see, that is next to all these other images that I don't want to be associated with'.

While the picture was available on Katie's social media, this was a group she felt she had control over- a curated social network. Taking the picture beyond this group is a breach of her privacy. Yasmin's experience is almost the direct inversion of Katie's. Screenshots were taken of her escorting profile from a [redacted] website and posted on social media: "we were on a website called [redacted], [we were] basically selling our services, I guess you'd call it [laughs]". Yasmin's escorting profile, while technically publicly available online, was not publicly available to her social group. Yasmin's image sharer uploaded screenshots of the publicly available website to

deliberately breach the boundary of privacy. When this chapter refers to privacy, it acknowledges that breaches of this boundary take many forms, and acknowledges the contexts of 'relative' privacies and front stage/ back stage performance of the self (Goffman 1959) .

Ben-Ze'ev (2004) offers a relevant definition of privacy in his work on online sexual and romantic interaction. He argues that there are three types of privacy- that to prevent shame, that to prevent humiliation, and that to prevent fear. For the purposes of our discussion, we shall focus on the first two. Privacy to prevent shame guards against actions considered to be abnormal, immoral, or otherwise 'deviant', either by ourselves or others. Privacy to prevent humiliation, on the other hand, does not guard against immoral acts, but instead speaks to actions not intended to be observed by others. Ben-Ze'ev's examples for the former include "extramarital affairs, masturbating, homosexual relationships, sexual fantasies, or cybersex"; his examples for the latter, "nudity or other intimate sexual activities" (2004, p.98). This offers an ideal framework examining sexual images shared without consent and speaks to the necessity of understanding the concept of privacy in analysing each participant's concept of shame. One might have a positive or neutral relationship with the content depicted but still find the sharing of it humiliating; alternatively, others may find that the content conveys aspects of their behaviour or habits which go against conventional norms, therefore triggering feelings of shame.

The conundrum of defining terms such as these is one that came up in the data collection interviews. Beth mentioned the concept of shame early in our dialogue, and when asked to expand on it, she took time to think about what she meant by that word. She noted that "is it shame? I don't know, shame is such a hard concept to pin down, isn't it?". It was not unusual for participants to use a range of synonymous terms to describe what they were feeling, or for them to use terms such as "humiliation" "embarrassment" or "guilt" interchangeably while describing the same aspect of their experience. What this chapter seeks to do, rather than simply focus on language used, is identity ways where feelings of being perceived in a negative light, expressions of perceiving oneself in a negative light, or expressions of regret about one's perceived role in the image-sharing, can be linked to these various forms of shame.

6.3 "That's not what I wanted the photo to be": the content of the image

Non-consensual sexual image sharing is an experience which is inherently exposing. Not only does it often display sexual acts, which naturally one would wish to keep private, but it also

exposes the physical body to scrutiny and judgement. Within the data, it was found that these feelings of shame began with the imagery itself, and the participant's relationship with what the image depicts. This occurs both with consensually and non-consensually taken sexual images. Consensually taken nude images occupy a contested position in the literature- while some argue that they are tools that allow for pride and empowerment, others suggest that they objectify and degrade the people- usually women- depicted (Orenstein 2016; Gill 2009a; Gill 2008; Levy 2005). Within the data, I would suggest that evidence for both is provided, and that the sharing of these images has a transformative effect- from pride to shame. For non-consensually taken images, the lack of control in how one is presented can result in feelings of shame regarding their depiction in the image, with specific reference to existing bodily vulnerabilities, such as weight.

Grace is one such person who falls in the former category. She took and shared the photos consensually at first, before they were shared beyond her control. Grace expressed her feelings as such:

> It really did kind of mess with my confidence then as well. Because I think something that doesn't really get talked about, especially with those kinds of images, is no matter the person's gender or anything, they've taken that photo because they have found some body positivity, or some sexual freedom, or whatever. And there's an element of that that gets kind of shattered, as soon as it gets abused, where it kind of eats into your confidence a little bit.

Grace's account speaks to the notion that the images themselves, when taken with the control and consent of the person depicted, exist as points of pride for a person. While the taking and sharing of sexual images has been criticised by some as being an obligation for women resulting from an over-sexualised society (Mandau 2021; Liong & Cheng 2019; Hasinoff 2013), Grace's account speaks in favour of the counterargument, that taking sexual images can be a source of empowerment and positivity (Lister 2020). Grace's account also offers evidence to support Amundsen's (2019, p.490) argument that "private sexual images can take on different meanings depending on the context in which it is shared and consumed". For Grace, the images were once sources of pride, an outlet for her 'body positivity' and 'sexual freedom' which has been robbed of these contexts by the act of re-sharing the images.

Katie also expressed this sentiment. While her photo displayed her fully clothed, she still demonstrated that it was a photo she had felt proud of and was dismayed that it had been presented in a sexual context: "We were fully clothed and it was a nice photo, [laughs] for want

of a better word". Katie also situated her experience in the broader context of other incidences of non-consensual sexual image sharing, referencing those who have had more 'typical' (such as depicting more clearly nude or sexual beings) sexual images shared than herself:

> There'll be images that people will take thinking they're doing them in a safe space, and a comfortable space, and they feel proud or empowered to have them images, and then somebody takes them and uses them for something else out of that context. And I think that's really awful, because I think us as women, we need to feel empowered and supported and beautiful. And for people to take those images and put derogatory terms next to them, or put them in a place where people are like- lusting over them, it just feels so violating. And against what those images are intended for. If they're there to make you feel powerful, or loved, or happy, and then they make you feel violated and scared and taken advantage of- and it's awful.

There exists within the data, then, the notion that sharing sexual images without consent has a transformative power to turn pride into shame. This additionally fits with our conceptualisation of shame as something that relies on the denial of joy (Frank & Kosofsky Sedgwick 1995). To take pride in an image of oneself is to find joy in oneself; as Grace describes it, to express 'sexual freedom' and 'body positivity'. The taking and sharing of these images, as Katie puts it, changes the relation the depicted person has between themselves and the image of their body, transforming 'power, love and happiness' into 'violation and fear' (Frank & Kosofsky Sedgwick 1995).

The impact of the non-consensual sexual image-sharing to one's body image was further discussed with participants Greg and Beth. In both cases, their weight was the focus of insecurity, and the depiction of their bodies in the images shared was a particular source of shame for them. Unlike Katie and Grace, who had once taken pride in the images prior to the incident of image-sharing, both Greg and Beth were photographed without their consent, and displeased with the depiction of their bodies. Greg described himself as such:

> I've always been quite insecure… I've always been a little bit self-conscious anyway, from a physical point of view. But it made me really self-conscious about *that*. Because it was something that- particularly at that time as well, I was a lot heavier, I think I was like [weight] or something fucking crazy like that. So I was really self-conscious, really upset about it… that they had sent stills of the videos to me pulling unflattering faces and things like that… that was a bit unpleasant.

Beth also described how the way she feels she looks in the image- with specific regard to the weight of her body, has impacted how she feels about it.

> I never saw it, I don't know what it looked like… I must have been naked, so I presume it's the most unflattering picture of my boobs and belly, hanging out. But for years afterwards, it really-[sighs] oh, I don't know, stuck with me, it would make me- at the time, it made me really, really uncomfortable. Now, it just makes me kind of cringe… I wasn't big then, I was fairly skinny for me. I think by the time I went to [place where image was taken], it's just probably about the thinnest I've ever been. But even so, being in an unflattering position is just-such a horrible thought [emotional]. And people finding that funny is- you know.

Both of these accounts focus on the word 'unflattering' to describe the pictures, with Beth's account in particular focusing on the 'hanging' nature of her body. Beth's account in particular is interesting, because she does not *know* how her body looks in the image for certain- she was simply told that the image had been passed around and that people had been laughing at it, but was given no context on what exactly the 'funny' part of the image had been. And yet Beth's natural assumption is that her body- specifically, her weight- is the source of humour. Beth addresses this in a fashion: 'I'm glad I didn't see it in a way, but then also, you can let your imagination run wild, can't you?' The image that exists in Beth's imagination has been shaped by her insecurities.

The relevance of Beth's weight to her feelings of shame is further illustrated where she discusses what she would do if the image was released now, around twenty years after it was originally taken.

> If it did come out [now]… honestly, I look back at photos of me now when I was [redacted], I was like 'oh my god, I was so thin!' [laughing]. So I suppose, even if it was unflattering and horrible, now I would just be like… 'it's a horrible unflattering photo, but I was still so thin!' [laughing]. So, [laughing] no, I don't think I'd feel as bad as I did then.

With the benefit of [redacted] years, Beth is able to conceptualise her weight differently- while at the time she perceived her weight negatively, and therefore felt ashamed of the images, their release now would have a different effect; they would demonstrate Beth's 'thin-ness' and therefore would not trigger the same kind of 'cringe' response.

McKinley and Hyde's (1996) concept of objective body consciousness can help to explore this relationship between body image and shame. Objective body consciousness refers to the constant monitoring of one's body to determine how well it meets culturally expected 'standards' for the ideal form. Those with high levels of objective body consciousness believe that the body is something to be controlled, and not meeting 'appropriate' body standards is therefore a failing on behalf of themselves. Liong and Cheng (2019) use this concept in their work on the relationship between sharing sexual imagery and personal body image. They note that:

> The internalisation of cultural standards and body shame concerns the degree of acceptance of cultural bodily standards according to an individual's choice, perception, and demand. Body shame is, thus, the result of failing to reach these standards… therefore, according to the objectification argument, sexters are expected to show higher levels of body surveillance and body shame than nonsexters (p.338).

Through this lens, we can see how non-consensual sexual image sharing particularly exacerbates feelings of body shame. Firstly, in both of these cases, the images themselves were taken without the consent of the people depicted. This removes any ability to monitor or control how one's body is being perceived. Control as a concept has already been discussed in section 5.1 and again becomes relevant here. Secondly, McKinley and Hyde (1996) also note the ways in which objective body consciousness manifests in self-surveillance- monitoring one's appearance and form. An image, an enduring form of surveillance, presents a lasting interpretation of one's body to be judged. Worse than simply being seen that way, being photographed creates a lasting representation of one's 'lacking' body.

This section therefore offers evidence to support the argument that poor body image can exacerbate the feelings of shame experienced as a result of having sexual imagery shared without one's consent. Even images which were once sources of pride or empowerment become sources of shame through the act of distribution without consent.

6.4 "I picture other people picturing it": perceptions of the image

When discussing the impact of having sexual imagery shared without consent, the idea that this image is seen by others- friends, family, colleagues, strangers, or other parties you would wish to maintain boundaries of privacy with- is well understood to be a harmful part of the experience. The idea that this image may be seen, or even that others become aware of the fact

that a sexual image has been shared, is a factor that contributes towards shame within the participants of my dataset. Actual or imagined judgement from others greatly increases feelings of embarrassment or shame in oneself.

Katie expressed this feeling as such:

> You feel ashamed that you ended up on that site or whatever. I think I felt that people were gonna judge me- when you tell your mum or friend or whatever that it happened, you're worried they're gonna judge you, that it's your fault, that you've took a photo that has ended up on there... it felt really frustrating, because you feel out of control, you feel judged, you feel ashamed, for something that you didn't even choose or want.

For Simon, the embarrassment also came from feelings that seeing the image would affect how people judge his character. He explained that he thought people would find the image 'strange', and described his experience as severely out of character for him:

> In the group [redacted], it was funny at the time because it was so out of character for me, and in character for them [to send nude images], because they were sending it between [redacted] and it was just a laugh, and part of the joke in that context was that I wasn't involved, wasn't joining in on that kind of thing. And then eventually, like, I sort of did. Erm, and that was part of the joke. But, erm, yeah utter humiliation, really.

Much like in section 5.4 on reputation, the potential impact to one's character is one of the many consequences of having sexual imagery shared without consent. For both Katie and Simon, the loss of reputation through the anticipated reduction in their character in the eyes of others leads to feeling 'ashamed' or 'utter humiliation'. This offers evidence to support the theory that feelings of shame are shaped by the ways in which we feel others perceive us. Non-consensual sexual image sharing naturally opens us to the scrutiny of others, therefore exposing the depicted person to an increased risk of feelings of shame.

An aspect of non-consensual sexual image sharing that causes feelings of humiliation or shame is the unavoidable *sexual* nature of the imagery. Sex is a topic to which feelings of embarrassment and shame are inherently attached. As per Ben-Ze'ev's (2004) definition of privacy, sex is something we prefer to do 'privately', to prevent feelings of humiliation. When we factor in complicated ideologies around morality, such as what the cultures that shape a person determine as 'appropriate' or 'normal' sexual conduct, people may have even more

reason to keep their sexual intimacies private. A number of participants talked about the 'stigma' of sex. Katie described it as such:

> There's still a bit of a stigma about people wanting to talk about, sex or porn or whatever. And I just think, we're human, right? It's completely natural to do that and to feel those feelings, or to want to take that photo, or to want to look at things, whatever. People want to do that, it's natural, it's fine.

As privacy is context dependent, it stands to reason that being seen in a sexual light by those who you consent to this with may not instigate feelings of shame, but being seen this way by others will. Greg's account offered a very clear example of this. His images showed him engaging in what he described as 'kink-based stuff':

> It was purely an embarrassment thing, because the photos were more, kink-based stuff. So I felt kind of ashamed, because it wasn't just like, 'vanilla' sex stuff, it was more fetishized stuff that was going on. So I was really worried about the way that people would see me.

Greg, at first, only gave brief detail about what the images depicted. It wasn't until later in the interview that he felt comfortable to talk about this in more depth:

> we were doing something called 'cuckold play'… the point is to be as degrading as possible, you know, for you to be as jealous and embarrassed and ashamed as possible. And that's the actual bit I don't like people knowing, because I feel lik guys that do that are kind of seen as 'pathetic cucks', unable to satisfy their partner, bad lovers and stuff, but that's not the case at all… my new girlfriend got no context on these pictures, and she was probably thinking, 'oh, what a shit guy, what a bad lover'. You know, if somebody doesn't understand it, to just get a video of, like, 'here's a video of your partner doing it'… -the way I picture guys that are into it – even though I'm a guy that's into it– the way I picture other people picturing it, that's what's awful. in my head the people that are into that kink, that fetish, come across really shitty, really pathetic.

Greg's feelings of shame here can be identified in two ways. The first is that the images exposed Greg's interest in a non-normative or 'kinky' expression of sexuality, something which is inherently different from- and therefore stigmatised by- mainstream society (Pohtinen 2019). Rubin's (1984) 'sexual hierarchy' differentiates between what she argues is considered 'good, normal and natural'- straight, monogamous, partnered, private, and vanilla- and what is considered 'bad, abnormal, or unnatural'- queer, group activity, casual, public, and kinky. As

Greg argues, this is something not widely understood by mainstream culture, and it exposes Greg as someone 'different' from the mainstream. There is no existing research on how kink intersects with the experience of having sexual imagery shared without consent, but we might consider this as another form of 'intersectional surveillance'- a further level of scrutiny that amplifies other harms (Franks 2017a).

In addition, the nature of this kink completely upends traditional heteronormative power structures (Gavey 2005), in rendering the female party dominant and the male party submissive. If we introduce the concept of hegemonic masculinity here, in engaging in this practice Greg is completely going against male discourses of strength, power and dominance (Messerschmidt 2018; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). While of course, kinks do not translate to the way we live our lives, as Greg argues, to be "pathetic" and embrace this subservient role "is the point"- it is unsurprising that exposing this specific kink would invite, as Greg perceives, judgement and scrutiny.

Additionally, being seen as a "pathetic cuck" is a phrase that comes with a significant level of baggage. Shaped by alt-right circles and eventually tricking into common discourse, the term is deployed as anti-feminist rhetoric, applied to men who fail to uphold strict, traditional standards of masculinity (Green 2019; Lokke 2019). This fits with our discussion of the 'manosphere' and other such misogynistic online cultures in section 2.6.4- such terms form a backdrop to how we see and understand the world. Greg's account offers further emphasis on the context-dependent nature of these images- what is a private sexual interest behind closed doors takes on additional cultural connotations once shared beyond those boundaries.

Interestingly, Greg's account was not the only one that demonstrated engagement in kink. Nathan noted that "we'd been doing some kinky things" in his shared images; and that the image sharing, he believed, had been motivated by a desire to show this off: "he wanted to be like, 'look at this kinky stuff I'm doing'". In a direct contrast to Greg, the kink was a source of pride for Nathan: he said, "my kinky work had been quite good, to be honest". When asked to expand on this, Nathan gave some careful insight into the factors that shaped this pride.

> I was topping, both times, and in the kinkier ones I was the dominant person in it. So that might play some psychological aspect to it as well, it wasn't like there was a loss of power being depicted… I don't bottom all that often, so if a video of that was shared– which it hasn't been– I think I'd be more angry about it… that I'm very pro like, not 'bottom shaming' and so on, but I'm sure there's some intrinsic level [of thought] that

> ‘bottoming removes masculinity’. It’s also because I don’t bottom often, when I do bottom it’s in a more established relationship, so it would be a larger breaking of trust.

Reference to ‘topping’ and ‘bottoming’, here, speaks to “sex position self-labelling”, where bottoming indicates “being the receptive partner during anal intercourse” and topping “being the insertive partner” (Moskowitz & Garcia 2019, p.1219). Research in this area has noted how these identities convey ‘masculine capital’ (Ravenhill & de Visser 2016), arguing these labels mimic, to some degree, heteronormative perceptions of gender, where ‘topping’ is equated with the masculine, and ‘bottoming’ the feminine (Zheng, Su & Zheng 2017; Reilly 2016). Men who bottom are therefore subject to what Nathan identifies as “bottom shaming”; subject to stigma, judgement, or ridicule based on a perceived lack of masculinity, which is shaped by the same hegemonic definitions of strength, dominance, and control as heterosexual men (Vytniorgu & Garcia-Iglesias 2025; Brooks, Reysen & Shaw 2017; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Connell 1987).

Nathan’s account corroborates this framing- he states that in “topping”, he was the more “dominant” party, which meant he didn’t perceive his content as conveying a “loss of power”. He also thinks that while he seeks to be anti-bottom shaming, he’s sure that on some level, he has unconsciously absorbed the idea that “bottoming removes masculinity”. Nathan’s account demonstrates that because the images depicted him in ways that made him feel powerful, dominant, and masculine, he did not feel overly harmed or shamed by their sharing- unlike Greg’s account, whose content depicted him in ways he perceived would be considered weak and pathetic, Nathan is confident that he would be perceived in a positive light. This perhaps offers some evidence as to why women who are affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing seem more likely to experience judgement, stigma and shame than men (Mandau 2021; McGlynn et al. 2020; Bates 2017; Henry & Powell 2015). Men (both queer and heterosexual) are typically protected from these feelings by dominant ideas around masculinity, which praises sexual dominance and prowess (Messerschmidt 2018; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Connell 1987;). Where content is shared that depicts a lack or loss of masculinity, however, men risk being exposed to judgement and scrutiny in the same manner as women.

Another area which was a particularly difficult area of discussion was that of discussing the experience with family. Nathan and Katie both discussed the impact of having to discuss this with family. For Katie, sharing the information with her mother was a point of particular embarrassment. She said:

> You don't want to have that conversation with your mum in the first place, right? [laughing].... So then [the police] came round the next day, and then we're sat in the living room with this police officer, obviously asking all these questions, like: 'so what's the website?' 'have you ever taken any images before?' 'have you ever visited these websites?' And you're just there, going [tense expression]. Cos that's all in front of my mum, as well, and I know it was awkward for her, and it was awkward for me, and just- really uncomfortable.

The image-sharing resulted in two particular incidents of embarrassment regarding Katie's mother- the first incident, where she told her about it, and the second where she had to answer questions regarding it to the police. We can route Katie's discomfort to her mother's mere presence- even though she explained that she found her mother to be very supportive during the whole process, this is simply not a conversation one wants to have with a parent. Nathan also expanded on this. He said:

> Well yeah, it's your family, isn't it. You don't want them seeing videos like that anyway. My parents still aren't– they're getting better, but they're not the most comfortable with my sexuality, so it would be a very explicit exposure of that to them. If my friends found the video or something I don't think I'd be that bothered about it, but they know I get up to this stuff. If it was sent to my family as well as what I've already said it would also remove some privacy that I've deliberately kept.

Nathan here is expressing the significance of context-dependent privacy. While he wouldn't necessarily wish to share the images with friends, his social circle have a more intimate understanding of his sexual habits and wouldn't be surprised by the "stuff" Nathan gets up to. His parents, however, are held apart from this understanding behind a "deliberately kept" barrier of privacy. Being seen in a sexual way- and for Nathan specifically, a sexual way which emphasises his identity as a gay man- would alter the way Nathan's parents perceive him.

The relevance of Nathan's sexual identity should be emphasised here. If judgement from others has the capacity to cause shame in affected individuals, it stands to reason that cultures which apply much stricter or moralistic ideologies about sex would cause more feelings of judgement- and therefore, shame. Nathan spoke about how he wouldn't want his family to see his pictures, but explained that images within his own social circles wouldn't bother him as much. He explained:

> Perhaps one of the reasons that I think about this in an almost diminished manner compared to perhaps how other members of society [women] is that I do think there is

> a difference in how the gay community thinks about sexual image sharing, both consensually and non-consensually…. Grindr hookup culture I think has led to a culturally accepted norm in 'gay society' [air quotes] about sending nudes- yeah, it's expected, everyone is doing it, and once everyone is doing it, ownership of your own nudes becomes a bit less… erm, serious, I would guess.

In "gay society", as Nathan argues, sex and the depictions of it occupy different meanings than in mainstream society. There is no culture of shame amongst gay men in having sexual imagery shared without consent- or at least, for Nathan, this is not the case- because it has become a 'normalised' aspect of their social interactions. This is touched on further in section 6.7, but offers evidence to support the idea that the degree to which a person's culture assesses sex has an impact on the degree to which a person feels judged- and therefore, shamed- by their image sharing. It also offers further evidence to support the argument that gay men affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing, where the images are shared in the specific queer spaces which has normalised this behaviour, are less likely to consider this a severe violation, and less likely to be subject to feelings of stigma and scrutiny (Waldman 2019; Gilden 2023).

Nathan also thinks his gender speaks to the lesser impact of having sexual imagery shared without consent: "I also think just in wider society, it is still more acceptable for men to sleep around than it is for women". Cultures which have more misogynistic attitudes towards women's sexuality might therefore cause more feelings of judgement- and therefore, shame- in women. Participants Katie and Beth also expressed sentiments of judgement related to their gender- Grace, however, offered a particularly illustrative example of how such a culture causes feelings of shame:

> I'm from Ireland, and I'd grown up in a small town where [reaction to sexual violence] was like, 'that's scandalous, and you've brought it on yourself'. Like, 'why would you share that [image], of course this is going to happen'. So that kind of shame made me internalise it a bit more…. it's the mentality that women ask for it, and you can't be a victim.

Grace's account offers a clear example of how the judgements of others caused her to 'internalise' those feelings of shame. Hearing- or expecting to hear- judgemental comments from others generated these feelings within herself. This account also offers evidence to support the argument that non-consensual sexual image sharing has more impact on women than it does on men. One's culture, and that culture's attitudes towards sex, contributes to the degree to which a person feels shame. As we live in a society which restricts and judges

women's sexual expression, this naturally results in women being more likely to experience shame.

6.4.1 "I didn't know how to talk about it": cycles of shame

The stigma of being a victim of sexual violence often manifests in a reluctance or unwillingness to discuss the experience with others (Hlavka 2016). Taylor's (2018) assertion that humiliation is the separation of self from society describes not simply the way acts of sexual violence sever a person's connections with others, but the ways in which re-building those connections can seem impossible. She argues:

> The experience of humiliation cuts people off from themselves and others. It therefore greatly inhibits or even renders impossible the meaningful expression of one's experience… Small wonder, that women who do so [attempt to talk to others about being raped or sexually assaulted] may find the experience deeply unsatisfying or even humiliating in its own right. (2018, p.446)

This speaks to the way in which feelings of shame manifest not simply when the incident occurs, but additionally in the aftermath whenever the incident is discussed. The interview itself was one such example. In Greg's interview, he at first offered me a brief explanation of the content his images depicted, and then contacted me after the interview had ended to say he felt he'd not explained himself properly and that wanted to discuss it further. His original reluctance, he explained, was because of the embarrassment he felt regarding his sexual habits. He expressed that he had never talked about his experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing before: "it's crazy talking about this- I've never told anyone this, you're the only person I've told"; additionally, he expressed the difficulty in discussing the topic: 'even now, there are some things me and my partner dabble in, and I'm embarrassed explaining it'. As with many aspects of non-consensual sexual image-sharing, temporality becomes a defining part of the experience. Feelings of shame re-emerge whenever the incident is discussed again.

Katie also expressed this sentiment. Katie explained an incident where she bumped into the person she thought had shared her images [redacted] while she was with her partner, fairly early in their relationship. Feeling scared and trying to avoid him, she told her partner that they had to leave, which led to her having to explain the reason behind her actions afterwards.

> Because I hadn't told him that yet, it felt like a big moment, I guess. In the car, being like, 'this happened to me and I felt a bit nervous and I'm a bit scared'. And not that he [current partner] pressured me to take any photos or act in a certain way or whatever, throughout our relationship, but I remember at the beginning, particularly, being like, 'I'm a bit scared about how this is gonna go'... when I had to talk to him about it, I felt shy about it. I was like, 'oh, I feel embarrassed to say this'. And it shouldn't- [sigh] it shouldn't feel embarrassing, cos I didn't even do anything. I didn't ask for it, do you know what I mean? It's something that happened to me that I had no control over, it shouldn't feel embarrassing, but for whatever reason, it does.

Grace also spoke about the difficulties in sharing her experience with others. Much like Greg, Grace identified the interview as a 'safe space' in which she might talk about her experience, which she had been unable to find elsewhere.

> I needed a safe space to be able to talk about it, because I have so many friends that are so good and so open, but there's just still that level of fear of being judged for something that was non-consensual... because I just didn't know how to talk about it with anyone, I think there was one person I told because they had been with me over my entire journey, and they knew what to say. Anyone else? I could count on one hand how many people know that that happened. You know, even girlfriends, I just wouldn't. I just always felt like, yeah, they love you unconditionally, but- I don't know what things are like in the UK, I reckon they're quite similar to Ireland- but that stigma there is horrendous. Of, you know, 'you're sharing it. so you have to grin and bear it', like, 'this is the consequences of sending a nude'. So it sucked in that regard.

The fear of judgement prevents people like Grace from sharing their experience with others. Her notion of the interview as a 'needed safe space' is interesting and speaks to the idea that having a place to discuss one's experiences can help to counteract or reduce feelings of shame. Some studies of shame and sexual violence suggest that silence exacerbates and re-perpetuates feelings of shame, causing more damage to the person affected (Fleming & Kruger 2013). Katie expressed that her reluctance to discuss her experience concerned her, and felt that this reluctance contributes to a climate that doesn't fully understand the impact of non-consensual sexual image sharing:

> But if it's increasing all of this non-consensual image sharing, that's the bit that scares me, because I'm not quite sure what is being done about that, or if enough is being done about that. or even if people understand how bad it is. Obviously, it's not

> something when you meet new people, that you would say, 'oh, this happened to me, check your privacy settings!' [laugh].t's hard to talk [about it], so there'll be loads of people that know me that don't know that something like this has happened. But it could happen to anyone.

Silence in Katie's account is therefore a direct contributor to *further* incidences of non-consensual sexual image sharing- the stigma and judgement that keeps those affected quiet perpetuates a lack of awareness of this experience. A way in which this cycle of shame limits those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing is that it can prevent those affected from reporting their experience to the police. This is not a surprising outcome; police's poor understanding of non-consensual sexual image sharing, and the way in which police responses exacerbate feelings of blame, are well-documented (Huber 2023b; McGlynn et al. 2019; Henry & Powell 2016). Katie, who is the only member of the dataset to have reported her experiences, talked about the 'awkwardness' of doing so.

> It was two male police officers came to the house. And then you're talking to them, and I was young, and my mum was there [laughing], and you're having to tell them these things, and whatever. And they're *men*. They're police officers, they're there to do a job, and you trust in them and whatever, but- it's like when there's something wrong with your female parts, and you want to speak to a female GP, because you feel more safe, right? So it felt like that, I'd feel a lot more comfortable if I could speak to a female officer about it. Because you feel embarrassed and you want them to empathise with you.

Katie also expressed sympathy for those who had had more explicit images shared, and the difficulty she imagines in discussing that with the police.

> I imagine if it's a naked photo, that you're gonna feel like you're gonna be more judged…. imagine what it must be like, sitting in a room with two male police officers, going 'here's some naked pictures of me that somebody put on the internet and I don't know who did it and I want you to help me please'. It must be awful to have that conversation… Whereas at least mine, I was like– 'well, you're looking at me next to a penis, and you're looking at people calling me all of these names, but at least I am smiling in the photo and I like that photo, and took that' [laughs]. So it was awkward and uncomfortable and it must be so much harder for people that have that, and so I get why people don't wanna report it, don't wanna talk about it, because even for me, it was awkward. It was uncomfortable.

Having to discuss her experience with the police, even with the caveat that these images are 'not as bad' as they could have been, was deeply uncomfortable for Katie. Seeing her image alongside explicit content was a clear reiteration of what had been *done* to Katie- a further reiteration of the 'pornification' (Harder 2023) she experienced. In partnership to this Grace's discussion of why she chose not to go to the police spoke greatly to the difficulties of reporting that Katie predicted. Grace, who had been raped previously, chose not to report based on previous interaction with the police. She said:

> The victim blaming, it's just gonna go through the roof. Rape's not taken seriously, molestation is not taken seriously. And if the most egregious offence is not taken seriously, and it's shamed, of course people aren't gonna want to talk about it or bring it to the attention of the police. Not when the police are doing it [shaming] as well. You know, there's no trust there. And how do you sit in a room when the majority of police officers back home- and I'm sure it's probably similar here- are male, you're gonna sit there and you're gonna go into detail about you being that vulnerable and taken advantage of? They're just gonna say, 'well, love, you kind of asked for it, didn't you'. And that's exactly why I didn't, and I also felt like, if I can't talk about the worst thing that's ever happened to me, this pales in comparison, so I'm not going to bring it to the police. What if I'm not believed? What if I'm victim shamed? What if it ruins my life?

Beth also demonstrated a reluctance to go to the police based on a perceived lack of support:

> I didn't think the police bothered about sexual assault or sexual anything. And to be honest, I don't suppose they would have done, in that time. I think they would now, but I don't think they would have done then. I think I'd have just got a fob-off.

This speaks to the way in which speaking about your experience, particularly with police officers, can exacerbate feelings of shame. The fear of having vulnerability met with a "fob-off"- particularly where the police officer is male- is preventing those affected from reporting this experience. This can be linked to the concept of 'double victimisation', where victims are subject to a second victimisation during the procedural criminal investigation and thereby producing further feelings of shame (Green & Pemberton 2017; Pemberton & Vanfraechem 2015).

6.5 “It felt like in some way I was responsible”: self-blame

Feeling guilt in the aftermath of having sexual imagery shared without consent has been found in several studies (Mandau 2021; McGlynn et al. 2020; Bates 2017). Both authors situate their reasoning for this finding in their own research in the parallels between non-consensual sexual image sharing and sexual abuse more generally. Feelings of guilt or self-blame are common in survivors of sexual violence (Eaton 2019). The presence of guilt in my own data offers further evidence to support the conceptualisation of this experience as an act of sexual harm.

Janoff-Bulman’s (1992) work on self-blame amongst victims of trauma defines self-blame in two categories. The first of these is ‘characterological self-blame’, whereby blame for the incident is laid at a person’s own character or qualities. The second is ‘behavioural self-blame’, where fault is assigned to a person’s acts or conduct in relation to the traumatic incident. Behavioural self-blame is particularly linked to the loss of control felt amongst victims of trauma, especially amongst sexual violence victims. Janoff-Bulman argues that if one believes the incident was caused by one’s own behaviour, one can take steps to prevent this harm in future, thereby regaining a sense of control over one’s life. Loss of control in those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing, and the steps taken to mitigate this, has already been covered in chapter 5. This section, however, will explore how characterological and behavioural self-blame both emerged from the dataset.

6.5.1 “Young”, “naive” and “stupid”: characterological self-blame

Characterological self-blame manifested in the form of disparaging comments about participant’s own characters, sentiments which were expressed by Simon, Beth, and Toby. Simon’s comment, for instance, focused on his intellect: “I felt like a bit of an idiot sending it [the image] at the time… but it was a joke”. This is similar to findings in both Mandau’s (2021) and McGlynn et al.’s (2020) studies into victims of image-based sexual abuse, where both datasets contained accounts of people describing themselves as feeling ‘stupid’.

Another form of characterological self-blame was shown in the data, which appeared in the form of being critical about one’s naivety. Beth’s account speaks to the ways in which she felt her lack of ‘savviness’ contributed towards her feelings of shame:

> I was abroad sharing a dorm with [redacted] guys, one of which was my boyfriend of the time… One morning, one of the boys in there said, ‘oh, I took a photo of you last night, Beth’. I was like, ‘oh, right’. And they were just laughing. And I was thinking, ‘oh, it's probably me drooling or something, in my sleep’. I was really young, it didn't really

> occur to me that it might be anything more sinister? I just didn't think anyone would be such a dick. Well, obviously, I did, but I was young, is all I can say [laughs]… I was ashamed that I didn't realise the depth of what the picture actually meant. I absolutely presumed it was just me dribbling. Because I would never do that to anybody else [choked up]. So I felt ashamed… if I'd been savvy enough, I could have gone completely nuts at him and destroyed the film, potentially… I guess, my own naivety.

Here, Beth is framing her inability to predict the act done to her as a failing of her own character; a symptom of being "young and naïve". Her lack of "savviness" and her trust in the people around her are presented as deficiencies, ultimately resulting in Beth laying some of the blame for her experience at her own door. Beth's account also demonstrates what Mandau (2021) calls 'contra-factual thinking', which was also demonstrated in her own research into victims of image-based sexual abuse. This involves the expression of an imagined, alternate sequence of events in which the harm does not occur. In Beth's case, this imagined scenario involves Beth realising what was going on sooner, giving her the ability to confront the image-taker and potentially destroy the image.

Toby's account offers a similar sentiment:

> I was playing a game on the television, like a videogame, with a friend, and it required that you stand up… while I was engaged in this game and I was stood up, he took his phone's camera and just 'upskirted' me. I was completely unaware, I was so invested, which is probably a bit sad, but, yeah. And I didn't appreciate it.

Toby's inference that he perhaps could have noticed the image being taken had he not been engrossed in an activity, and that this fact makes him 'sad', again frames the incident of image-sharing as a failure of Toby's character. Both Beth and Toby's accounts frame a lack of awareness that this could happen to them as a personal flaw that bears some responsibility for their experience, despite the fact that both of these people were in the company of friends and had no reason to assume sexual content would be recorded of them.

The idea of 'naivety' as a concept additionally exists in Nathan's account. For Nathan, consensually sharing images comes with an inherent risk that the images will be shared beyond the original parties, and he argues that it is "naïve" to assume that images shared in spaces such as Grindr only stay with the original recipient. As discussed in chapter 5, Nathan takes what he calls "sensible precautions" as a result of this expectation

> I just think this is a sensible precaution and, you know, as much as I've not been that bothered by it, I don't want pictures of me, dick out, on the internet [amused]. Or, being

> able to be found by an employer for example, or a future employer. So, I think it makes sense to maintain some level of anonymity.

Nathan's 'sensible precautions' mirror other forms of sexual violence prevention. Many sexual violence prevention programmes offer advice to 'potential victims'- usually women- on how to avoid placing themselves in risky situations. While often presented as reasonable preventative measures, these programmes have been criticised for implying that victims who do not follow such precautions are at least in part to blame for placing oneself in harm's way. Although Nathan does not overtly blame himself for his incidents of image-sharing, his expression of this worldview echoes these sentiments; it places the responsibility for preventing harm on the person depicted to engage in careful 'risk management' practices which minimise potential impact (Waldman 2019; Mandau 2021), rather than squarely placing the blame on the part of the image-sharer.

6.5.2 "Not my fault, *but* my fault": behavioural self-blame

Nathan's notion of 'sensible precautions' leads neatly into the concept of behavioural self-blame; the idea that you are made responsible for an incident that has happened to you by your own actions (or inactions). Failure to take 'sensible precautions' can lead to feelings of self-blame. It is not unusual for those who experience self-blame to experience both characterological and behavioural types (Mandau 2021). This is illustrated by Beth's account- she expresses regret both over her character and her behaviour.

> I felt fine sharing a room with those men, which in hindsight, looking back now, wouldn't do that [laughs]. But at the time, I was like, 'oh yeah, they're all just mates, it's fine'. I think perhaps I felt guilty that I'd put myself in that situation. I mean, there wasn't anything else I could do. The hostel didn't have private rooms, they only had dorms. But I felt guilt that I've put myself in that situation. And the fact that the photo came out of that was- *not* my fault, but my fault for being in that position. So that made me, I suppose, feel shameful that, had I not have been in the room, it never would have happened.

Beth demonstrates the ways in which her failure to keep herself from harm has manifested as feelings of guilt and responsibility. In addition, Beth's account indicates how feelings of self-blame permeate even in spite of rational logic. Both Beth and Toby were in the company of friends when their images were taken, a place where one might reasonably assume they need not be on their guard. Although Beth made the choice to share the room with others, and that

those others were men, there was clearly no other option available to her- as she states herself, "there wasn't anything else I could do". In fact, one could argue that Beth did indeed make the most 'rational' choice; when faced with the option of sharing a room with strangers or sharing a room with friends, her decision was arguably the most likely to keep her safe.

Even where participants did not make overt expressions of guilt or self-blame, the language used framed the incident as, at least in part, a failure on the part of the participant. In Yasmin's case, her images were shared by the person she was cheating on her long-term partner as a deliberate act of malice. She cites the image-sharing as being directly instigated by her behaviour:

> What I did was horrible. I cheated on the person I was intending to spend the rest of my life with… if I'd have never cheated [redacted] in the first place, the pictures wouldn't have come out.

Similarly, Nathan's account ties responsibility for the image-sharing, in part, to his own actions: "the mistake that I made was that those videos were made before we'd fully developed a level of trust". In both accounts, the language used reflects a degree of responsibility for the act of the image sharing on Yasmin and Nathan. Yasmin's experience was caused by *her horrible act,* rather than the malicious goals of another*;* Nathan's stemming from *his mistake* in trusting a sexual partner too soon, rather than the deliberate act of a person Nathan trusted. Yasmin's account also demonstrates another incident of 'contra-factual thinking' (Mandau 2021) with her regretful expression that 'if only' she had not engaged in a specific behaviour, her incident of sexual image sharing may have been prevented.

These accounts also demonstrate that self-blame occurs not only where a 'causal link' can be identified by the affected person, but additionally in scenarios where the cause-effect relationship is less clear. I do not use the term 'causal link' to imply that any participants in my data, or indeed anyone who has experienced non-consensual sexual image sharing, is in any way responsible for their experience. Instead, what I mean to suggest is that self-blame occurs not simply in participants who took a clear step which they define as contributing towards their experience, such as sharing the images originally with consent or provoking the image-sharer in some way. It also occurs in participants who can find no logical way in which they could be held responsible for their experience. In Beth's case particularly, while she holds herself responsible for 'putting herself in that situation', this feeling both defies Beth's rational logic that one should feel safe sleeping alongside 'just mates', and demonstrates contradictory thinking- as Beth admits herself: 'there wasn't anything else I could do'. Self-blame is therefore not reliant on an instigating act. A person's role in the image-sharing can be defined as

arbitrary, illogical, or even contradictory, even by the admission of the person affected, but that this knowledge does not prevent the instinct to blame oneself.

This corroborates other studies into self-blame amongst victims, such as Eaton's (2019) study into victims of sexual violence. She found that women did not passively accept themselves as to blame, but instead actively engage in a difficult battle between what they logically knew to be true- that they were not to blame- and a more emotional feeling that they must have done *something* to cause their experience. Other studies have found that victims of sexual assault actually find it easier to move on from their experience if they can more easily 'blame themselves- for instance, if their assault occurred in a scenario they already perceived as dangerous (Scheppele & Bart 1983). This also disrupts typical narratives about self-blame in incidences of non-consensual sexual image sharing, which often focus on the person regretting the original consensual sharing of the images.

6.6 "It was a huge joke to them": targeted humiliation

The argument that non-consensual sexual image sharing has been used as a tool to deliberately humiliate a targeted audience has been long-established. The reasons behind this are varied. Some argue that sexual violence inherently involves aspects of humiliation, and non-consensual sexual image sharing is a form of sexual violence that lends itself well to exposing a person for public humiliation (Taylor 2018). Others such as Stroud (2014) argue that the growth of this phenomenon is motivated more by the desire to enact swift digital revenge on others- rather than routed in sexual violence, the sharing of sexual images is more about gaining the maximum amount of humiliation. Sol offers an interesting perspective on this, situating sexual image sharing in this wider culture of online shame:

> It's the same dynamic behind people taking videos of strangers on the street doing weird stuff, right? And then posting it all over the internet, cos 'look at this weirdo'. And then they don't even think the person might find it, and how that person might feel. Even outside of sex[ual content]… It's a bit of a panopticon situation, everyone's regulating everyone's behaviour, because we can't be weird in public without being recorded and blasted on the internet. And I genuinely think it's the same dynamic, psychologically, it feels the same. I think if someone videoed me- I don't know, being weird in public, or crying in public, I would feel even more violated than I have felt when this has happened. Like, if someone posted a video of me loudly crying because I'm having a meltdown or something, for thousands to see. That would feel more violating to me, than this situation that actually has happened to me [laughing], you know? It's only hypothetical, [but] I know I would feel worse.

I asked Sol to expand on why such a situation would make him feel worse. He responded:

> Well, the shaming element to it, and the public element to it…. having a meltdown in public is something I would already be feeling ashamed of while it's happening, just because I'm loudly crying in public. And then that shame would probably be amplified by it happening thousands of times online, essentially. And there would be that element of- 'why did you take a video if you're not shaming me?'

Sol here is drawing on the differences between public shaming and his own experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing. This demonstrates that the intention of the image-sharer in distributing the image- whether they intended to humiliate the person depiction- has some impact on how much shame is felt (as covered in more detail in section 4.7). Sol doesn't particularly feel shame regarding the content of the imagery itself (which will be covered further in 6.7), but Sol is also shielded from feelings of shame because they don't believe shaming was the *intent* of the person sharing it. From this, we might consider that the impact of feelings of judgement from others in shaping a person's shame response in this situation begins with the image-sharer's judgement.

Where work on non-consensual sexual image sharing focuses on the intentions of the image-sharer, it is often to highlight that these images can cause a great deal of harm regardless of the intention of the culpable party (Hall & Hearn 2017). This was one of the reasons the term' revenge porn' was deemed an inappropriate term and contributed towards the removal of the need to demonstrate 'intent to harm' in UK law (Rackley & McGlynn 2014). While a person may be deeply harmed by an unintentionally damaging act of image sharing, sharing for purposes of intentional humiliation is even more likely to induce these feelings of shame in the person depicted.

6.6.1 "Caught by [redacted]": sexual bullying

Within the data, there were several incidents where the presence of image sharing was quite clearly used as a 'joke' or 'prank' against the person depicted. These are deliberate acts of humiliation, deliberate attempts to shame the person depicted in the images. These accounts differ from mainstream discourses regarding non-consensual sexual image sharing not only through the display of it as a 'prank' but additionally because both parties- the image-sharer and the person depicted- are male. Further to this, all cases of this in my data were between parties who considered themselves friends, without any sexual or romantic connotations. Research on men sharing sexual images of men is scarce- Hall and Hearn's (2019) discourse

analysis of 'revenge porn websites' include male-male interactions, but only in a romantic or sexual context. The cases in this dataset present more of a complicated narrative around non-consensual sexual image sharing. Rather than an act of sexual violence intended to humiliate, these situations seem to be *primarily* an act of humiliation, that uses sexual violence as a tool to emphasise these feelings of embarrassment. This may be best examined through the lens of what Small (2023) refers to as 'sexual bullying'. Small's definition situates sexual violence in the context of wider forms of violence used in social settings amongst men, deliberate acts of social shaming. Small argues that violence is used as a form of bonding to reaffirm masculine identities and demonstrate group cohesion. While these acts of violence often involve elements which would be identified as sexual violence in other contexts, the perception of the acts in this context do not fit our typical 'cultural meaning' of sexual assault and are therefore often excluded from the dialogue. This idea will be discussed throughout the section.

Both Toby, Simon and Greg experienced their image sharing as a 'joke' perpetrated by male friends. Toby's account situates his experience in the 'edgy' sense of humour of his friend and stipulates why being "the butt end of a joke" felt particularly cruel:

> One of my friends, the one that I've known for the longest time out of that group, his sense of humour sometimes involves crossing boundaries. I'm varying degrees of comfortable with that, but I know that's his sense of humour… I think that was part of what made the joke a little bit more, callous than I would have liked? Even, notwithstanding his humour involving that type of humour that involves crossing boundaries, lighter or darker than that, I just thought it had a more callous edge to it than normal.

Simon, similarly, explains his experience was probably viewed as 'banter' by the image sharer, and his friend was surprised to find Simon angered, rather than humoured, by the experience.

> The guy who actually shared it, he was a good friend. He thought it was funny, it was just a joke for him. It was in his mind, 'banter', I suppose. It wasn't banter, but you know, on that kind of level. It didn't even occur to him that it would have been actually quite a seriously damaging thing.… I was thinking at the time, you'd have to have the emotional intelligence of a plank of wood to think that was funny… He honestly thought it was going to be funny. He was surprised that I was angry about it. And that made me more and more annoyed.

Greg's account also offers a particularly detailed illustration of the 'joking' nature of this experience. He situates his experience in the context of his friend group at the time, who made a regular 'prank' out of recording sexual acts of their friends.

> When I was about [late teens], I think it was [redacted], there was a trend that was going around in our friendship group called '[redacted]'. So, [laughs] whenever there were people at house parties that went and slept with each other, or even just going round to each other's houses, they would basically run into the room while you're having sex with people and they would take photographs or they'd record it, and that's the joke... a lot of the time it was just like, 'haha, you got caught [redacted]'.

I asked Greg if he thought this was done maliciously, and he offered more context on the 'joking' nature of this experience:

> Even though they thought it was a joke I still found it quite a malicious thing, from my point of view. But to them, it was the joke, so... It's difficult to say, because obviously there are some people there I was quite good friends with, so I think that it was a joke for them, but there are others that I didn't get on so well with, so for them it would be more of like, a 'revenge' kind of- like, 'ha ha, we can do this', kind of thing.

This seems a fairly clear example of non-consensual sexual image sharing in the context of sexual bullying, an act of image sharing disguised as a 'joke' or 'prank' with the clear intent of humiliating or shaming the participant. While at no point was this described as sexual violence, the sexual undercurrent of photographing someone engaged in a sexual act cannot be denied, neither can the intent of this act as to 'humiliate'. Greg is the clear 'butt of the joke' here, subject to overt and malicious 'bullying'.

The possibility of this 'trend' being done as a misogynistic act, however, can't be fully ruled out. Greg's female partner was also recorded in this incident, and Greg has reason to believe that least one of his friends had a deliberate motivation to target her:

> One of the people that had done it– which is why I said it was more of a malicious thing from his point of view– one of the guys that had done it was her ex. So he had come and took these photos and was obviously doing it to get back at her, but he was a friend of mine as well. They had broken up a few weeks before we ended up together, so it was a bit tender anyway, and then there was this, so she was really upset.

Despite this, however, it is clear that Greg's partner is not the *sole* target. The fact that the image-sharers sent "stills of the videos" to Greg after the incident in a deliberate attempt to further this experience demonstrates that Greg was a target of his friends himself.

All of these accounts situate their experience of image-sharing in the context of a joke or prank. Jokes that involve 'crossing boundaries' or 'banter' as described by Toby and Simon can be rooted in so-called 'lad culture'. 'The contribution of lad culture to sexual violence has been covered extensively, but mostly in its application to women (Jordan et al. 2022; Phipps et al. 2018). What has been less researched is the ways in which this 'humour' is used against other men within the social group. Small's 2023 study of sexual violence amongst teenage boys on a high school wrestling team shows the ways in which lad culture can develop into a "ritual of sexual bullying" (2023, p.23). Small researched a practice referred to within the teenager's group as 'pumping', whereby a number of the group would hold down another member of the team and commit an act of sexual violence against them: "pinning down his arms and legs; covering his face with a hoodie; punching and hitting him; grabbing his genitals; and pushing their fingers toward or into his anus" (2023, p.23). The act became a ritualistic form of social interaction amongst the team.

Greg's description of the practice of '[redacted]' has much in common with 'pumping'. Both experiences take place within the context of a specific social cohort of teenagers. Greg identifies it as a trend within his specific 'friendship group'. Greg was also in his late teens at the time, and he positioned this group as being around at a similar age: "At this time this was the end of A-Levels, so people were going off to uni and stuff". Both experiences also have a unique name and a ritual of practice to be followed. Additionally, 'pumping' typically took place in "in semi-private locations, outside the oversight of adults" (2023, p.23)- Greg notes that '[redacted]' typically took place at house parties. Greg's use of the term 'trend', his statement that this happened 'whenever' the group attend a house party, and his assurance that he had not done this himself: "I'd never taken part in it, cos I've always been… a little bit uncomfortable about the whole thing anyway' speaks to this phenomenon as a repeated act, much like 'pumping'.

Greg's account presents his experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing as a form of 'ritualistic' sexual bullying. While Toby and Simon's accounts may be missing the 'ritual' element, they too demonstrate image-sharing in the context of deliberate, targeted humiliation, presented under the guise of humour or 'banter'. This is presented as a new 'type' of non-consensual sexual image sharing, as per McGlynn et al.'s (2017) continuum of image-based sexual abuse. Toby offered some speculation on why he thought the relationship between non-consensual sexual image sharing and humour had not been discussed prior.

> I think this has some place in a discussion about humour and its relationship to limits that we can have, on freedom of expression and also freedom of action. When we take into account the idea of comedy, it's an interesting dynamic, because humour does necessarily kind of consist of breaking some kind of rule, whether it's a conversational or a societal one. So I think it's a really difficult line to cross and I think it's difficult to detect, and I think it's something that should be studied.

Toby's account touches on a key factor of humiliation or prank-based acts; because these are done under the guise of humour, and because humour necessitates breaking boundaries, this permits these acts to be framed as jocular 'boys will be boys' activity, rather than acts of deliberate harm or violation; as Toby notes, it is "difficult to detect" when a boundary has been broken which transforms an act from a prank into something more serious (Small 2023). Some studies have noted how humour or pranking re-enforces concepts of hegemonic or toxic masculinity, particularly when used against men and boys who display less dominant forms of masculinity (Böhner 2023; Plester 2015; Gieseler 2014). We might argue then, that men are targeted by non-consensual sexual image sharing by the same types of dominant masculine discourses that motivate men to target women, and that 'sexual bullying' might be neatly situated into existing feminist arguments around n0n-consensual sexual image sharing (Aborisade 2021; McGlynn et al. 2020; Ruvalcaba & Eaton 2020; Hearn & Hall 2019; Gavey 2005).

6.6.2. "It stayed with me for a long time": shame's longevity

The data also offers evidence to corroborate Probyn's (2005) argument that shame is defined by its capacity to remain with a person for a prolonged period of time. A recurring element of non-consensual sexual image sharing, which has been found in several incidents of the data, is the way that it breaks temporal boundaries. Those subject to this experience must endure it long after the incident occurs. The data offers two accounts where the feeling of shame in particular remained with the affected person long after the incident. Grace's account is as follows:

> I carried a lot of shame with me for- I want to say for at least a year after it. Definitely. And I don't know [if] I don't have it really anymore. I know I haven't processed it. But it's still something that- even thinking about the fact that that was up there, even if it was only one- two photos for an hour, terrifies me.

Beth also gave a similar account. The idea of her image being a public source of humour, and the shame attached to that particular imagining, had a lasting impact:

> It was just the guy in the pub, who was passing it around, and everyone was laughing. That image stayed with me for a long time [emotional]. That random people in pubs were being shown a picture of me that they thought was hilarious… the fact that there was so many people seeing it, and laughing at it and finding it funny… it did feel shameful. It felt I'd done something wrong [choked up].

In both cases, these feelings of shame have lasted for years, and the presence of it was felt during the interview process. Grace's situation of the feeling that 'even now' this feeling occurs, and the emotional way in which Beth recounted the feeling, show that shame is something that can be recalled at a moment's notice. These accounts also speak to another common theme- that of the 'embodied' nature of the harms felt by non-consensual sexual image sharing (see section 4.6). Probyn (2005) uses the work of Tomkins to illustrate this in her own work: "shame strikes deep into the heart of man… shame is felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul" (Tomkins, cited in Frank & Kosofsky Sedgwick 1995, p.133). While Probyn focuses on the reaction of 'blushing', this data demonstrates other physical reactions to shame. Shame here is 'carried' by Grace, evoking the image of shame as a burden to be born, something seated deep with her. For Beth, her body still has a physical reaction to this account of shame- she became choked up, and cried, as she recounted this feeling in the interview. Shame therefore joins both harm and loss as effects on non-consensual sexual image sharing which are felt bodily and experienced far beyond the original impact.

6.7 "That's unfair, but it's not my fault": resisting shame

This chapter has explored how shame is shaped by both opinions and standards held of oneself, and by outside judgement of others. As a result, shame is not always a straightforward emotion. For those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing, who often logically know that they have done nothing wrong, the shame they feel places them at odds with themselves. This is particularly true for women and queer people, who face judgement and stigma for sexual acts from mainstream society. Resisting shame, then, becomes an act of deliberate rebellion against these discourses.

6.7.1 “As a feminist, you don’t want to feel shamed”: feminist resistance

The relationship between women’s sexuality and shame has been covered extensively in the literature review, and it is true that existing research on non-consensual sexual image sharing often identifies a relationship between shame and female victims. Lehtinen’s (1998) work on shame establishes that the feeling is more largely felt by women and what she refers to as other ‘socially subordinate groups’, and that shame is felt differently by such people. Shame for what she refers to as a ‘privileged person’ is a unique position, often driven by a single incident, which may be easily overcome. For women, whose social environment instils feelings of insecurity from an early age, feelings of shame are the norm rather than the exception (Probyn, 2005; Lehtinen, 1998; Bartky, 1990). An incident which instils feelings of shame in women is layered upon a self which has already been conditioned to feel inferior, resulting in a greater or deeper impact. Theoretically then, women who experience non-consensual sexual image sharing- or at the very least, members of other ‘socially subordinate groups’, are both more likely to feel shamed by their experience, and to feel that shame more deeply. As Probyn (2005, p.83) puts it, “those who have been the object of shaming early on have a greater capacity to re-experience the feeling”.

Feelings of shame in some of my female participants- Beth, Grace, and Katie- were quite complicated to express. In these cases, the experience of shame felt about oneself clashes with how one thinks women as a whole should react to this experience, resulting in a complicated expression of feeling. Beth presents this neatly: she stated that “particularly, as a feminist, you don’t want to feel shamed when it's not your fault. But I remember at 18, it did feel shameful.” This builds on some of the contradictory nature of shame already discussed in section 6.4. We can infer here that Beth’s feminist ideologies- which would argue that women are not to blame for having sexual imagery shared without consent- are clashing with Beth’s actual feelings about this experience. What results is a double sensation of shame for not only the image itself, but for going against or failing to uphold one’s feminist beliefs.

Taylor’s (2021) work on sexual humiliation argues that this creates a response in those affected by it of what she calls ‘feminist rage’. She describes this as a

> Counternormalizing and counterhumiliating potential in the form of a feminist rage that challenges gendered power and the sexual violence and humiliation that both emerge from and reproduce it. My analysis thus illustrates that expressions of feminist rage are crucial for both individual victim/survivors and more broadly within feminist anti–sexual violence protest (p.83).

Beth, Grace and Katie all at times expressed a version of this 'feminist rage', where their feelings of shame eventually led to feelings of anger about the way they were made to feel. The discussion particularly of gender discrepancies and the perception of this experience as 'something that happens to women' has already been covered, here, we see how that perspective develops into anger. Beth's account particularly establishes the way that these feelings of shame develop into 'feminist rage':

> The only thing I feel the most angry about, was that the stigma and the fear of that photo have followed me all the way through my life, and I just wonder… there were opportunities I had, that I did not take, in part because I was scared that photo might come out. And I think that's so stymying on female ability and potential…. [if it came out now] I don't think I'd feel as bad as I did then. And I could use it as something positive. But for years afterwards, there's no way I would have done. I didn't have the confidence or the feminist backing behind me, to be able to articulate it, perhaps.

As Beth describes, what was once felt as stigma, fear and anxiety grew into anger, a progression Beth roots in developing her own sense of confidence and what she identifies as "feminist backing". Here, we can see how the principles of feminism have helped Beth to move away from feelings of shame and gain a perspective that allows her to embrace the injustice of what occurred to her. This also displays a sentiment of female aggregation; this experience is not simply impacting Beth's ability alone, but has an impact on female ability in a broader sense; Beth is clearly framing her perspective as one that broadly represents and affects women.

Katie offers a similar expression of the 'frustrating' nature of her experience, and how this fits with other injustices against women, which she feels are intrinsically linked to her experience.

> I'm still frustrated, it still hurts that something like that could happen. And I know it happens to so many people, and I think that hurts even more, the fact that there'll be so many people, women especially, that this happens to- it's not right, it's not okay, it's not fair that we have to deal with things like this, and for it to affect us so much… it's really, really, frustrating I think, because it feels like so many things you've got to be cautious over, or you've got to think twice before you do that, or, you've got to do all of these different things to protect yourself. And we shouldn't have to do that… But, we have to end up thinking all those other things, because we've got to keep ourselves safe, cos nobody else is. Nobody else is protecting and supporting us and stopping it from happening.

Katie's language of "we" and "us" is a further example of how she is speaking not only for herself, but for women in a broader sense. Her further assertion that "it's not right, it's not okay, it's not fair", is a mantra that speaks quite clearly to the idea of 'feminist rage'. An important note here is that the data collection took place shortly after a particularly notable incident of violence against women. Sarah Everard was a young woman who was falsely arrested, sexually assaulted and then murdered by Met police officer Wayne Couzens in 2021. In the aftermath, a vigil in which a number of women were controversially arrested, and advice given by the Met which included to 'wave a passing bus' down if approached by suspicious persons, attracted a great deal of criticism (Grierson 2021; Milne et al. 2021). Katie mentioned this incident specifically as something that has shaped her understanding of her experience.

> When Sarah Everard went missing, she's local to me… it was scary and it hit home and me and my sister went to a vigil for her. And she was running, she was just on a run, she was just going home… you know, you report [sexual violence], and then it turns out that the police are involved in that! How are we supposed to trust the police? And then you've got the government coming out and saying, 'if you feel unsafe, go to a bus stop'. Stuff like that where it's just like, is anybody actually listening or doing anything, like, to help us? It makes you feel helpless.

This offers a much broader perspective on Katie's anger. Her response to her image sharing is not shaped simply by the experience itself, but how the incident fits within a wider scope of violence against women, and this feminist framework helps Katie to understand and rationalise her experience. The assertion that these things happen to women 'for something that is not our fault at all' re-affirms that the guilt she feels is contradictory to the system that she lives in.

Katie's attendance at a vigil additionally corresponds with the findings of Bate's (2017) study on 'revenge porn' victims, where she found a number of participants took part in activist work as a 'positive coping mechanism' after their experience of image sharing.

> Mechanisms used by participants such as speaking out and becoming involved with advocacy work may be empowering because it gives survivors a chance to show resistance against the institutions that continue to allow others to be victimized by revenge porn. When survivors have little or no legal recourse, they may find that speaking out and testifying to have bills passed is the only chance they have for their voices to be heard by individuals with power in society, which may provide a sense of

> agency when they are actively trying to prevent revenge porn from harming others (p.38).

This was similarly echoed in the data, not just by Katie but also by Grace and Beth. Beth outlined quite clearly how her own experience had incentivised her to 'fight' injustice against women:

> The things that have happened to me have made me much more confirmed in my mindset about how we have to fight what's happening around us, and how we have to keep supporting women's rights and children's rights. And yeah, maybe all of those things, you know- such as having that happen to me when I was [redacted] was a good thing in a way, because it certainly spurred me on… it has been really pivotal in pushing me towards feminist movements.

Beth offered some examples of the ways in which she challenged sexism in her daily life, such as preventing sexist language in her workplace and raising her sons with what she called a "schooling in feminism". Grace also expressed that she had done charity work for sexual violence, and considered non-consensual sexual image sharing to fall into this category:

> I knew straightaway I wanted to help with this because I've done so much fundraising and stuff for sexual assault and sexual violence, and this does fall under that category but it's not spoken about. It is one of those things where, it's not until you start maybe opening up about your experiences that you learn how many people, the percentage [of people] that it affects….I remember last year, I had bought a t-shirt for a charity that donated everything in Ireland to Women's Aid, and it was all based on ending the spread of explicit imagery without consent, to spring the new legislation into the Constitution and stuff. But I remember buying that. and that was me showing my support.

Grace's statement frames taking part in fundraising as a cathartic experience- it is an act she can do that allows her to 'show support' for a cause, which then provides licence for her to 'move on' from her experience. This speaks to Bate's (2017) discussion of the role of agency in advocacy work- it offers Grace an opportunity to respond to her experience in a safe and positive manner. This is especially significant for Grace, who chose not to report her experience to the police based on a highly judgemental and sexist response she had received when previously reporting an incident of rape. This makes advocacy work all the more significant; it may not aid Grace in the pursuit of personal justice, but it might just contribute

to a more 'just' world overall, in a way that doesn't risk further harm or shame to herself. Advocacy work is therefore a safe outlet for feelings of injustice, anger, or pain.

Grace's account also situates taking part in this research project in the same category as fundraising and activism. Section 6.4.1 already noted the positioning of the interview as a 'safe space' for Grace to discuss a shameful topic; here we can also infer that the research interview is seen as a productive or helpful place to share one's account. Grace's final note at the end of the interview was that: "I think a lot of work needs to be done, unfortunately [laughs]. You've got your work cut out for you, I'll give you that!", which again positions her contribution to the research project as a step towards the 'needed work' of preventing non-consensual sexual image sharing. Katie also situated her reason for participating not only in a desire to share her experience in a 'safe' space, but additionally within this need to contribute towards 'doing something' about the problem.

> When I was talking about it- you know when you feel like, 'oh, god, yeah, I really needed to get it off my chest'… When I saw your research, I'm like- 'I can talk about that. That's happened to me!'… I think it's gonna be important- for example, your research, shining a light on the fact that this happens… and maybe it will create more of a movement of people being able to do something about it, I don't know. I hope that something will be done more about it, whether that's like, from the websites trying to control more, or the police might be able to track things better in future… I like to think that they will be able to improve and do that. Cos I think it's needed, I think it's so needed [sighs].

The desire or opportunity to take action against non-consensual sexual image sharing, or other forms of sexism or sexual violence more broadly, can be an effective way for those affected to reclaim agency and feel they are contributing to a 'better' world. Bates's (2017) identification of this as a positive coping mechanism is echoed in this data. So-called 'feminist rage' allows women affected by this experience to rationalise their complicated feelings of shame or guilt, and to contextualise their experience in a wider patriarchal power structure.

6.7.2 "Taking the images with protest in mind": queer resistance

Resistance was not an intended point of discussion in the interviews. In fact, in interviews with Nathan, a gay man, and Sol, a bisexual trans man, it was something that wasn't prompted directly by the interview questions, but a discussion that emerged naturally at the end of the call once the interview had ended. In both cases, I turned the recording function back on and

asked them to repeat what they had said. Queer resistance wasn't discussed at length in the dataset, hence the brevity of this section in comparison to the previous section on feminist resistance. However, as non-consensual sexual image sharing is rarely considered in the context of queer identities or issues, the idea of queer resistance merited inclusion in the thesis. Both Nathan and Sol expressed sentiments that concerned the resistance of a heteronormative culture. Nathan- who stated that he was proud of his depiction in the shared images- expanded a little on why he felt this way. He contextualised sexual image sharing as a point of pride for gay men:

> Oh gosh, we're gonna get into queer theory here if we're not careful- I think this is a wider part about why in general, roughly speaking, as a community, gay men seem to sleep around more… So first of all, gay men sleeping around with each other is intrinsically an act of rebellion and protest… and then has become part of the culture… it is an action against heteronormative society… and I think some gay guys probably will be taking these images with this idea of protest in mind. An example of this might be- it's not quite photos, but Pride [events]– especially when you move away from commercialised areas- like the fetish versions, like Folsom, where pictures and videos are being made at the parade deliberately to some extent to be provocative.

The idea that sexual acts, and therefore by extension the recording of sexual acts, as an act of rebellion against a heteronormative society is incredibly interesting. This frames the taking and sharing of sexual images, for Nathan, as an act of resistance towards a society that might seek to demean or shame gay men. The reference to Folsom street fair is also interesting; this is directly cited by Gilden (2023) as a site where existing conceptualisations of non-consensual sexual image sharing fail to take into account queer cultures and identities. This idea is also paired with Nathan's previous description of image sharing as 'the norm' in gay culture; if sex is "intrinsically an act of rebellion", then the taking and sharing of sexual images becomes a point of rebellion too; as Nathan further argues, "it's not particularly rebellious if you're just keeping that image to yourself". Images shared within queer spaces which are subject "comparatively low levels of stigma surrounding nudity and sexuality" (Gilden 2023, p.816) exist outside of heteronormative discourses of shame.

This is not to say that queer men cannot feel shame or be generally impacted by this experience. Accounts of queer men who have had their images shared publicly have documented this, even if this was not represented in the dataset (Survivors UK n.d.; Anonymous 2022; Beresford 2018). Even inter-community sharing is not immune. When asked to expand on this, Nathan raised the significance of the concept of agency in queer resistance:

> The taking of the image I guess is part of the act of rebellion. If you choose to share it, that can be part of it, [but] if you've not chosen to share it, and it's being shared, that's just dodgy bullshit, that's bad. And then I guess it isn't an act of rebellion, cos you're removing their autonomy… And the removal of autonomy, I would argue, probably at least diminishes the rebellious aspect.

Nathan's account routes resistance in autonomy- the ability to choose when and in what circumstances, and to whom these images are shared, is crucial to the perception of these images as a point of pride. This contributes to Waldman's (2019) argument, who states that norms around image sharing, even if motivated by positive factors such as "sexual empowerment" (p.998), creates a climate where non-consensual sexual image sharing is excused as 'normal' or 'expected conduct': "some gay men who use geosocial dating apps do not understand the privacy invasion inherent in sharing graphic images without consent" (p.995). Nathan is addressing the value of consent in these image-sharing practices, which suggests that there is still a notion of inter-community non-consensual sexual image sharing as a violation, even if it is less likely to trigger feelings of shame or experiences of stigma. More data- both on practices of image-sharing among queer men, and the factors that might impact the severity of non-consensual sexual image sharing for them- is outside of the scope of this research but clearly warranted to understand this problem fully. What we can draw from Nathan's account, however, is that the sharing of these images as a form of resistance and pride protects him from feelings of shame.

Sol also expressed resistance to shame. While at first, this was expressed in a more general sense:

> I've told my friends, [and] there has been a few people who have diminished it. Said it wasn't that big a deal, and that's also really changed my opinion of them. Or like, blamed me for even letting them take a video of me while that was happening, and 'what was I expecting, having sex with them', that kind of thing… But you're sharing something, a video of me, sexually, without my consent, so that's [Sol being to blame] not in question, that was never a question for me… I know I'm right, and it's more frustrating that no one else can see it.

Sol later situated this resistance firmly in a queer context, with specific reference to his trans identity. He stated his frustration with "radical feminist" movements- specifically, trans exclusionary radical feminist movements- and their framing of gender. He states that their assessment of sexual violence is overly reductive and that it "projects this idea of womanhood as being weak and inherently victims, and manhood as being strong and inherently attackers".

Further, he argues that they consider "trans masculine people as people trying to evade the misogyny and the sexual abuse that comes with being a woman, as if that's something that's embedded in womanhood". Sol is referencing the myth that transgender men transition mainly to avoid experiencing gendered harassment as a woman, an argument that greatly oversimplifies the process of transition and ignores the increased risk of harm that transgender people face (Closson et al. 2024; Abelson 2014;).

Sol resists this notion that he is merely a woman avoiding sexual violence. Part of what frustrates him is that his experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing, as well as other forms of sexual violence, have been motivated by his identity as a *trans* and *non-heterosexual* person:

> That really upsets me, because most of the sexual violence I have experienced has come from my trans-masculine identity, and how people related to my trans-masculinity, in one way or the other. I've been sexually assaulted and that was from a partner that was trying to prove to me that I liked men… which, again, is all very gendered and very queer. It's not about me being a woman.

This highlights the importance of addressing non-consensual sexual image sharing, and other forms of sexual violence more broadly, not only in discourses of misogyny, but in contexts that take into account the ways in which LGBTQ+ people are targeted and affected by this experience. Sol's experience of being assaulted to "prove" something about his sexual or gender identity relates to the idea of 'corrective rape'- sexual violence deployed as a tool to 'correct' certain types of behaviour or identities. While most research identifies gay or bisexual women as targets of this experience, asexual women, trans men, and indeed, "any individual who does not conform to traditional expressions of gender or to heterosexuality" (Doan-Minh 2019, p.177) is liable to experience it. For Sol, a cultural discourse that focuses solely on *women* as victims erases his lived experience, and he firmly resists the trans-exclusionary narrative this places him in. Sol also discusses how narrow framings of gender and sexual violence exclude the perspectives of men, both queer and straight.

> A lot of the cis, straight, or, men I talk to about sex, so many of them have very similar stories of being somewhat abused in their teenage years and they don't realise they were, because don't fit this mould as the 'stereotypical victim', and because their perpetrators were women. I do think in many ways that also fed into my own experience, in this person thinking it was okay to share that video. Because I'm certain, similar things, or breaks of those boundaries and consent, happened to him as well, and he brushed it off and thought it was okay, and so he just doesn't see why that's a

> problem. The nature of the conversation around sexual assault and violation of consent leads so many men to think they could not *not* be consenting. Because they're men. And men are supposed to 'always want it', and they're cool if they want it.

Sol cites the exclusion of men from discussions of victimhood as both a s*ymptom* of, and a *producer* of, cultures which normalise violence- he considers the likelihood that his image-sharer has experienced "something similar", but without the framework or tools to understand this as violence, which normalises and therefore perpetuates this behaviour.

Sol's account therefore demonstrates the significance of resisting applying a narrow framework of gender to the phenomenon of non-consensual sexual image sharing, one that perpetuates the idea that women are *solely* victims and men *solely* perpetrators. Sexual violence of men and queer people is argued to be a feminist issue- it can be rooted in concepts of power, hegemonic masculinity, and hierarchal gender structures, all of which feminist groups cite as causes of sexual violence (Ashley 2018; Javaid 2016; Cohen 2014; Walklate 2004; Hooks 2000). Despite this, dominant socio-cultural framing of this experience focuses on heterosexual dynamics and female victims, to the extent that this narrative directly informs UK legislation and policy (Graaff 2021; Phipps 2010). Feminist responses to non-consensual sexual image-sharing must therefore seek to conceptualise this problem as one that largely- but not exclusively- targets women, allowing for a more or inclusive conceptualisation of this problem. It must embrace the commonality in the experience of having sexual imagery shared without consent, across the boundaries of gender and sexuality. As this research has shown, gender and sexuality are far from the only factors that affect how having sexual imagery shared without consent is lived, felt, and experienced.

7.0 Conclusion

This project aimed to explore the experiences of individuals who have had sexual imagery shared without their consent. It sought to explore the effects that the release of these images had on the individuals, including repercussions to their mental health, their careers, or their relationships with others. Additionally, it questioned what actions were taken in response. Do those affected report their experiences to police, bosses, or host websites, or do they respond to their experience in other ways? Finally, it sought to examine the lasting impact of this experience. Does it cause persistent, transformative alterations to a person- are they left changed?

This research has found that non-consensual sexual image sharing has the ability to be severe, but is not always; the experience can have both major and minor impacts, creating a 'scale' of harm. These harms are embodied, gendered and far reaching, existing beyond traditional boundaries of temporality and extending into social groups and relationships. This impact can also be categorised as one of loss- control of one's image, the way one is perceived, one's ability to trust, and one's ability to exist freely online. These losses extend beyond the original incident of image sharing, including limiting one's ability to react in certain ways; while participants expressed desires to report or confront their image-sharer, the fear of further repercussion, discussion, or circulation of the images strips them of this choice. Furthermore, the experience can be categorised by a sense of shame, tied deeply to the sexual nature of the image. Sometimes this shame is intended by the act of sharing the image, making it an act of deliberate humiliation- in other cases, this shame comes from internal sources. This further results in feelings of self-blame and perceived or actual reputation damage. These findings demonstrate that this experience is capable of having a lasting impact on a person, with certain factors such as image audience, the image-sharer's motivations, and the relationship one has with the image, shaping the lasting consequences of this experience. Fear of re-circulation of the image or new incidences of image-sharing, combined with a lack of closure or justice, can extend the impact of this experience infinitely.

One consequence of using more 'neutral' (e.g. without assumption regarding abuse) language to describe this phenomenon is that the dataset demonstrates the range of ways in which a person can be affected by this experience, and the diversity in who can be affected. Each incident of non-consensual sexual image sharing expressed in the dataset was unique. While some imagery was taken and shared consensually, other footage was taken without the knowledge of the person depicted, or stolen from other spaces online. The sexual nature of the imagery itself ranged from explicit to mundane. Images were shared by friends, colleagues,

current or ex-partners or unknown parties, and shared to a range of places- social media, adult websites, group chats, within social circles or to clearly targeted parties. Participants have offered detailed accounts which could be more granularly defined as 'revenge porn', 'upskirting', 'image-based sexual abuse', and 'pranking'. Some included experiences defy established categorisation, such as the theft and sexualisation of non-sexual images, and the sharing of sex work profiles. The use of a broader umbrella term such as non-consensual sexual image sharing moves away from the need to individually categorise these experiences, which indeed, many participants had difficulty doing; sentiments such as questioning whether their experience was 'genuine', and discussing how they felt their experience matched up with the 'expected' norms of this phenomenon, was commonly expressed.

This work therefore offers further evidence to support the notion that the traditional 'revenge porn' narrative is an outdated framework for conceptualising this experience. This is not something that only happens in the context of sexual or romantic partners, nor does it only occur as a result of animosity within that relationship. This supports McGlynn et al.'s (2017) assertion that this phenomenon is best conceptualised as a continuum of practices rather than a collection of neat categories. This work has further uncovered types of non-consensual sexual image-sharing which are not included in our current framing of this experience. The sharing of sexual images as a joke, prank, or 'sexual bullying' is a new conceptualisation. Building on this foundation with further research on this area- particularly how it relates to masculinities and inter-male violence- would be a welcome further development in this area.

This thesis has corroborated other research in this area, in findings such as the impact of non-consensual sexual image sharing to general health and mental wellbeing (Huber 2023a; McGlynn et al. 2020; Bates 2017;), the enduring nature of this experience (McGlynn et al. 2020; Powell & Henry 2017), expressions of shame and self-blame (Aborisade 2021; Mandau 2021; Eaton 2019), the nature of these harms as embodied (Powell & Henry 2017; Henry & Powell 2015), and a lack of inclination to report this experience to the police (Huber 2023b). This data further offers evidence of this experience as a form of sexual violence. Women in the dataset particularly situated their experience in a broader framework of sexual and gendered violence, often explicitly linking their experience to other forms of sexual harassment or violence they had faced (Aborisade 2021; Ruvalcaba & Eaton 2020; McGlynn et al. 2020; Henry & Flynn 2019). Furthermore, this thesis offers evidence to support the significant role of technology in facilitating this act- the fear of digital image re-circulation and an inability to remove or trace content all exacerbated the harms felt (Dragiewicz et al. 2018; Henry & Powell 2018).

This thesis also made novel contributions to this field. The use of broader language in recruitment materials has gathered a population that diverts from the conventional, heteronormative framing of this experience. The inclusion of men- who had their images shared by sexual partners and friends, both male and female- has allowed us to examine this experience in new contexts which account for queer and masculine interactions. The inclusion of a trans man has offered particular unique insight into how this experience intersects with trans identities. Furthermore, the inclusion of a sex worker has offered a perspective not previously addressed. The examination of these accounts, alongside the accounts of women affected in a more conventional heterosexual framework, has allowed us to identify where parts of this experience transcend gender. Expressions of humiliation, self-blame, objectification, panic, and the lasting nature of this experience- previously only examined in the context of women- were also demonstrated by men in the dataset, suggesting that factors *beyond* gender shape this experience.

Furthermore, the inclusion of data from those who felt less severely impacted by this experience has offered us space to examine specifically *what* factors or circumstances cause the most impact. The inclusion of men, for instance, has allowed us to identify the significance of power dynamics outside of a gendered power structure. Men are usually considered immune from some of the more severe harms of image-sharing based on the assumption that men are not subject to the same level of stigma around sexuality, and this was certainly the case for some; images that showed men in ways they felt portrayed them as dominant, masculine, and powerful were less impacted. However, men who felt the images portrayed them in humiliating or non-masculine ways- particularly where causing powerlessness or humiliation was the purpose of the image sharing- were impacted more severely. In this context, non-consensual sexual image sharing can be identified as a gendered phenomenon for both men and women. Future framing of this problem should consider that while men may not be the largest targeted group for this experience, they are neither immune from having sexual imagery shared without consent, nor immune from being harmed by this experience. Gender is just one factor of many that shapes the degree to which this experience is impactful.

The examination of images shared of queer men has further helped us conceptualise how the context of the image sharing is a factor that causes impact. The data shows evidence that supports other limited work in this area that images of queer men exist in a context that normalises- and to a certain extent, takes pride in- the consensual exchange of nude images (Gilden 2023; Waldman 2019). Images shared in this context are subject to risk-management practices that protect the person depicted from being identified. Therefore, the sharing of these images without consent *within* the queer community, *where* anonymity is preserved, and where sharing images is a *normal* practice may cause less impact. Images shared outside

of this context- for instance, where the transaction has been between intimate parties, or the audience sits outside of these queer spaces- do introduce risk of impact and harm. Further research in this area, which perhaps explores the culture of sexual image exchange in queer men and how this intersects with the phenomenon of non-consensual sexual image sharing, is needed to fully understand this context.

The final novel contribution of this work is a methodological one. There is little empirical, qualitative research on the phenomenon of having sexual imagery shared without consent. Furthermore, there is little guidance on conducting in-depth qualitative research on forms of sexual sensitivity, or intimate topics more broadly (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007; Goodrum & Keys 2007). This work has noted the ways in which conventional methods of qualitative data collection, such as recording signatures to demonstrate informed consent, or conducting face-to-face or video interviews, may be too exposing or risky for people that are being asked to discuss highly intimate- and at times humiliating- experiences. This is particularly pertinent for those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing, who have already had content shared without their consent, and may be less likely to put their trust in a stranger to keep their names and faces private. As sexual images are sometimes shared accompanied by other personal content, such as names and contact information, knowing this information can make these images searchable. Future research should consider methods that preserve participant anonymity *even from the researcher* as much as possible to better circumvent this issue.

One conclusion that this research can draw, quite plainly, is that the experience of having sexual imagery shared without consent is a harmful one. Feelings of anger, fear, humiliation and confusion were all commonly expressed, even in participants who considered themselves 'less' affected. What can also be defined here is that this experience is highly personal and there are a number of factors which can impact exactly *how* harmful the experience is to you. The relationship with the image-sharer, the context of the imagery and the image-sharing itself, and one's relationship with oneself are all factors which can affect the degree to which this experience impacts a person. Non-consensual sexual image sharing can cause long-lasting harm to the people affected, and has impacted peoples' mental health, physical health, self-esteem, and feelings of safety and security. It has affected people's relationships with their friends, families, romantic partners, and coworkers.

Another conclusion to be drawn is that this experience is inherently sexual in nature and has much in common with other forms of sexual violence. Sharing a sexual image without consent reduces a person to that very image, rendering them a sexual object in quite a literal manner. Participants, both male and female, expressed feelings of being objectified, dehumanised, or reduced to a 'thing'; and feeling judged or demeaned by the act. There were also some

commonalities between the way people discussed their experience and other forms of sexual violence. Expressing feelings of self-blame- having deserved or brought on the image sharing based on previous sexual behaviour- was not uncommon. Non-consensual sexual image sharing should therefore be considered a sexual harm, and this thesis offers evidence to support a framing as such.

Another goal of this project was to assess if there was any lasting impact to this experience. We can conclude that this is certainly the case. Once released, the public existence of the images haunts a person. The idea that these might be re-shared at any point, and that one may not even be aware of this re-sharing if it occurred, exists as an ominous potential future which can never be eliminated. An element of the unknown accompanies this experience in many aspects. For some, this is not knowing who shared the images, or not knowing why they did so, an aspect which can be very frightening and frustrating for those affected and can cause fear of a repeated incident. For others, this is not knowing who in your social circle has seen the images, or who still has access to them, which can cause feelings of paranoia or judgement. Not knowing how these images may impact future careers, relationships, or livelihoods is an additional concern, a sentiment which returns whenever the affected person considers their career or other personal ambitions. In the case of my participant Beth, the potential for this image to return was an idea that had been with her for twenty years. There is no finite end to this experience which may allow a person to fully move on, and the constant, enduring potential of these images cannot be denied.

The final aim of this research was to examine how a person responds to the distribution of their sexual images, either via 'formal' means (reporting to police, schools, employers) or 'informal' means (discussing the incident with the perpetrator or wider social circle). The general sentiment raised here was that those affected simply wanted the image to 'go away', and hence their reaction focused largely on this goal. Reporting to the host websites to have the imagery taken down was the most formal action taken by most, and this was met with mixed results. Reporting to the police is a rare choice made by those affected- just one participant did so, and she described the difficulty in discussing her experience with the police and the mixed response she received. For others, being unaware of the law or fearing judgement from the police (another aspect which ties this experience to other forms of sexual violence) was a consideration. There was an additional sense that to do so would be more 'effort' or 'stress' than was worth any potential legal outcome and might simply exacerbate the issue. Also expressed was the fear that taking any action, may either draw more attention to the images, incite further action in the image-sharer, or further damage one's reputation. As a result, we can conclude that there are very few options available to those who experience non-

consensual sexual image sharing; ultimately, all available courses of action are denied to them, from fear of further harm, attention, or retribution.

Policymakers, academics, campaign groups, and activists may all take some benefit from these findings. Firstly, these groups may wish to move away from a narrow conceptualisation of this framework as something that happens *solely* to women and girls. This is not to say that presenting this phenomenon in this gendered framework is incorrect; as this analysis has shown, women do consider this experience as a form of gendered and sexual violence. Nor should these groups disregard the fact that women are largely targeted by this experience. However, there should be some space provided *alongside* this framing to examine the ways in which this experience occurs outside of a heteronormative context, including where this experience affects men and the LGBTQ+ community. At times, the addressing of men is relatively flippant. The reporting of one study from support group SWGfl, for instance, despite stating that 27% of calls made to the revenge porn helpline were from men, only dedicated a few sentences to explaining this phenomenon (Sharratt 2019; SWGfl 2019). Men's experiences of non-consensual sexual image sharing largely focuses on the phenomenon of sextortion and rarely addresses this experience as particularly harmful or impactful. It is difficult to know to what degree men *are* harmed by this experience in a broader sense beyond this data; it may be that a cultural framing that places men solely in the role of aggressors leaves little room for men to vocalise any experiences of harm. This parallels criticism of other UK policies of sexual violence, which focuses too heavily on a heteronormative framing which both excludes male victims and presents women as passive, homogenous, inevitable victims (Phipps 2010).

I do not think this focus on women's experiences of non-consensual sexual image sharing has made efforts to deliberately exclude other parties; instead, this is a natural response to the increased numbers of women affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing. Furthermore, campaigns against this experience which situate it as a sexual harm map neatly onto existing campaigns against female sexual violence, which have well-developed, historical roots. Indeed, groups such as the Revenge Porn Helpline are deliberately gender-neutral in their use of language and clearly establish that 'anyone can be a victim' regardless of age, gender, and sexuality (Revenge Porn Helpline n.d.). Perhaps what is needed here, then, is dedicated discussion of this issue from men's support groups, rather than just women's. Charity groups for men affected by sexual violence, such as Mankind Initiative and the Male Survivors Partnership, are already calling for dedicated strategies that acknowledges sexual and domestic violence against men and boys, without categorising this within broader definitions of 'violence against women and girls' (Male Survivors Partnership 2025; ManKind Initiative 2024). These groups might consider including non-consensual sexual image sharing, or other forms of technology-facilitated harms, into their campaigning. Providing support, resources,

and avenues for affected men to tell their stories may also be welcome. The '1-in-6' campaign, which provides resources for men affected by "unwanted sexual experience", includes "revenge porn" as a potential sexual harm for men, but seems to have little dedicated resource beyond this (1in6.uk 2020). Further campaigning and activism in this area might help to create a clearer perception of what it means to be a man affected by this experience.

Furthermore, activist and support groups that focus on queer identities might encourage discussion of this experience that conceptualises it outside of a heterosexual power structure. The support group LGBT hero (n.d.), for instance, has conducted research on the impact non-consensual sexual image sharing among queer men, but this phenomenon is not present in advice or discussion pages on sexual violence and support. Data such as this should be discussed further, by any and all groups that seek to raise awareness of non-consensual sexual image sharing. The LGBT+ charity Galop also includes revenge porn as a form of sexual violence they offer support for, and has produced research on sexual violence which includes image sharing practices (Galop 2022). These groups may be well placed to bring awareness to this issue to better understand the specific contexts in which this experience affects the LGBT community.

This research has also demonstrated that those affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing rarely engage with the police in this area, either because they perceive their experience as not serious enough to report, they think reporting will prolong their experience for little gain, or they feel they will get a poor reception from police officers. Participants in this study were affected between the 1990s and 2010s, a period in which the legislation in this area has changed dramatically. It is too soon to determine whether changes to the legislation brought in by the Online Safety Bill- such as rendering the sharing of images without consent a sexual harm, which now guarantees those who report anonymity- will convince more people to come forward with this issue. What this research demonstrates, however, is that changes to the legislation must be accompanied by support for those who choose to formally report the image-sharer (Gillespie 2019). As charging rates for this offence remain low, in part due to victims withdrawing their support, this engagement with and support for victims is necessary to render any legislation effective (Bottomley & Bruckmayer 2023). The charity Refuge has cited a lack of faith in the police as a major factor in women choosing not to report their experiences of sexual violence (Refuge 2024). This is unsurprising, given the heavily publicised culture of misogyny apparent in the police; following the rape and murder of Sarah Everard by police officer Wayne Couzens in 2021, the systematic misogyny inherent in the police force has been well publicised (Bowdrey 2024; End Violence Against Women 2021; Grierson 2021). Police reform must therefore be a key factor of any policies intended to improve the experience of having sexual imagery shared without consent. Without dedicated

efforts to tackle discriminatory policy, attitudes, and cultures among the police, any legislation change remains pointless.

Despite this general expression of lack of faith in policing, the overwhelming sentiment expressed by participants was a desire for improved education, rather than punitive measures against their image sharer. Education efforts would acknowledge the fact that this experience is rooted in wider gendered power dynamics, and any efforts to prevent non-consensual sexual image sharing must also tackle this wider cultural framework. Activists in the area of non-consensual sexual image sharing are already engaging in education campaigns (Tomorrow Woman 2025; Martin 2023; Mustafa 2022). Furthermore, the department for education has recently included discussion of pornography, misogyny, and deepfakes in guidance on conducting relationship, sex, and health education, in response to a concern of growing misogyny in schools (Department for Education 2025). Alternatively, this education may combine elements of digital citizenship and appropriate conduct in online spaces, such as the 'education for a connected world' framework (UK Council for Internet safety 2020). As mentioned before, any education programs must balance the discussion of this experience as something that largely affects women and girls with the acknowledgement that anyone might be affected and harmed by this experience, focusing on the notion that gendered power structures are harmful to *everyone*.

It is hoped that this project will help in guiding future research on the phenomenon of non-consensual sexual image sharing. It can assist in shaping definitions and terminology of the experience, an area that is still not well defined. It can additionally assist in shaping methodologies for other research projects, taking guidance from this work to best determine how to access this 'hidden population'. The findings may help to shape future assessments of the impact of non-consensual sexual image sharing, particularly how this impacts men, sex workers, and trans individuals, who are represented in this dataset when they are rarely represented elsewhere.

8.0 Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics form

ELMPS Ethics Committee
SUBMISSION FORM

(Version as of October 2020)

This form is intended to enable you and the Committee to ensure that your proposed research is compliant with the relevant codes of practice and ethical guidelines. The University recognises its obligation to the wider research community and to society as a whole to uphold the integrity of academic research. The University also has a responsibility to ensure that the funds it receives are spent in accordance with the legitimate expectations of the funding providers and the law and in the public interest. The University formally endorses the UUK Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2012).

Please ensure that you are familiar with the University's Code of Practice on Research Integrity and the University Data Management Policy as well as any relevant professional guidelines for your discipline (e.g. the Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association) or funding organisation (e.g. ESRC Framework for Research Ethics). Useful links include:
https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/research/governance/policies/ethics-code/
https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/research/governance/policies/research-code/
http://www.esrc.ac.uk/about-esrc/information/framework-for-research-ethics/
http://www.britsoc.co.uk/about/equality/statement-of-ethical-practice.aspx
http://www.york.ac.uk/about/departments/support-and-admin/information-directorate/information-policy/index/research-data-management-policy/

Please ensure, **prior to your submission of this form**, that you have consulted the University's guidance on data protection and the General Data Protection Regulation, available at: http://www.york.ac.uk/recordsmanagement/dp/

Internet research may involve new and unfamiliar ethics questions and dilemmas. A good place to start is with the Association of Internet Researchers 2002 Guidelines and the BPS

'Conducting Research on the Internet: Guidelines for ethics practice in psychological research online (2007)'.

Note: If you are collecting data from NHS patients or staff, or Social Service users or staff, you will need to apply for approval through the Integrated Research Application System (IRAS) at https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk/Signin.aspx If you are a staff member please fill in the IRAS form NOT this one. When your IRAS application has been approved you should then send your completed IRAS form to ELMPS. Masters and Undergraduate student applications for approval through IRAS should normally be pre-reviewed by department level ethics committees.

Completed application forms should be submitted by the advertised deadline and will not be accepted after this date. One signed electronic copy (including attachments) combined into ONE pdf file (email to: elmps-ethics-group@york.ac.uk). We no longer require a signed hard copy. Initial decisions will normally be made and communicated within two weeks of the Committee meeting.

SECTION 1 ABOUT YOU

1a. Please provide the following details about the principal investigator at YORK

Name of Applicant:	Jade Gilbourne
e-mail address:	Jcg531@york.ac.uk
Telephone:	******
Staff/Student Status:	Student
Dept/Centre or Unit:	Sociology
Head of Department:	Professor Paul Johnson
HoD e-mail address:	Paul.johnson@york.ac.uk

Head of Research:(if applicable)	
HoR e-mail address:(if applicable)	
If you are a student please provide details about your supervisor(s)	1. Professor David Beer (david.beer@york.ac.uk) 2. Dr. Carol Robinson (carol.robinson@york.ac.uk)

SECTION 2 ABOUT THE PROJECT

2.1 Details of Project

Title of Project:	Experiences of individuals who have had sexual imagery shared without their consent
Date of Submission to ELMPS:	6th May 2021
Project Start Date:	September 2020
Duration:	3 years
Funded Yes/No:	Yes
Funding Source:	ESRC – White rose doctoral training partnership
External Ethics Board Jurisdictions (if any):	NA

2.2 Aims and objectives of the research

Please outline the aims of your project and key research questions. Show briefly how existing research has informed the research proposal and explain what your research adds and how it addresses an area of importance (N.B. Max 300 words).
This project aims to explore the experiences of individuals who have had sexual imagery shared without their consent. It seeks to explore the effects that the release of these images had on the individuals, including repercussions to their mental health, their careers, or their relationships with others. Additionally, it questions what response (if any) the individual took as a result of the incident. This could be a formal proceeding, such as reporting the incident to the police or reporting the images to the hosted website. Alternatively, it could be a more 'informal' response, such as confronting the perpetrator directly. Finally, it seeks to examine any broader changes that may have occurred within the affected person. Has the act been transformative in any way- was there any change in personality or behaviour as a result of the incident? The project will offer much needed insight into the experiences of those victimised by this experience and could offer evidence that improved support or legislation is needed. Several aspects of non-consensual sexual image sharing demonstrate the need for further research. Whilst the sharing of sexual images is not a novel concept, technological advancement such as the smartphone and social media have caused the practice to skyrocket within the last 20 years. There have been few academic studies into the experience and impact of having sexual images shared without consent. Additionally, the act of sharing private sexual imagery was only criminalised in England and Wales in 2015 (Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015), which means the effectiveness of such a law remains to be seen. This research aims to provide a more comprehensive and well-rounded picture as to what it really means to be affected by this experience.

2.3 Methods of Data Collection

Provide a brief summary of the method(s) of the research making clear what it will involve for participants (e.g. interviews, observation, questionnaires). If you (or your research assistants) are meeting face-to-face with research participants, specify where you will be meeting them (and you will need to address how any risks associated with this will be managed in Section 2.10) (N.B. Max of 800 words).

Data will be collected using in-depth semi-structured interviews. Participants must be over the age of 18, and identify themselves as having experienced non-consensual sexual image sharing. Additionally, participants must have experienced the image sharing whilst over the age of 18, to ensure the project does not include people affected by child pornography. Participants will be given an information sheet, which includes a privacy notice, and given the opportunity to ask any questions. Written consent must then be provided; additionally, at the beginning of the interview the participant will be asked to audibly confirm their consent. Participants also will be asked to confirm their experience fits within the age restrictions both on the written consent form and verbally at the beginning of the interview. The purpose behind the semi-structured nature of the interview is to allow for a more natural flow within the discussion, in order to create a more conversational and less interrogative tone. Pilot interviews will be conducted with friends and family, to ensure that my tone and manner is both professional and sensitive while discussing this topic. To ensure the wellbeing of my participants, they may choose to skip a question or end the interview at any time, and I will take great care to pause or stop the interview if I detect overt distress.

Due to circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is impossible to predict what the world will look like for the data collection period of this project. For this reason, plans have been made for both face-to-face and distance interviews[CR1] . The decision of which to use will be made based on guidance from the university. Face-to-face interviews will take place in a hired meeting room on campus. For safety purposes, a 'buddy' system will be implemented – a third party (a colleague, friend or partner) will be told the time and location of the meeting, and will check in with myself following the interview to ensure my safety. Remote interviews will take place via a video conferencing system. Zoom is the preferred platform due to the University's licence and personal preference, however to ensure participation is available to people with all levels of technical knowledge, alternatives such as Skype or Whatsapp will be considered if requested by the participant. The researcher would take this remote interview from home to better manage variables such internet connection, privacy, and background noise levels. The participant would also be asked to ensure they were in a comfortable environment where they felt able to speek freely and openly.

The interviews will be recorded using either in-built video/ audio recording of the video call software (if conducting a distance interview), or the audio recording abilities of my personal devices (personal phone and laptop, both password protected and encrypted). 2 models of recording will always be used for back-up purposes.

2.4 Sampling and Recruitment of participants

How many participants will take part in the research? How will they be identified – describe your sampling method? How will they be invited to take part in the study – describe your recruitment method? If research participants are to receive any payments, reimbursement of expenses or any other incentives or benefits for taking part in the research please give details, indicating what and how much they will receive and the basis on which this was decided.

The project will aim to interview between 20-30 participants. Sampling for this project is made difficult as the qualifying factor of experiencing non-consensual sexual image sharing is, by nature, a fact many will keep secret. There is no sampling frame available from which one might select participants. Therefore, several methods of sampling will be applied to avoid collecting participants with homogenous experiences. The charity Victim Support, who offers assistance for those affected by 'image-based sexual abuse', will be contacted and asked if they might refer any interested participants to the study. The police service will also be contacted and asked if they might do the same. The charity 'The Revenge Porn Helpline' will additionally be asked to share information about the project on the 'news' section of their website. Furthermore, social media advertisements will also be used on the platforms of Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Finally, traditional posters recruiting participants will be posted around the University of York campus. The website www.callforparticipants.com will also be used. A landing page will be created and linked to via my twitter profile, which provides a central space for participant recruitment and additionally for participant support (https://beacons.page/jgilbourne/home).

Potential participants will be advised to contact the myself via email for more information. They will then be sent an information participant sheet and a consent form, to be signed and returned. In the event of no response, I will follow up only once asking the potential participant if they have any questions I might answer. In the event of face-to-face interviews, participants will be eligible to receive reimbursements of their travel costs from myself, to the value of £20, to ensure participants are not financially disadvantaged by partaking in the project. At the end of the interview, snowball sampling will be employed by asking participants to refer the study to any eligible and interested parties.

2.5 'Vulnerable' Participants

Please indicate whether any research participants will be from the following groups; if so, please explain the justification for their inclusion. In most cases, researchers working with vulnerable people will need to be registered with ISA (www.isa.homeoffice.gov.uk) which has links with the DBS (formerly the CRB). The DBS offers organisations a means to check the background of researchers to ensure that they do not have a history that would make them unsuitable for work involving children and vulnerable adults.

NB: If you are collecting data from NHS patients or staff, or Social Service users or staff, you will need to apply for approval through the Integrated Research Application System (IRAS).

Children under 18	NA
Those with learning disability	NA

Those who are severely ill or have a terminal illness	NA
Those in emergency situations	NA
Those with mental illness (particularly if detained under Mental Health Legislation)	NA
People with dementia	NA
Prisoners	NA
Young offenders	NA
Adults who are unable to consent for themselves	NA
Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator or gatekeeper, e.g. those in care homes	NA
Other vulnerable groups (please specify) – discuss the issues this raises	NA

If yes to any of the above, do you have Disclosure and Barring Service Clearance?

Yes/No

Describe the procedures you are using to gain (a) consent and/or (b) proxy consent if applicable

Participants will be provided with an information sheet that details all mandatory information about the project, including a privacy notice. It provides the contact details of myself as lead researcher and my supervisors, so that the participant may ask any questions prior to participating. Participants will be asked to sign a consent form to demonstrate their consent. In face-to-face interviews, this information will be sent prior to the interview and the signature collected before the interview commences. In the event of remote interviews, alternatives must be considered; participants may sign the document using the Adobe PDF or Word Signature function. Participants will also be asked to confirm verbally at the start of the interview that they have given their consent freely and with full knowledge of the project. Participants may end the interview at any time and withdraw their consent up to 3 months after the interview date.

2.6. 'Sensitive' topics

During your study, will anyone discuss sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal

activity)? If so, please give details of the procedures in place to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Consider, too, the risks this may pose to the researcher. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities.

As participants are being asked about their experiences of having sexual imagery shared without their consent, it is likely that many will find this topic sensitive or embarrassing to discuss. For this reason, several measures will be taken to minimise discomfort wherever possible. The participant information sheet makes clear that the interview will ask them specifically about their experiences, actions, and feelings around non-consensual sexual image sharing, and does not require any detailed information about a participant's sexual habits or for the participant to show the sexual imagery itself. This will both protect the participant from divulging unnecessary sensitive information, and protect the researcher from being exposed to such. Participants will also be advised prior to the interview that they may skip any question they do not wish to answer, or end the interview at any time, without repercussion.

There is additionally a risk to myself as the researcher in discussing sensitive material. Pilot interviews will allow me to practice the skill of re-directing a participant to the relevant topic if they begin to divulge unnecessary information. Additionally, it may be particularly draining if participants are upset or emotional during the interview; to combat this the interviews are to be scheduled with some time between them, wherever possible, to allow for time to de-compress between interviews. A research journal will be used to note down and better manage any thoughts and feelings experienced.

At the end of the interview, participants will be given a de-brief sheet. It will advise several helplines a person might contact for support and guidance. The Revenge Porn Helpline is an excellent resource for affected persons, and offers support for emotional issues and practical guidance on what the next steps for an affected person should be. Other charities named will be Victim Support and the Samaritans, for general mental health help and advice. As some academics (McGlynn et al., 2017; Maddocks, 2018; Powell and Henry, 2019) argue that non-consensual sexual image sharing is part of a wider system of sexual and domestic violence, the National Domestic Abuse Helpline and Respect: Men's Advice Line will also be noted down. I will additionally include links to these helplines on a landing page accessed via my Twitter profile so they can be accessed by eligible persons at anytime. As non-consensual sexual image sharing is a crime in the UK, participants would be able to report the offence to the police if they so choose (or if they have not already done so). The sheet will therefore also outline resources a person might need if they wish to file a report.

Additionally, it will be detailed on the participant recruitment materials, the participant information sheet and the consent form that the participant must have experienced non-consensual sexual image sharing whilst aged 18 or over. This will also be asked again at the start of the interview. This is because sexual materials of persons under the age of 18 are defined as child pornography, which is beyond the ethical scope of this project.

There may be situations that arise during the data collection process in which a participant reveals that they have not reported their experience to the police. Included in the debrief sheet is specific guidance about where a participant might go to find more information about reporting. I will not be reporting these incidents to the police myself, for several reasons. Firstly, as participants are over the age of 18 and are able to provide consent to participate in the research project itself, there is no reason that they should not also be able to make the decision to report for themselves when provided with a list of appropriate resources. Additionally, reporting non-consensual sexual image sharing does not guarantee the victim anonymity. As in many cases these images might be found by a simple google search of a person's name, reporting this experience to the police without the consent of the victim risks exposing these images to a wider population and furthering the harm done to them (McGlynn, 2016). There are many further reasons a person might be hesitant to report their experience to the police, including a belief that the perpetrator can't be caught, that they might be 'blamed' if they took the photos in the first instance, or that the police might not take the incident seriously (Powell and Henry, 2017; 2018). As such, allowing the participant to make the decision to report for themselves is the best course of action.

- Maddocks, S. (2018). 'Fron Non-consensual Pornography to Image-Based Sexual Abuse: Charting the Course of a Problem with Many Names'. Australian Feminist Studies. 33(97): 345-361.
- McGlynn, C. (2016). 'Anonymity for complainants of image-based sexual abuse: focus on harms to victims, not motives of perpetrators' [online]. Centre for Gender Equal Media. University of Durham. Available at https://claremcglynn.files.wordpress.com/2016/07/mcglynn-anonymity-revenge-porn-11-july-2016.pdf [accessed 29th April 2021].
- McGlynn, C., et al. (2017). 'Beyond 'Revenge Porn': The Continuum of Image-Based Sexual Abuse'. Feminist Legal Studies. 25: 25-46.
- Powell, A. and Henry, N. (2017). Sexual Violence in a Digital Age. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Powell, A. and Henry, N. (2018). 'Policing technology-facilitated sexual violence against adult victims: police and service sector perspectives'. Policing and Society. 28:3. 291-307.
- Powell, A. and Henry, N. (2019). 'Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence Victimization: Results From an Online Survey of Australian Adults'. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 34(17): 3637-3665.

2.7 Covert research

If the research involves covert data gathering or deception of any kind, please explain and justify the deception. Specify what procedures (if any) will be used to debrief participants after the data have been collected.

NA

2.8 Informed Consent

Please attach (1) the privacy notice/project information sheet to be given to all participants and (2) the informed consent form. In line with the University's Code of Practice on Research Integrity, participants and/or their representatives should be provided with details of a first point of contact through which any concerns can be raised: this should be your Head of Department (or if you are a Head then the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research).
i. If you are not seeking informed consent It is usually the case that informed consent is required for research with human participants. If you do NOT intend to seek informed consent please explain carefully why you believe this is not necessary for your project. You should explain this with reference to the research ethics guidelines for your discipline and cite other recent published research using your methodological approach or ethics discussions about this to support your case.
I will be seeking informed consent.
ii. Please confirm you have included the privacy notice/project information sheet to be given to all participants with your submission to ELMPS. If these have not been attached, please explain why this is the case.
Yes
iii. Please confirm you have included all the relevant informed consent forms. If these have not been attached, please explain why this is the case.
Yes.
iv. Are the results to be given as feedback or disseminated to your participants (if yes please specify when, in what form, and by what means). If no, why not?

With regards to sensitive subjects, it may cause more harm than good to remind participants of the data they have provided to you. For this reason, I will not be disseminating feedback to participants. On the debrief sheet, however, I will advise participants that they are welcome to inform me if they wish to receive further information on the project. I will endevour to do my best to give relevant updates to participants who have requested them.

2.9 Anonymity

In most instances the Committee expects that anonymity will be offered to research participants. Please set out how you intend to ensure anonymity. If anonymity is not being offered please explain why this is the case. Note that if anonymity is not offered (or cannot be guaranteed) this has implications you must address in Section 3 below. Note: if you are using a transcriber or translator you must have a signed confidentiality agreement with them.
All participants will be anonymised. This will be done by replacing the name of the participant with a pseudonym. A record of the pseudonym will be kept in a password-protected 'master' file, separate from any other data. All data will be stored on the university filestore, accessed via a personal password-protected, encrypted laptop, and backed up via the University's Google Drive. Recordings of the interview will be transcripted. Any identifying information in the interview, such as specific names or locations, will be automatically redacted or generalised during the transcription process (e.g 'age 21' becomes 'early 20's', 'York' becomes 'northern university town').

2.10 Anticipated Risks or Ethical Problems

Please outline any anticipated risks or ethical problems that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the university, and the steps that will be taken to address them. (Note: all research involving human participants can have adverse effects.) Please also refer to the University's Health, Safety and Welfare Policy Statement and associated Management Procedures, as well as to any ethical guidelines you have consulted. Where relevant, risk assessments should be carried out not only in relation to the researchers themselves, but also for those participating in the project or affected by its conduct, and in relation to any impact on the environment. Researchers should ensure that appropriate insurance is in place, liaising with the University's Insurance Officer as necessary (via standard departmental procedures where these exist).
i. Risks to participants (e.g. emotional distress, financial disclosure, physical harm, transfer of personal data, sensitive organisational information…)

The topic is of a sensitive nature and there is a risk that a participant may experience emotional distress as a result of the interview process. This will be mitigated by making the data collection process as open and transparent as possible for the participant. Participants will be given a 'participant information sheet' prior to consenting to the interview, so that they might better determine their ability to discuss the topic and prepare for the discussion. During the interview, participants are able to skip any question or end the interview at any time, without penalty. The researcher will also take care to monitor the emotional state of the participant and pause or halt the interview should it appear that the participant is experiencing overt distress. Participants will be given a de-brief sheet at the end of the interview which outlines several organisations they might reach out to for emotional support or advice.

As the information being discussed is highly sensitive, confidentiality is of the highest importance. Interviews that take place in person will be conducted in a private interview room on campus. Interviews that take place remotely will be conducted by me from home, where I can ensure privacy. Participants will be advised to take the interview from a place where they feel they can talk freely and comfortably. All data will be held securely as per university guidelines to prevent loss of privacy via a data breach.

ii. Risks to researchers (e.g. personal safety, physical harm, emotional distress, risk of accusation of harm/impropriety, conflict of interest…)

There is some risk of harm to the researcher in the event of face-to-face interviews, as this involves spending time alone with a stranger. In-person interviews will be conducted in an interview room on campus at the University of York, which offers privacy for the interview process, but safety in that I will not be isolated with the participant. A 'buddy' system will also be implemented where a third party (a colleague, friend or partner) will be told the time and location of the interview and asked to check in with me afterwards to ensure my safety. There may be a risk of emotional harm to myself, as I will be discussing very sensitive topics with participants and an emotional reaction from them might negatively impact my wellbeing or mental health. Practice interviews with friends and colleagues will allow me to prepare for an emotional participant, and develop the skills to manage the interview in a way that doesn't cause undue distress for both myself and the participant. Wherever possible, interviews will be scheduled with time between to allow for decompression. A research journal will also be kept to allow for me to express and manage any negative feelings. I am aware of the University support service Open Door should I need further assistance with my mental health or general wellbeing. I have also raised this situation with my supervisors, who have both encouraged me to bring any wellbeing concerns to them for additional support.

iii. University/institutional risks (e.g. adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection…)

The project will be conducted according to the guidelines set out by the University of York, and with guidance from my supervisors. All ethical and data protection guidelines outlined in this form will be followed strictly to ensure the project is conducted to the highest professional standard.
iv. Financial conflicts of interest (e.g. perceived or actual with respect to direct payments, research funding, indirect sponsorship, board or organisational memberships, past associations, future potential benefits, other…)[j10]
I am not aware of any financial conflicts of interest. My funding is provided by the ESRC White Rose Doctoral Training partnership.

2.11 Research outside the UK

If you are planning research overseas, you should also take account of the ethical standards and processes of the country/countries in question as well as those of the University. If the research is being conducted outside the UK please specify any local guidelines (e.g. from local professional associations/learned societies/universities) that exist and whether these involve any ethical stipulations beyond those usual in the UK. Also specify whether there are any specific ethical issues raised by the local context in which you are conducting research, for example, particular cultural sensitivities or vulnerabilities of participants.
All research will be conducted from the UK.

SECTION 3: DATA PROTECTION

Please ensure you have read the information on data protection at: https://www.york.ac.uk/records-management/dp/ *before you complete this section*

3.1 Does your project involve personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation this includes the names and contact details of participants): Yes/No. If yes, please provide a description of the data and explain why you need to collect this data.

The name and contact details of a participant will be collected simply to facilitate arrangement of the interview. It will be kept to permit a participant to withdraw or, where requested, to update the participant with further information on the project.. This information will be kept securely and made visible only to the researcher.

3.2 Does it involve special category personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation): Yes/No. If yes please provide a description of the data:

Although the data collection process will focus on the experience of having sexual imagery shared non-consensually, a participant may provide details of their sex life or sexual orientation to provide context to their answers. Both of these are special category data.

3.3. If the research will involve any of the following activities please indicate so and provide further details. Explain how this will be conducted in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act (and/or any international equivalent)

Electronic transfer of data in any form	Yes – interviews may take place via video conferencing software such as Zoom, and will be recorded. These recording will save by default to my personal laptop (password-protected and encrypted as per University guidance). A personal phone (password protected and encrypted as per University guidance) will be used as a back-up recorder. Data will be moved from these devices to both the university filestore and google drive within 24 hours of interview completion. The recordings will then be transcribed and analysed.
Sharing of data with others at University of York	No 'raw' data will be shared.

Sharing of data with other organisations	No 'raw' data will be shared.
Export of data outside the European Union or importing of data from outside the UK	No 'raw' data will be shared.
Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers	Yes – the name and contact details (most likely an email address) of participants will be collected for the purposes of facilitating the interview and allowing a participant to withdraw. This information will be stored separately in a password- protected document, saved to the university filestore (accessed via a password protected and encrypted personal laptop) and backed up via the University's Google Drive.
Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals	No identifying information from participants will be published. Participants will be referred to using a pseudonym. Identifying data will be redacted or generalised during the transcription process.
Use of audio/visual recording devices	Yes, the interview will be recorded with written consent of the participants. If conducted via video call software such as Zoom, the native recording function will be utilised. This records both audio and video by default, however only the audio will be used. If conducted in person, the recording software on my personal laptop (password protected and encrypted) will be used. In both circumstances my personal phone (password protected and encrypted) will act as a secondary recorder in case of corruption to the primary recording. Files will be moved from these devices to the university filestore/ Google Drive within 24 hours of the interview.
Use of data management system (e.g. Nvivo, ATLAS.ti)	NVIVO will be used for data analysis purposes. This software is downloaded on a personal laptop, password-protected and encrypted.

	The University's filestore and Google Drive are where this data shall be saved.
Data archiving	My project is funded via the ESRC which encourages all students to provide an archive of their data via the UK data service. I shall endeavour to do so, subject to the consent of my participants and my ability to maintain their anonymity.

3.4. If the research will involve storing personal data on any one of the following please indicate so and provide further details.

Manual files (i.e. in paper form)	Notes may be taken during interviews and analysis. No identifying information regarding the participants will be written in these notes. A field journal will also be kept, however this will largely discuss my thoughts, feelings and experiences during the research process, with no identifying information about the participants.	
University computers	No	Password protected Y/N Encrypted Y/N
Private company computers	No	Password protected Y/N Encrypted Y/N
Home or other personal computers	No	Password protected Y/N Encrypted Y/N
Laptop computers/ CDs/ Portable disk-drives/ memory sticks	Interview 1 recording on laptop – both password protected and encrypted. Data will only be stored on	Password protected Y/N Encrypted Y/N

	this device up to 24 hours after interview.	
Websites	Google Drive (University account) to back up data – both encrypted and password protected.	Password protected Y/N Encrypted Y/N
Other	The university filestore, accessed via VPN from personal laptop. Audio recording on iPhone – both password protected and encrypted. Data will only be stored on this device up to 24 hours after interview.	Password protected Y/N Encrypted Y/N

3.5 Please explain the measures in place to ensure data confidentiality, including details of encryption and anonymisation.

A minimum amount of personal data - name and an email address - is collected only to facilitate meetings with participants and to allow them to withdraw at a later date. This information will be kept in a separate password protected file, stored on the university filestore (accessed via VPN) and backed up on the University's google drive. All participants will be referred to via a pseudonym and no real names will be used. Identifying information that might be divulged in the interview, such as location, will be redacted or generalised during the transcription process.

3.6 Please detail all who will have access to the data generated by the study.

Only I will have access to the 'raw' data for this project. Any data shared with supervisors or written into my research outputs will be anonymised.

3.7 Please detail who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the study.

I will have control of and act as custodian for the data.

3.8 Please give details of data storage arrangements, including where data will be stored, how long for, and in what form.

Will data be archived – if so how and if not why not. Note the university policy that [CR11] **"**Where possible, relevant elements of research data must be deposited in an appropriate national or international subject-based repository, according to their policies. Data should be kept by the researcher in an appropriate manner when suitable subject repositories are not available." http://www.york.ac.uk/about/departments/support-and-admin/information-directorate/information-policy/index/research-data-management-policy/#tab-1

Data will be stored on the university filestore and backed up via the University's Google Drive. Recordings may be made using my personal laptop and phone, both of which are password protected and encrypted, however data will be moved from these devices to the university filestore and Google Drive within 24 hours of the interview. Following the completion of the project, audio recordings will be destroyed following the University's guidelines on disposing of data. Other materials will be kept in line with the University's retention schedule on the university filestore and backed up via Google Drive. Additionally, it is intended for selected data to be archived with the UK data service following the completion of the project, including items such as transcripts, field notes, and participant information sheets. This is subject to the participant's consent and an ability to suitably anonymise the data. Due to the sensitive nature of the content, it will need to be made safeguarded once archived.

3.9. Minimising data collection to what is necessary

A key principle contained in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is that the data collected must be **limited to what is necessary** to fulfil the purpose for which they are processed.

Are you capturing the minimum amount of personal data/special category data necessary for your research project? If yes, please provide an indication of why this is the minimum amount of personal data/special category data required.

Yes, the minimum amount of personal or special category data is being gathered for this project. Personal data is only captured to facilitate contact with the participant (such as a name and contact address, e.g email). These will be kept confidential and not used beyond the purpose of initial contact or to permit the participant to withdraw. Special category data will only be collected if a person desires to share it; for example, if discussing their sex life or orientation provides additional context to their interview responses.

3.10. Right to Withdraw

Applicants should include a specific time limit for withdrawal from their study, in the case of a PhD we usually recommend 3 months from the date of data collection, in other cases a reasonable period of time for participants to be able to reconsider their involvement in the research in relation to the overall length of the project. This should be clearly elaborated on the information sheet and consent form.

3.11. Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) Screening Questions

A DPIAs should be undertaken for data processing likely to be high risk under the GDPR. The Regulation does not define 'high risk' but the Information Commissioner's Office has produced a checklist for determining when assessments should be undertaken. This is available on the ELMPS website DIPA Screening Questions (MS Word , 15kb).

Please consult the University of York's guidance on DPIAs prior to completing the declaration below. This is available at: https://www.york.ac.uk/records-management/dp/dataprivacyimpactassessments/

It is your responsibility to ensure that a DPIA is undertaken if it is required for your research project. Please tick **ONE** appropriate statement below:

Declaration	Agreement

1. I have completed the DPIA screening questionnaire and consider that a DPIA **is not required** as the data collected is not 'high risk.'	
2. I have completed the DPIA screening questionnaire and consider that a DPIA **is required** as the data collected is likely to be 'high risk.' I have submitted the completed assessment to the University of York's Data Protection Officer for review and **am awaiting a decision on approval.**	
3. I have completed the DPIA screening questionnaire and consider that a DPIA **is required** as the data collected is likely to be 'high risk.' The completed assessment is attached to this application and **has been approved** by the University of York's Data Protection Officer.	☐

SECTION 4: SIGNED UNDERTAKING

In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research project will meet the University's Code of Practice on Research Integrity https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/research/governance/policies/research-code/.

Jade Gilbourne…….. (Signed Lead Researcher/Principal Investigator)

29/04/2021…….. (Date)

Appendix B: Consent form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

EXPERIENCES OF INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE HAD SEXUAL IMAGERY SHARED WITHOUT THEIR CONSENT

Jade Gilbourne
jade.gilbourne@york.ac.uk

Please read the below information carefully and select as appropriate.

I have read (or had read to me) the 'Participant Information Sheet' about the project.
Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand what the project is about and what taking part involves.
Yes ☐ No ☐

My experience of having sexual imagery shared occurred when I was over the age of 18.
Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that direct quotes from my interview may be used, however I will be referred to using a pseudonym. Any identifying data I provide (such as exact ages and place names) will be generalised or redacted.
Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that I may ask for my data to be withdrawn up to three months after the interview by emailing the researcher, without giving a reason.
Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that my interview will be recorded, and consent to this recording.
Yes ☐ No ☐

(For remote interviews) I am able to conduct the interview in a place where I can talk freely and comfortably, without fear of being overheard.
Yes ☐ No ☐

Do you give permission for your anonymised data (a transcript of your interview) to be archived with the UK Data Service following completion of the project?
(This field is not mandatory for participation)
Yes ☐ No ☐

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I consent to take part in this project.
Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher Name: _____

Researcher Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: Information sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

EXPERIENCES OF INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE HAD SEXUAL IMAGERY SHARED WITHOUT THEIR CONSENT

Jade Gilbourne
jade.gilbourne@york.ac.uk
@jcgilbourne @jadedoesresearch

About me

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study! My name is Jade Gilbourne and I am a PhD Student with the department of Sociology at the University of York. This project is being supervised by Professor David Beer and Dr Carol Robinson and is funded by the ESRC.

You can ask me any questions about the project via email at jade.gilbourne@york.ac.uk, or via my social media platforms.

About you

I would like to invite you to take part in an interview for this study. To participate, you must be currently residing in the UK, and have experience of having private sexual images shared without your consent. There are a lot of terms used for this experience - some call this 'revenge porn' or 'image-based sexual abuse', among other names - but how you define it is up to you. It doesn't matter whether you took the images yourself, or whether they were also taken without your knowledge or consent. It also doesn't matter if you've never reported your experience to the police.

Your experience of non-consensual sexual image sharing must have occurred at the age of 18 or over. This is because sexual images shared of people under 18 are subject to different definitions and laws.

The Interview

The interview will be conducted remotely via an online video call service, such as Zoom. Interviews are currently averaging around 30 minutes, but we can talk for as long as you feel comfortable. The interview will be recorded to allow me to transcribe your words for analysis.

During the interview, I will ask you to tell me about your experience. This might include:

- The circumstances of the image sharing
- How you felt before, during, and after the experience
- Your reaction and response (reporting the incident to websites or the police, for example)
- The overall impact the experience had on you.

I understand that this topic might be difficult to talk about. If any accommodations can be made to make the interview easier for you, please don't hesitate to let me know.

In the interview:

- I will never ask to see any of the imagery, or request any information about the specific sexual nature of the image
- You can provide answers in as much or as little detail as you feel comfortable with
- You can skip any question you don't want to answer and end the interview at any time
- Your information will be held securely and any identifying information will be anonymised.

If you choose to participate, you'll be contributing to academic research that aims to better understand the impact of having sexual images shared without consent. This area is currently under-researched, and it is my hope that this project will offer a better understanding of the repercussions of this experience.

Some people can find interviews a cathartic experience, particularly if it's about something you haven't talked about before. For others, however, it might be quite upsetting. I'd like to ask you to please think about how comfortable you would feel discussing this topic with me and make sure that your own wellbeing is prioritised.

Data collection and processing

- **How will you use my data?**

Your data will be processed for the purposes of conducting research into the project. Your data will consist of interview recordings and a transcript of this recording. Any identifying information will be redacted in any research output, including names and locations. While direct quotes may be used, these will be identified with a pseudonym.

- **On what basis will you process my data?**

Under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the University of York must identify a legal basis for processing personal data and, where appropriate, an additional condition for processing special category data.

In line with the charter which states that we advance learning and knowledge by teaching and research, the University processes personal data for research purposes under Article 6 (1) (e) of the GDPR:
Processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest.

Special category data is processed under Article 9 (2) (j):
Processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, or scientific and historical research purposes or statistical purposes.
Research will only be undertaken where ethical approval has been obtained, where there is a clear public interest and where appropriate safeguards have been put in place to protect data.

In line with ethical expectations and in order to comply with common law duty of confidentiality, we will seek your consent to participate where appropriate. This consent will not, however, be our legal basis for processing your data under the GDPR.
or statistical purposes.
Research will only be undertaken where ethical approval has been obtained, where there is a clear public interest and where appropriate safeguards have been put in place to protect data.

In line with ethical expectations and in order to comply with common law duty of confidentiality, we will seek your consent to participate where appropriate. This consent will not, however, be our legal basis for processing your data under the GDPR.

- **Will you share my data with 3rd parties?**

During the project, any 'raw' data will be accessible only to myself. Anonymised excerpts from your data may be discussed with my supervisors or included in any research output.

You will be asked if you wish to consent to having your data archived. At the end of the project, anonymised transcripts from consenting participants will be deposited with the UK data service. Archival allows for the data to be made available to certain other researchers (subject to safeguarded access) for the purposes of further research and learning. You need not consent to archiving to participate in this project.

- **How will you keep my data secure?**

The University will put in place appropriate technical and organisational measures to protect your personal data and/or special category data. For the purposes of this project we will ensure that all data is kept on password-protected and encrypted devices.

Information will be treated confidentially and shared on a need-to-know basis only. The University is committed to the principle of data protection by design and default and will collect the minimum amount of data necessary for the project. In addition, we will anonymise or pseudonymise data wherever possible.

- **Will you transfer my data internationally?**

Possibly. The University's cloud storage solution is provided by Google which means that data can be located at any of Google's globally spread data centres. The University has data protection compliant arrangements in place with this provider. For further information see, https://www.york.ac.uk/it-services/google/policy/privacy/.

- **How long will you keep my data?**

Data will be retained in line with legal requirements or where there is a business need. Retention timeframes will be determined in line with the University's Records Retention Schedule.
If you consent to it, an anonymised transcript of your data may be archived with the UK data service and kept indefinitely, subject to safeguarded access.

- **What rights do I have in relation to my data?**

Under the GDPR, you have a general right of access to your data, a right to rectification, erasure, restriction, objection or portability. You also have a right to withdrawal. You may request to withdraw from the project within 3 months of the date of your interview.

Please note, not all rights apply where data is processed purely for research purposes. For further information see, https://www.york.ac.uk/records-management/generaldataprotectionregulation/individualsrights/.

Questions or concerns

If you have any questions about this participant information sheet or concerns about how your data is being processed, please contact myself in the first instance. If you are still dissatisfied, please contact the University's Acting Data Protection Officer.

Right to complain

If you are unhappy with the way in which the University has handled your personal data, you have a right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office. For information on reporting a concern to the Information Commissioner's Office, see www.ico.org.uk/concerns.

Key contacts

- Lead researcher: Jade Gilbourne | Jade.Gilbourne@york.ac.uk
- Supervisor: Professor David Beer | David.Beer@york.ac.uk
- Supervisor: Dr Carol Robinson | Carol.Robinson@york.ac.uk

- The chair of economics, law, management, politics, and sociology ethics committee: Tony Royle | elmps-ethics-group@york.ac.uk
- Data Protection Officer of the University of York: dataprotection@york.ac.uk

Appendix D: Interview questions

Pre Interview questions:

- Were you over 18 at the time the image was taken?
- Do you have any questions?
- Are you happy to proceed?
- REMIND participant they can skip any question or stop the interview at any time without explanation.
- REMIND participant I don't need to know any details about the sexual image itself.
- REMIND participant you're recording.

INTERVIEW

- Determine openness and build on that. What language or 'terminology' are they using?

1. **Tell me about when this happened to you.**
    a. Where was it shared/ who shared it/ how did you find out
    b. *(If given timelines – build on them)*
2. **How did you feel when you found out?**
3. **What did you do when you found out?**
    a. Did you tell anyone/ did you report to the police/ host website/ (why/why not)/ did you go anywhere for support
4. **Tell me about what has happened since.**
    a. Has the image been taken down/ recirculated/ any reporting outcomes
5. **What impact do you think the experience has had on you?**
    a. The way you think about yourself/ behaviour/ interact in relationships/

6. Has anyone/anything helped you to deal with the experience?

7. In an ideal world, what outcome would you want?

8. Is there anything else you would like to say?

Appendix E: Debrief sheet

PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF SHEET

EXPERIENCES OF INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE HAD SEXUAL IMAGERY SHARED WITHOUT THEIR CONSENT

Jade Gilbourne
jade.gilbourne@york.ac.uk
@jcgilbourne @jadedoesresearch

Thank you so much for participating in my research!
Here's some information that might be useful to you.

More information

If you would like more information about the project, you can contact me at any time via email at jadegilbourne@york.ac.uk or via my social media. You can also get in contact with my supervisors, Professor David Beer (David.Beer@york.ac.uk) and Dr Carol Robinson (Carol.Robinson@york.ac.uk).

If you would like updates on how the project is going, please let me know! I'd be happy to share any milestones with you.

Withdrawal

If you change your mind about participating in the project, you can contact me via email (jade.gilbourne@york.ac.uk) and ask for your data to be withdrawn, without giving a reason. You can do this up to 3 months after the date of your interview. I'd like to re-iterate that the data you have provided is completely confidential and you will remain anonymous.

Referring others

If you know anyone else who has also been affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing and feel they may be interested in participating in this study, please pass along my email address to them (jade.gilbourne@york.ac.uk).

Resources

If you feel like you need some additional help, support, or resources, the sources provided below are a great place to start.

- **The Revenge Porn Helpline**
  www.revengepornhelpline.org.uk | 0345 6000 459 | help@revengepornhelpline.org.uk
  The helpline is the designed to help UK-based adults who have been affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing. They can give advice or support, help with reporting or removing content, assist with reporting to the police, and signpost ways to free legal advice. I would recommend this to anyone seeking further information about non-consensual sexual image sharing.

- **Victim Support**
  www.victimsupport.org.uk/crime-info/types-crime/cyber-crime/image-based-sexual-abuse
  Victim Support offers confidential, personal and safe support for victims of crime, including non-consensual sexual image sharing. You do not need to have reported the crime to the police to access Victim Support.

- **Samaritans**
  www.samaritans.org | 116 123 | jo@samaritans.org
  Samaritans offers confidential and non-judgemental support to anyone who needs a place to talk about whatever's on their mind.

- **National Domestic Abuse Helpline**
  www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk | 0808 2000 247 | Live chat and messaging facilities also available via the website
  Some people affected by non-consensual sexual image sharing experience it as part of a wider system of domestic abuse. You can access support and information here.

- **Respect: Men's Advice Line**
  www.mensadviceline.org.uk | 0808 8010327 | info@mensadviceline.org.uk
  Men's Advice Line offers help and support to male victims of domestic abuse, which some people experience as a part of non-consensual image sharing.

Reporting

Choosing whether to report the offence is a personal decision - you can access more information about reporting via the resources mentioned above. The Revenge Porn Helpline outlines what you can expect if you do choose to report (https://revengepornhelpline.org.uk/information-and-advice/police-and-courts-advice/ask-an-officer/). You can report the offence by dialling 101 (the non-emergency police number).

- In England and Wales, 'it is an offence for a person to disclose a private sexual photograph or film if the disclosure is made— (a)without the consent of an individual who appears in the photograph or film, and (b)with the intention of causing that individual distress' (Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015).
- In Scotland, 'a person commits an offence if— (a) They disclose, or threaten to disclose, a photograph or film which shows, or appears to show, another person in an intimate situation, (b)by doing so, A intends to cause B fear, alarm or distress or A is reckless as to whether B will be caused fear, alarm or distress, and (c)the photograph or film has not previously been disclosed to the public at large, or any section of the public, by B or with B's consent' (Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016).
- In Northern Ireland, it is 'an offence for a person to disclose a private sexual photograph or film if the disclosure is made without the consent of an individual who appears in the photograph or film and with the intention of causing that individual distress' (Section 51, Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2016).

Appendix F: Recruitment poster

9.0 Reference list

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