

Introduction

The Internet never forgets. And that permanent digital record, a blessing when it summons a moment we want to recall with the click of a mouse, can be a weapon in more sinister hands when it preserves ones we would like to forget. Controlling the distribution of the acts we want back, from mere silly poses for a camera to the most intimate deeds, has become a fact of life in the digital age, taking us into uncharted legal and ethical territory. And few expressions of this exploitative power are as disturbing as what is known as revenge porn, the posting online of sexually explicit photos or videos by a former partner seeking retribution (Penney, 2013, p. 1).

Jonathon Penney's (2013) warning about the misuse of the Internet is demonstrable by what has become known as *The Fappening* (Moloney & Love, 2017). In August 2014, the non-consensual disclosure of nude and sexually explicit photos of around 100 female celebrity A-listers appeared on the online image-based bulletin board 4chan, many of which were pay-per-view (Radhika, 2014). The famous women involved included Jennifer Lawrence, Kim Kardashian, Rihanna, Scarlett Johansson, Kaley Cuoco-Sweeting, Kirsten Dunst, Meagan Good, McKayla Maroney, Vanessa Hudgens and Ariana Grande (see Strang, 2014, for the full list).

Making public sexually explicit (consensual and non-consensual) images and videos of others with new technology is nothing new. Communication technologies, whether labeled as 'new' or not, have repeatedly been taken up by those wishing to represent sex and sexuality, and pornographers, in particular, have done so in a more or less organised way. Rosen's (2010) *Beaver Street: A History of Modern Pornography* points out that throughout history, pornography and technology have enjoyed a symbiotic relationship. Increasingly complex technologies have developed from the peep show, photography and film, and associated histories of 'the real', the glossy image, the pin-up, the film star and the film icon. Early filmmakers were not slow to exploit the sexual display on the screen, with sexual themes figuring in clear, conscious and sometimes less conscious ways. Telephones brought 'call girls'; specialist telephone sexual services, sex lines and telephone sex followed.

Video and television technologies have led onto sex videos, sex channels and sex pay TV. Johnson (1996) points out the pornography industry always accelerated the growth of new technologies

such as video recorders and cameras and more recently the Internet and smartphone because they appealed to creators and consumers of pornography. Their appeal centered on being able to produce explicit photos in the privacy of one's home without having to go to the store to get a film developed. "Videotape first emerged as a cheap and efficient alternative to film (later kinescope) for TV production. Its development for home use owes its birth to Sony and Betamax but its maturity to porn" (Johnson, 1996, p. 222). Conversely new technologies such as the Internet allow the consumption of explicit material at home, and as such, the porn industry has gained a new audience of people willing to watch their films; "(i)nstead of travelling to a disreputable store, viewers could watch films at their convenience at home" (Johnson, 1996, p. 222).

Information and computer technologies (ICTs), and specifically the Internet, have raised possibilities of techno-sex, high-tech sex, non-connection sex, mobile phone sex and virtual sex. New forms of sex, sexual storytelling, sexual genres, sex talk shows and digital sexual media have mushroomed. Indeed, ICTs are themselves part of the broader histories of the publicisation (Brown, 1981) of sexuality and technologies of the senses. There are daily reports of how ICTs are changing how sexuality is done and experienced in chat lines, Internet dating, email sex, cybersex, cyberaffairs and falling in love on the Net, so providing new channels for sexuality, sexual communication, sexual citizenships and sexualised violence (Hearn, 2006). Speed and ease of ICTs create many possibilities for new forms of cybersexual experimentation, such as mixed or multi-media sex, interactive sex and interactive pornography.

There are many further ways in which people use ICTs and the Internet for sexual purposes. These may draw on the increasing range of online information and discussion forums on all manner of sexual aspects that are to be found on the Internet. In addition, their growing moves from more passive use of the Internet information to more active engagement and creation on interactive sites by those who might be described as competent online sexual agents (Döring, 2009). Above all, the Internet has brought all this and more into one "single medium to which a still increasing number of people have access due to technological advances and decreasing prices" (Daneback & Ross, 2011, p. 3).

Online uses of ICTs for sexual purposes are now normalised in many parts of the world, and especially so, but not only, for younger people. For example, in one recent four-country (Canada, Germany, Sweden the United States) study of 2,690 college students' sexuality-related activity online, 89.8% reported accessing sexual information, 76.5% experiencing sexual entertainment, 48.5% browsing for sexual products and 30.8% having engaged in cybersex (Döring, Daneback, Shaughnessy, Grov, & Byers, 2015; also, see Cooper, Månsson, Daneback, Tikkanen, & Ross, 2003; Cooper, Scherer, Boles, & Gordon, 1999; Shaughnessy, Byers, & Walsh, 2011).

Some representative samples of adult populations have indicated much lower figures of using the Internet for sexual purposes, with estimates ranging between 15% and 33% (Cooper, Morahan-Martin, Mathy, & Maheu, 2002). For example, a representative Swedish study estimated that 17% of adults had visited a website with sexual content (Findahl, 2009). However, this may neglect Internet use for some other kinds of sexual purposes such as educational purposes, ambiguities in what is meant by "sexual content", and whether use implies any relation to sexual arousal. They also do not take account of likely under-reporting by some people, particularly some women, who claim *not* to use the Internet for sexual purposes, but still report that they engage in online sexual activities (Daneback & Ross, 2011). Under-reporting may be for a variety of further reasons, including gendered and sexual taboos, cultural notions of sexual respectability and normalisation of everyday ICT use, whether sexual or not. Also, such generalised figures can obscure some broad demographic tendencies, for example, in some surveys, women's lesser and men's greater use, younger people's greater and older people's lesser use and bisexuals' greater use than heterosexuals and homosexuals.

Of particular relevance for our current concerns is the normalisation of access to, and use of, pornography. Men tend to access and use pornography, online or not, more than women, with less gender difference for younger people, and declining use with age. According to a recent UK study (Puccio & Havey, 2016), the average age for first exposure to online pornography is 11, and, of 3,000 13- to 18-year-old boys surveyed, 81% said they had looked at online pornography. Another recent UK study, *Young People as Critical Users of Online Pornography* (Martellozzo et al., 2016), commissioned by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and the children's commissioner for England, based on focus groups and an online survey of 1,001 young people between ages 11 and 16, found that the majority of 11-year-olds (72%)

had not seen online pornography, while almost two-thirds of 15-year-olds (65%) had. This study also provided information on sexting and related activities, reporting on how relatively few young people had taken naked or partly naked photographs of themselves (13%–14%) or others (3%–4%), and sent them to other people (c.7.5%).

Such broad tendencies have multiple effects, especially on younger people. For example, the 2014 UK Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) study, *Young People, Sex and Relationships: The New Norms* (Parker, 2014), surveyed a representative sample of 500 18-year-old young people: “Seven out of 10 say ‘accessing pornography was seen as typical’ while they were at school; the consensus view is that this is typical between the ages of 13 and 15”; and “Almost eight out of 10 young women (77%) say ‘pornography has led to pressure on girls or young women to **look** a certain way’, while almost as many (75%) say ‘pornography has led to pressure on girls and young women to **act** a certain way’.” (also see Martellozzo et al., 2016). It is now clear that pornography – that is, online pornography – is part and parcel of many children’s, young people’s and indeed adults’ lives.

At the same time, the Web and ICTs more generally have facilitated, in many ways, new forms of relatively easy and virtual violation and abuse (Hearn & Parkin, 2001), by Twitter, social networking sites (SNSs) or other means. The European Union’s Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA, 2014) interview survey of 42,000 women in all 28 EU countries on experiences of violence against women addressed three types of acts that could be considered cyberstalking – that is, which involve the use of the Internet, email or mobile phones:

- sending emails, text messages (SMS) or instant messages that are offensive or threatening;
- posting offensive comments about the respondent on the Internet; and
- sharing intimate photos or videos of the respondent, on the Internet or by mobile phone.

They add that to be considered as stalking, these and all the other acts described in the survey must take place repeatedly and be perpetrated by the same person. Based on these definitions, the FRA survey authors estimate that 5% of women in the European Union have experienced one or more forms of cyberstalking since the age of 15, and 2% have experienced it in the 12 months preceding the survey. Taking the victim’s age into consideration, the 12-month rates vary from

4% among 18- to 29-year-olds to 0.3% among women 60 years old or older. Not surprisingly, there appear again to be important variations across age and generation.

There would appear to be both significant differences and significant continuities between the ubiquity of what might be called stranger pornography online, and its widespread negative pressures and effects, especially on young women, but also young people more generally, and the more personally directed and repeated online violations, including revenge pornography, from known others. An important caveat here is that what has been hitherto a basic distinction between knowing and not knowing someone is becoming blurred, especially for younger generations. Similarly, notions of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality are not so absolute for some people. At the risk of over-generalisation, Daneback and Ross (2011, p. 7) put it:

It has ... been suggested that younger and older people (in relative terms) have different concepts of anonymity with regard to sexually related activities on the Internet. It seems that by anonymity, young people mean not having to express sexually related details face to face (but they have no problems displaying a picture of themselves while doing it), whereas older people equate anonymity with not being seen or known.

Pornography, online pornography and online violation can indeed be intertwined in complex ways, both societally and individually. It should be added that, for some people, these developing and unstable connections can be intensified in and through what have become known, in psychological parlance, as 'Internet addiction' (Young, 1996), 'virtual addiction', 'cyber addiction' or indeed 'pornography addiction'. Some studies report young men's greater propensity for 'compulsive use of the Internet', and also how this may in turn link with psychological tendencies towards, for example, depression, loneliness, low self-esteem, experience of low parental involvement or conflict (for example, Ayas & Horzum, 2013; Aydin & Sari, 2011; Wiederhold, 2016), and co-addictions, and at times also psycho-sexual problems (Sussman, Lisha, & Griffiths, 2011).

Furthermore, various forms of online abuse have a socio-spatial and geopolitical aspect that can be both local and global. Once of the Web, they can be accessed from anywhere in the world, the global digital public space. Incipient 'globalisation' of sexuality and abuse through ICTs can be

produced through local and globalised social practices. ICTs have multiple impacts on sexuality, with changing forms locally and globally. Although this relationship has, in strictly quantitative and commercial terms, been mutually beneficial for the porn industry, some sectors of the porn industry have, as a consequence, stagnated or declined. For example, the speed and relative anonymity of the Internet, and especially in the Dark Net, has meant that the distribution and viewing of child pornography have been extended. One of the more recent consequences of the relationship between pornography and the development of Internet and smartphone technologies has the number of people reporting harassment, humiliation, invasion of privacy and loss of reputation with what has become termed 'revenge porn' (Parliament.UK, 2015).

Hasinoff (2015) suggests that the development of smartphones with in-built cameras has led to the explosion in 'sexting' – people texting explicit images of themselves to others. Smartphone technologies provide a false sense of security by giving people a sense of privacy, making them feel comfortable taking and sending explicit pictures and videos. Indeed, a survey conducted by Match.com (2012) found that out of 5,000 adults, 57% of men and 45% of women had received an explicit photo on their phone and 38% of men and 35% of women had sent one. Yet these pictures and videos can easily be uploaded to the Internet by anyone who has access to them. As Penney (2013) points out in the quote above, once this happens, those seemingly 'private' pictures are then available for the world to see. It is the uploading of such private pictures with text onto revenge porn specific websites, motivated by revenge, that is the focus of this book.

In Chapter 1 *Mapping the Terrain* we explore the parameters of revenge porn. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first explores uses of the term *revenge porn*, and looks at what is covered in the various definitions of the term in dictionaries, by organisations such as the UK Safer Internet Centre (2015), and in legislation such as the UK Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 (Parliament.UK, 2015). In combining these, we provide a more comprehensive definition of what can be deemed revenge pornography, who commits this crime and who the victims are.

The second part of the chapter looks at where revenge porn is posted, for example, specific pornographic websites such as Cliphunter, specific revenge porn sites such as Anonymous Image Board and social media sites such as Tumblr. We also look at the multiple linkages and

convergences between e-media that mean that revenge porn is able to circulate with ease and speed. The relationship between 'sexting' (Hasinoff, 2015) and revenge porn is also explored, in particular, the reported increase in 'sexting' in younger generations and the risks of doing so. We look at the geographical scope of revenge porn and where the vast majority of victims and perpetrators reside. Given its increasing popularity, we look at how lucrative it can be for host websites.

Section three looks at who produces revenge porn. While male ex-partners are reported to be the main perpetrators (McAfee, 2013), we show that current partners, (ex)friends of both victims and perpetrators, people known to the victim, complete strangers and Internet hackers are also involved. We explore some of the motivations perpetrators provide for posting explicit images of another, for example, reported infidelity, to brag, revenge for a reported crime, rejection and many others. Our broad definition implicates some sections of the media such as the paparazzi, and celebrities.

The final section of this chapter looks at who the victims are and the impact of revenge porn. While 90% of victims are reported to be women from teens to thirties, we show that younger and older people do also fall victim. We provide examples where victims have experienced physical and psychological health issues. For example, victims report experiencing humiliation, shame, embarrassment, concerns for personal safety and so on (Lichter, 2013).

Chapter 2 *Responses* is divided into two sections. The first explores the legal and governmental responses to revenge porn. We look at issues related to ownership of the images, in particular, the ownership of photographer, and how that might impact on perpetrator perspectives. Although some revenge porn laws exist, these are not universal and limited to a handful of countries. In countries where they do exist the collection of data is often sparse. While people are now being convicted of this crime, we show that it is still difficult for victims to bring lawsuits or take action against the perpetrators and the host websites.

We examine what resources and support are available to victims such as the UK government's launch of the Revenge Porn Helpline offering victims free downloadable resources on legislation,

how to limit the effects of revenge porn, the use of social media platforms and how to remove images and report offenses. Other not-for-profit organisations such as Woman's Aid, Broken Rainbow and the National Stalking Helpline also provide assistance to victims, including dealing with the fallout of revenge porn. In addition to, and overlapping with, legal and governmental responses, we explore various other responses in Section 2. These are largely technological and political responses. Technological responses are shown to be more poster orientated, and more focused on online processes, whereas overtly political responses are shown to focus more on the victim. We also explore some of the campaigns against revenge porn (Penny, 2014), for example, *The Guardian's* campaign project, 'the web we want' and feminist-led websites fighting revenge porn directly (Johnson, 2013).

In Chapter 3 *Situating Revenge Porn* we show how revenge porn can be understood from several different traditions and perspectives: (1) revenge porn can be seen as a relatively new form or genre of publicly displayed pornography which coincides with the 'pornografication' (Attwood, 2009) or 'mainstreamification' (Empel, 2011) of pornography in society; (2) a form of interpersonal revenge, involving, in particular, what motivates people to seek revenge, how they express it and what happens after they act. Revenge can thus be seen as an extension of well-developed strategies and tactics for dealing with, and coping with, emotions and social relations (Yoshimura, 2007). And, as we show in Chapter 1 and Chapters 6–8, revenge can be understood in relation to a variety of motivators, which may include, and be framed in terms of, gender and sexuality, and gender-sexual dynamics; (3) since it tends to be committed by former intimate partners it can be understood as another form of gendered violence and abuse that ranges across femicide, rape, stalking and non-contact harassment (Blumenstein & Jasinski, 2015); (4) given revenge porn is largely facilitated by information and computer technologies, it can be viewed as another part of the multifarious possibilities for virtual/online socialities, sexualities and violences, specifically cyberabuse (Slonje, Smith, & Frisé, 2013); (5) the publicisations of revenge porn notably amongst national newspapers, government ministers and some activists in the United Kingdom. This general perspective might also be seen as an example of a complex, unstable and rhizomic nexus of postings, violations, media interest, law and regulation, and further postings and violations, and so on (Holehouse, 2014) and; (6) revenge porn can also be seen as gendered, or intersectionally gendered, practices, especially as it is largely the practice on men and masculinities.

Since revenge porn is largely facilitated by online platforms, Chapter 4 *Online Interactions* explores how people communicate in cyberspace. We show that people interact on multiple levels such as narrative, interactive, communicative, adaptive and productive, as well through a variety of media such as email, social media, forums and chat rooms. The vast array of ways people can engage with online sources and each other can influence how people present themselves when surfing the web (Tyler & Feldman, 2005). We argue this has important implications for the study of revenge pornography since it allows us to see what motivates people to undertake this activity and how they account for their actions. We explore how people present themselves, which includes discussions around online deception and ‘real’ identities that mirror offline identities. This chapter concludes with us outlining our position in which we see identities, as co-constructed in interactions regardless of the online or offline medium.

Chapter 5 *A Discursive Approach to Revenge Porn* sets out the philosophical and methodological position in which we analyse our datasets. Beginning with ethnomethodological enquiry (Garfinkel, 1967), we argue that the people perceive social life to be relatively stable in order to make sense of their experiences, even though this stability or certainty does not actually exist in itself. Garfinkel (1991) argued these social ‘facts’ could be observed and studied through available data on talk and action. The method we draw upon in our analytical chapters is discourse analysis (Potter, 1996), as this method lends itself well to interrogating the online electronic text accompanying the posting of explicit images. We discuss the background to our dataset, our analytical process and steps, concluding with ethical considerations.

We begin our analytical chapters by looking at how heterosexual men account for posting explicit images of others. Chapter 6 *‘She took my kids, ruined my life’: Heterosexual men’s accounts* shows the complex ways in which masculinities, manhood acts, femininities and sexualities are invoked by men to account for their practices. We show the various types of response and, in particular, non-consensual posts. Several emergent masculine discourses were identified in our analysis: intimate relationship control, power over other men, heterosexuality, homosexuality, financial status, power and fatherhood. Our analysis shows that overall revenge porn was reported positively as a supposedly equalizing action downplaying any culpability. We conclude this chapter by discussing how these can be understood in the traditions set out in Chapter 3.

Chapter 7 *'Just wants to use you for sex': Heterosexual women's accounts* examines women's electronic talk to see how they account for posting explicit images of others. These women claimed the men deserved being posted because they were reported to have been violent, a poor father, a sexual predator (both online and offline), homosexual, effeminate, a liar and not fulfilling their intimate partner sexual duties. We show that many of these reported or alleged misdemeanors are linked, even tied, to and invested in notions of appropriate gender and sexual interactions from a gendered perspective. Similarly, to heterosexual men women posters tended to frame revenge porn positively and a legitimate way to reclaim equality.

In Chapter 8 *'... cheater! liar! thief!': Gay and lesbian accounts*, we examine texts by posters who either self-identified as, or orientated to, gay or lesbian. Five gay and five lesbian texts are analysed and show similarities to heterosexual posts such as sexual promiscuity and intimate relationship control. There were, however, sexuality-related differences such as challenging someone's 'true' sexuality. For example, some heterosexual posters challenged sexuality as a way to directly abuse (for example, 'he's gay'), whereas some same-sex poster could be seen to challenge their ex-partner's sexuality as a way to deny them group membership (for example, 'pretesbian'). But despite these differences, both heterosexual and same-sex posters worked up accounts in which they, themselves, are positioned as the victim with a legitimate right to seek revenge.

Our chapter *Discussion* summarises the key points made in the previous chapters. This is followed with a discussion on the more general perspectives on revenge porn, and what it is and is not. Incorporating the findings from our analytical chapters, we further develop and contextualise some of the perspectives highlighted in Chapter 3. We argue that the fundamental and recurring issues about how revenge porn violates can be understood in terms of gender and sexual dynamics and constructions, binary gender and sexual positionings and logics and the use of sexual meanings. These we suggest are further complicated by technology, thus revenge porn needs to be placed within the wider context of contemporary socio-technological conditions.

Our final chapter *Future Interventions* builds on, and develops, some of the points raised in Chapter 2 about what is being done, and what else might be done, to curb revenge porn. We begin

by looking at the effectiveness of current legislative frameworks. While these have clearly had an impact on revenge porn and gender violences more generally, we argue that there should be a more specific focus on online gender and sexuality offences, especially since these are reported to be on the rise. While there is currently a patchwork of laws addressing revenge porn in the United Kingdom and some other countries, this kind of response is far from global. Thus, laws are arguably required at the regional, national and international levels, since revenge porn can easily cross national boundaries, and include various forms of pornography, as we outline in Chapter 1 (Tyler, 2016). Such laws might apply to both individuals and organisations, and in criminal and civil contexts.

But even with the growth of legal means to either prosecute perpetrators or host websites, or provide the means for victims to bring civil lawsuits, we suggest that more could, and should, be done to prevent this crime, for example, including content on the UK sex and relationship curriculum on how to deal with, and appropriately conduct, when relationships end (Eckhardt et al., 2013). Such interventions could help to avoid a lifelong trajectory of violence, either as victims or perpetrators.

We discuss also how support for the victim might be improved. Existing specialist support services could develop protocols of cooperation between themselves and the relevant authorities, for example, sharing best practices, and promoting cooperation and multidisciplinary networking. More could also be done to re-educate perpetrators, especially since criminalisation does not act as a deterrent for all.

We concluded our final chapter by looking at the political aspects of revenge porn: that is, revenge porn is part and parcel of the gender-sexual-violation visual culture. While legislative and technological responses, support for those violated, punishment and re-education for those violating are all positive, it is through broader political and gender-sexual-feminist political action and activism that lasting change is most likely to happen. We suggest this will need to take new forms, given that revenge porn and other online abuses are likely to continue. Thus, we argue that more attention is needed to the future of gender and sexuality as an arena of policy, politics, research and action.

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¹ 'Victim' and 'survivor' are at times used interchangeably by some of the sources we draw upon. We recognise that the correct term should be determined by context, and that 'survivor' or 'victim-survivor' is more appropriate than 'victim' in many instances.