School of Social and Political Sciences

Master of Research in Criminology

The Performance of Sexual Violence in Virtual Spaces: An Analysis of Websites Dedicated to the Non-Consensual Sharing of Sexual Images

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Abstract.

Non-consensual distribution of sexual images has become a social problem, where the desire for revenge are acted out through public shaming and humiliation, causing devastating emotional effects for its victims. As the research on this phenomenon has predominantly been concerned with the legal aspect, as well as victims experience, little attention has been given to the websites that publish and share intimate images. Leaving a gap in our understanding of this phenomena. This research project analyses the comments on two websites (*Peeping Tom* and *Upload your Ex!*) dedicated to non-consensual publishing of sexual images by using thematic coding, as it allows the researcher to map out prevalent themes and behaviours.

This study shows that there is a clear difference between the purpose of the websites, as *Peeping Tom* is dedicated to trading and swapping images, where the communication is oriented towards reciprocal sharing of original images. *Upload your Ex!*, on the other hand, is oriented towards the public humiliation of the victims, through sexually objectifying strategies. This research project ends with a conclusion where the researcher addresses the limitations of this study as well as providing suggestions for further research.

Key words: Sexual violence, sexual objectification, non-consensual sharing of sexual images, group dynamic, public humiliation.

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Table of content.

1.0.0 Introduction.

Non-consensual pornography/revenge pornography refers to the sharing of intimate and often sexually explicit images to seek revenge through public shaming and humiliation, most commonly after a romantic relationship has ended, where women are the predominant victims (Citron & Franks, 2014; Sweeny, 2017). In addition, the act is harmful through making the private public (Stroud, 2014). Where sexually explicit content originally has been created and shared with a partner, under the belief that it would not be shared with anyone else, often in a relationship or the process of courtship (Ouytsel et al., 2017). Where victims of this act experience highly distressing emotional responses that carries a striking resemblance to victims of rape or other forms of sexual violence (Bates, 2016).

As public awareness of this problem is growing, steps to criminalise this act have been taken across several countries such as Germany, UK, and Japan (Matsui, 2015). As well as in 39 states including DC in America (CCRI, 2017). In the United Kingdom, non-consensual sharing of sexual images was criminalised in England and Wales in 2015, followed by Scotland and Northern Ireland in 2016. In July 2017, Scotland passed an additional legislation that criminalises threats to publish sexual images, as well as the publishing of such content, the latter highlights the seriousness of this crime, that is viewed as a growing problem (BBC, 2017). In Norway, there have not been created a specific law tackle this problem. However, non-consensual sharing of sexual images has been criminalised through other laws, such as 'disturbance of privacy and peace', 'violation of honour' and 'violation of copyright'. It is considered a criminal offence to publish images without the consent of the person depicted and is not limited to sexually explicit content (NRK, 2015). As of today, there is no international law created to tackle this problem (Sweeny, 2017).

Although, research have highlighted the devastating effects the victims experience, as well as arguing the motive for sharing such images in the first place (Henry & Powell, 2016b), the few scholars that have addressed the websites dedicated to non-consensual publishing of sexual

images where they explain how this type of website functions, e.g. the opportunity to comment on the images published (Stroud, 2014). However, as of today, there has not (to the researchers' knowledge) been a study aimed to analyse the comments on these websites. Thus, leaving a large gap in our understanding of this problem, as the behaviour on these websites might provide important insight and knowledge regarding this understudied phenomenon.

This research project addresses this gap and as it analyses comments posted on two websites dedicated to the non-consensual distribution of sexual images, where the researcher draws on multiple theoretical contributions to map out the behaviour on these websites. The researcher is well aware that by not focusing on one or two possible issues this study might be criticised for not being narrow enough. However, as this is the first project of its kind, the researcher found it necessary to conduct this research project with a broad scope of analysis.

To provide a framework for this research project, the researcher constructed the following research question:

How is sexual violence performed within virtual spaces?

As this both sexual violence and virtual spaces are vast categorizes a set of sub-questions was created to guide the researcher through this project, it is important to note that these are not intended as independent research questions:

- How are the victims spoken of/referred to on websites dedicated to non-consensual sharing of sexual images?

- Which themes are prevalent within the comments on the websites?

- Are there any differences between the websites or across nationalities regarding the type of comments?

<u>Structure of the dissertation.</u>

The dissertation starts with an introduction framing the topic at hand and providing the reader with the research questions. Further, the literature review is presented, where the researcher draws heavily on theoretical as well as empirical work. The literature review aims to provide a foundation of knowledge and discusses important themes related to the non-consensual distribution of sexual images, such as sexual violence, technology-facilitated sexual violence, sexting and the merge between the online and offline world. Further, the methodology is presented, where the researcher provides the reader with the research strategy and design, the ethical implications of this research project as well as methodological limitations. The research project then moves on to the findings, where the researcher presents a description of the websites analysed to contextualise the findings to the reader. The analysis is presented thematically. Lastly, the researcher provides a conclusion where she addresses the limitations of this research project as well as providing suggestions for further research.

2.0.0 Literature review.

This literature review draws on multiple theoretical as well as empirical contributions and aims to provide the reader with an insight into the phenomenon of non-consensual distribution of intimate images. To answer the research question *how is sexual violence performed within the virtual sphere*, the researcher has chosen to draw on a broad range of literature, spanning from sexual violence to computer science.

This literature review is divided into four sections; the first section is dedicated to *Sexual Violence: Victim Blame and Objectification*, where the researcher draws on relevant theory to bring insight into possible mechanisms that cause sexual violence. The second section is dedicated to *Technology Facilitated Sexual Violence (TFSV)* where the researcher emphasises the terms used to describe the non-consensual distribution of intimate images, as well as drawing attention to the victims' emotional responses, as well as the gendered nature of this crime. The third section discusses *The Private/Public Sphere: Social Media and Sexting*, by seeking to understand sexting behaviour. The fourth section, *The Online/Offline Dichotomy* addresses how the offline and online world is merging, followed by a brief conclusion.

2.1.0 Sexual Violence: Victim Blame and Objectification.

This section discusses sexual violence in the physical world by looking to Kelly's (1988) view of 'sexual violence' on a continuum, with a further emphasis on the notion of 'victim blame' and 'sexual objectification'. Thus, this section is not dedicated to a deep exploration of different forms of sexual violence; rather the researcher has dedicated the section to explore possible mechanisms behind sexually violent acts.

The term 'sexual violence' escapes crude definition, as scholars predominantly use the term in relation to specific sexually violent acts. Where illegal acts such as rape, stalking, sexual harassment, and flashing are described as 'sexually violent acts' (Pryor,1987; Shepherd, 2008). As well as legal acts such as pornography (Coward, 1982; Dworkin, 1989). This implies that sexual violence is not only related to a legal definition but include acts that can be experienced as harmful and intrusive (Kelly,1988).

The lack of a determinate definition might be viewed as troublesome as not having a clear-cut definition might make it difficult to chisel out exactly what constitutes as sexually violent behaviour. However, it does allow for a broader way of thinking about sexual violence as sexual violence might not always be performed through illegal acts.

According to Kelly (1988), sexual violence should be seen as on a continuum as it enables women to make sense of their own experiences by showing how 'typical' and 'aberrant' male behaviour shade into one another. Which is based on two aspects: 1) a basic common character that underlies many different events', and 2) a continuous series of elements or events that pass into one another and which cannot be readily distinguished. Meaning that there is no linear straight line connecting many different events or experiences, nor is the continuum a statement about the relative seriousness of the acts, but is expressed in how common the experiences were (Kelly, 1988: 76). According to Kelly (1988), sexual violence – or intimidating and/or violent behaviour with sexual undertones can be a part of women's everyday life and might point to a normalisation of certain sexually violent acts, in such a manner that they do not seem violent or extraordinary. This 'non-recognition' of sexual violence such as sexual harassment, is highlighted by Betsy Stanko (1985), who states that women's experience of male violence is filtered through an understanding of men's behaviour that is characterised as typical. Meaning that behaviour that might be classified as 'sexual harassment' may be interpreted as normal behaviour where one rationalises behaviour through statements such as 'boys will be boys', thus, leading to a normalisation of acts that might be viewed or experienced as harmful and violent behaviour.

To discuss the prevalence of sexual violence in our society is problematic due to the ambiguous definition of 'sexual violence' where behaviour that might not be criminalised can be experienced as harmful or violent (Kelly, 1988), as well as official statistics and victimisation surveys might not provide a fully accurate picture of how prevalent sexually violent acts are in society (Coleman & Moynihan, 1996). Sexual violence is, however, a highly political act, where the sexual aspect of this crime function as a means to an end, not the end itself. In other words, although the violence is expressed through sexual acts, (e.g. rape) the act is "a pattern of sexual behaviour that is concerned much more with status, aggression, control, and dominance than with sensual pleasure or sexual satisfaction" (Groth et al., 1977: 1240). Which becomes as rape is used as a weapon in war. Since the devastating physical and psychological effects of rape not only have a large impact on the individual victims but can contribute to poverty on a community level or national scale. As the fear of experience sexual assault as well as the social stigma

victims carry might prevent women from employment, thus contributing to financial poverty and health deprivation (Shepherd, 2008).

Victim Blame and Rape Myths:

Victim blame functions as a strategy where the perpetrator or bystanders shift parts or all of the responsibility of assault or aggressive behaviour from the perpetrator to the victim. Where "victim blaming is the extent to which members of society hold a victim responsible for his or her victimization", e.g. victims of rape or sexual harassment (Hayes et al., 2013: 205).

Rape myths refer to a set victim blaming explanations, where the victim is viewed somehow responsible for experiencing sexual violence such as rape, e.g. by consuming alcohol (being drunk) or dressing a certain way (wearing revealing clothing). The likelihood of using rape myths and victim blame is highly gendered, where males are more likely to utilise victim blame as a strategy, and less likely to identify with the victims than females (Hayes et al., 2013:206).

Rape myths tend to focus on the female behaviour that leads to their victimisation (Hayes et al., 2013), as well as the type of assault have a significance when reviewing to what extent victims are being blamed. In relation to rape, studies have shown that victims of classic rape (where the perpetrator is a stranger) are less likely to experience victim blame. When the perpetrator is an acquaintance/partner, or the victim has accepted gifts such as alcohol in a bar, the victim is more likely to experience victim blame (Romero-Sánchez, et al., 2012). Where the difference in the degree of vulnerability may affect how victims of rape are viewed, where 'date rape' or 'seduction rape' is seen as an act where the responsibility is shared between the two parties (Grubb & Harrower, 2009). In addition, the likelihood of victim blame is connected to whether one can identify with the victim, where women utilise 'victim blame' to a lower extent than men due to self-identification with the victim (Grubb & Harrower, 2009; Hayes et al., 2013). However, rape myth acceptance is also related to the general view one has of the world, where Hayes et al. (2012) hypothesised that believing in a *just world* (Just World Belief) increased the likelihood of rape myth acceptance and victim blame. A Just World Belief implies that the individual believes that the world is a just place, where one 'get what one deserves'. Where Hayes et al. (2012) found a positive correlation between a Just World Belief and leniency towards victim blame, as well victim blame and rape myth acceptance was more prevalent in men.

<u>Objectification:</u>

Objectification is a process where a human being is reduced to a commodity through different strategies that deny them their subjectivity and autonomy. Where the objectified individual is not valued or assessed based on who they are as individuals, but rather by qualities related to their gender, ethnicity, and/or physical appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Szymanski et al., 2011). At the very heart of objectification, we find that some*one* is reduced to some*thing* (Naussbaum, 1999).

According to Naussbaum (1999), this reduction occurs through seven key processes, which are: instrumentality (the individual is seen as an instrument for pleasure), denial of autonomy (the individual is seen as lacking self-determination), inertness (treating people as passive without agency), fungibility (viewing people as interchangeable), violability (viewing people as objects that can be violated), ownership (viewing people as something that can be bought and sold) and denial of subjectivity (the individual is treated as if their emotions do not exist). These processes are deemed as part of the objectification strategy. When an individual is reduced to a 'thing' or commodity, they are not in need of our respect and care, as they are not regarded as fully human, and in turn may facilitate overt forms of violence such as physical or verbal abuse (Christie, 2008).

Further, sexual objectification occurs "when a person, typically a woman, is reduced to her sex appeal or sexuality for the use and pleasure of others". Sexual objectification is a strategy which reduces the individual to a sexual commodity, where they are no longer perceived as fully human with an emotional repertoire, deserving of dignity and respect (Gervais & Eagan, 2017: 226). Sexual objectification of the female body mainly occurs in media and through social interaction, which may contribute to a cultural context in which violence against women is made possible (Gervais & Egan, 2017) – e.g. sexual harassment in the workplace (Pryor, 1987) and on college campuses (Wolff, et al., 2017). Although each of these phenomena represents a complex social problem all in their own right, objectification is a significant contributor, as objectification can alter norms of what is considered appropriate behaviour. In addition, exposure to objectification can cause a passive acceptance of violence (Gervais & Egan, 2017). The connection between sexual objectification and sexual violence is by "[s]eeing women as less-than-human sex objects is a likely first step toward aggressing against them." (Gervais & Egan, 2017:230)

2.2.0 Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence (TFSV).

Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence (TFSV) is an umbrella term aimed to capture a range of behaviour where digital technologies are used to facilitate both digital and face-to-face sexually based harms. These include; online harassment, gender- and sexuality-based harassment, cyber stalking, image-based sexual exploitation, and the use of a carriage service to coerce a victim into an unwanted sexual act (Barak, 2005; Bates, 2016; Cooper, 2016; Henry & Powell, 2015a; 2015b; 2016b).

TFSV is expressed in multiple different forms such as; sexist and harassing comments on online roleplaying games (Fox & Tang, 2014; Tang & Fox, 2016), blackmail victims for money by threatening to publish compromising images of them, threats of rape and/or other forms of physical assault (Matsui, 2015), extended control and abuse in a domestic violence situation (Bates, 2016), the unwanted distribution of sexual explicit images, with the aim to harm and humiliate the victim (Citron & Franks, 2014), and virtual rape (where there is performed sexual acts on someone's avatar against their will) (Henry & Powell, 2013).

In this research project, I will focus on the part of image based sexual exploitation referred to as non-consensual pornography – also referred to as 'revenge pornography' (Citron & Franks, 2014) The two terms are often used interchangeably within the literature, as a manner of referring to the same phenomenon (Stroud, 2014; Cooper, 2016; Bates, 2017; Pina et al., 2017). However, I would like to point out a slight nuance to the terms.

The term *revenge pornography* refers to an act where one person shares or uploads a sexually explicit image of another person with the aim of shaming, humiliating, and harming them, an act most commonly performed by an ex-lover or ex-partner. The aspect of seeking 'revenge' for a wrong-doing is at the centre of this action and might be explained as something the victim deserves after a messy break-up or being caught cheating or lying. The action is thus rationalised as 'something the victim deserves' (Pina et al., 2017; Citron & Franks, 2014). The image is often uploaded to a website that is dedicated to 'revenge porn', where the victim's full name, links to profiles on social media, address, or place of employment is published along with the images. This will often include an aggressive statement concerning the person on the photograph (Stroud, 2014). A vital part of this action is therefore that the victim and the immediate social network of the family are aware that the images have been created and shared by the victim, and then, distributed to the rest of the world. The aim of the perpetrator is thus to humiliate and shame the victim (Henry & Powell, 2015a).

The term *non-consensual pornography*, on the other hand, allows us to include actions where the aspect of 'revenge' is not the main focus. It still points to the action of uploading a sexually explicit image without consent from the person in question (Barak, 2005). However, the term points to the action in a neutral manner, as it does not assume the motivation or intention behind the distribution of the images, but points to an act where sexually explicit imagery has been shared *without consent* (Bates, 2016). The distribution of sexually explicit imagery might not always be tied to the desire to publicly humiliate the victim. All revenge porn is non-consensual pornography but not the other way around. By separating the two terms, we point to how the act of sharing sexually explicit images without consent can have different motivations, where we do not automatically assume that intent is connected to public humiliation (Bates, 2016). However, the researcher would like to point to a potentially problematic aspect of using the term 'non-consensual pornography', as it does not distinguish between sexually explicit images that have been *created* without the victims' consent, and images that have been created consensually but published without consent. In this case, the researcher will refer to non-consensual pornography as the *non-consensual publishing of intimate/sexted images*, unless when referring to scholars who use different terms.

Gendered harm:

Like other forms of sexual violence, revenge pornography is a highly gendered crime as the majority of the victims are women, and the perpetrators are commonly men (Citron & Franks, 2014; Sweeny, 2017). Women are more likely to send sexual images of themselves (sexting) upon request or coercion of their partner, as well as being primary targets for sexual violence both in the virtual and analogue sphere (Henry & Powell, 2016a). The gendered nature of the phenomenon is highlighted through the social stigma that women experience, e.g. through reputations in the physical world or complications in relation to finding employment. Additionally, victims of 'revenge porn' experience a form of victim blame, where one public argument is that 'if you don't allow sexually explicit pictures to be taken by yourself or a partner, you won't have a problem' (Cooper, 2016: 819). This is a strategy that can be seen as shifting the blame and the responsibility from the perpetrator onto the victim, as the victim often has created the content themselves, and consensually shared within the frame of a romantic relationship (Ringrose et al., 2013), and is a strategy found when addressing other forms of sexual violence, such as rape (Grubb & Harrower, 2009; Hayes et al., 2013). As well as insults and harassing comment directed towards 'revenge porn' victims are often directed towards the

victim's appearance, rather than intellectual abilities. Furthermore, the gendered nature of this crime is emphasised when viewing the difference between how male and female victims are being treated on revenge pornography websites. While male victims are either ignored or celebrated, female victims are being 'slut-shamed' and spoken of in a derogatory manner. Thus, showing society's double standard where women experienced being punished for behaviour that is viewed as acceptable for men (Sweeny, 2017: 23).

Cause of emotional and financial stress:

As con-consensual pornography is a recent phenomenon, the literature so far has been focused on the legal aspects and its implications, where scholars' primary have debated how this act can, or should be criminalized (Citron & Franks, 2014; Sweeny, 2017) and then towards exploring the victims' response to revenge pornography. This, to strengthen the argument that sexual violence performed within digital spaces has physical health impacts on the victims (Bates, 2016). As Bates (2016) discovers through interviewing 18 female survivors of revenge pornography that they experience similar emotional responses as victims of other forms of sexual violence, such as rape. The survivors report experiencing trust issues, anxiety, depression, and PTSD. The participants of Bates (2016) study all experienced their victimisation as a horrendous invasion of sexual privacy and personal space by someone they loved and trusted. The study finds a striking similarity between emotional responses revenge porn-victims and the emotional responses of rape-victims, thus suggesting that revenge porn should be viewed and classified as a sexual offence.

As well as negative emotional responses survivors/victims of revenge pornography experience financial loss or difficulties in finding employment due to the social stigma victims experience (Cooper, 2016; Matsui, 2015). As well as victims of revenge porn experience difficulties emotionally connecting to new romantic partners, feeling embarrassed or fearful in public situations. Or is used as a tool to keep women in abusive relationships, or through blackmail for financial gain (Cooper, 2016). The devastating effects are accentuated as the virtual space carries opportunities that the analogue world does not, as a similar act in a pure analogue world would limit the distribution to who the perpetrator physically sent the images to. In the virtual sphere, the perpetrator has the opportunity to publish images anonymously, reaching millions of people within a few minutes, where the victim is stripped of control and autonomy (Cooper, 2016).

Revenge porn websites:

The very first 'revenge porn' website, *IsAnyoneUp*, was created by Hunter Moore in 2010 and quickly became highly popular with over 30 million visits per month. To disclose intimate pictures of someone as an act of anger after an ended relationship existed before *IsAnyoneUp*. However, Hunter Moor took the act of revenge and public humiliation to a more extreme extent as the website allowed images to be uploaded by the users, with full name and often addresses of the victims. Place of employment and links to the victims' social media profiles were also often included (Matsui, 2015). Thus, leaving the victims vulnerable to physical assaults or other forms of threatening behaviour, such as stalking (Midtbø & Rønningen, 2017). The perpetrators gain power from their anonymity, while an important part of the harm and humiliation of the victim is that s/he is exposed in a highly sexual setting. As well as being the next step in sexual violence against women where patriarchal norms are used against women, the sites allow for swift and quick anonymous revenge (Stroud, 2014).

Stroud (2014) conducted a study of a variety of revenge pornography websites, by applying an ethical analysis utilising Dewey's pragmatism. Whereby removing oneself from a moral view of 'good' or 'bad', the researcher allowed himself to focus on the mechanics of the phenomena in questions as well as deduce possible motives for publishing revenge-pornography. Stroud (2014) highlights four key characteristics of revenge porn sites: 1) The content is user-submitted. 2) The victims are identifiable (full name and/or picture which show their face), 3) the website links to verifying Internet sources, such as social media profiles and/or links to the victims' employer, and 4) the websites allow users to submit comments about the content posted, and his study offers a general analysis of how the revenge pornography websites functions. However, Stroud (2014) did not analyse the images or the comments on the websites, neither offers he insight into how the participants comment on the websites.

2.3.0 The Private and Public Sphere - Social Media and Sexting.

According to Habermas (1962/1989) the frontier between the private and public sphere have traditionally been seen as the difference between the 'world at home' and the 'political world', where the two worlds implied different forms of conversing and behaving. However, due to technological advances and societal change, the need for 'togetherness' and 'not being alone' has become more dominant, as seen through the focus on individual narratives in mass media.

Habermas (1962/1989) points us towards a rethinking of what we consider as private and public, that have never been more accurate, and the technological development that we have seen since the 1960s have challenged the conceptualisation of a private sphere separate from the public life. This is clear when we look to the development of social media and in particularly Facebook (Haugseth, 2013).

The development of social media early 2000 allowed us to connect with friends and acquaintances across space and time, where the aim is social interaction, unlike traditional websites that were designated to a specific task (e.g. University websites) or topic oriented (e.g. websites dedicated to specific topics such as 'fishing' or 'homemaking'). Social networking sites, i.e. social media, are websites dedicated to social interaction (boyd & Ellison, 2007), where social networking sites, and particularly Facebook revolutionized how we use and spend our time within the virtual sphere (Haugseth, 2013). Through Facebook, we invite a large number of people into our private sphere by sharing information and images concerning ourselves and our families (Arora & Scheiber, 2017). As well as the act of 'liking' and commenting is an activity a large number of us engage in on a daily basis (Gunter, 2009). Thus, we find ourselves in a *semi-public* sphere, where highly personal information (place of work and residence) and private information (pictures of our children's birthdays and the first day of school) is published to a vast number of people (Haugseth, 2013).

As large portions of our social interaction have moved to the digital sphere, we encounter new manners of displaying our desires and emotions, which leads us to the phenomenon of *sexting*[1]. Sexting refers to the creation or distribution of sexually explicit content via an electronic device, such as smartphones (Moore, 2012). The sexted images are often shared on social media platforms such as Snapchat and WhatsApp, as they are deemed more private than Facebook messenger and email (van Ouysel et al., 2017). Which gives us a sense of how privacy is understood in this context, as measures to protects once privacy is (here) related to social media platform, not only by assessing the recipient of the images.

Scholars have predominantly addressed the topic of sexting among youths and young adults (Drouin & Landgraff 2012; Ringrose et al., 2013; Drouin & Tobin, 2014). Ringrose et al. (2013) found that sexting behaviour can be seen as a part of romantic courting among teenagers, where predominantly girls send sexualised pictures of themselves to boys. Where part of their role is to assess who to send such pictures to, as sending sexually explicit content carries with it a risk

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[1] Sexting is a 'portmanteau' term that combines the words *sex* and *texting* (Ringrose et al., 2013: 306).

of receiving negative social sanctions, due to societal gendered expectations regarding what is and is not viewed as socially acceptable. For boys, on the other hand, acquiring images can provide a positive effect on their social status, by proving their desirability among girls and having access to girls' bodies, thus providing a possible new way of thinking about masculinity norms.

The gendered inequality regarding sending and receiving sexted images is highlighted by van Ouysel and colleagues (2017) that explore how adolescents perceive the usage of sexting by exploring the motives for engaging in sexting behaviour among 57 adolescents conducting focus groups. The researcher found that sexual images was predominantly sent by girls and received by boys, where the girls interviewed in this study expressed that the motivation behind sending such images was to provide a sign of love or to surprise him. However, participants also expressed sometimes feeling pressured to send such images, where their boyfriend wished them to 'prove their love' or questioned whether she trusted him. The boys on the other hand, expressed sexting as attention seeking behaviour of girls, or as a part of romantic courtship.

Sexting (in particular among youth) has been regarded a highly problematic phenomenon, due to the risks associated with sending sexually explicit images, as sexted images can be used to seek revenge (e.g. revenge pornography) or blackmail (Cooper, 2016). Where the phenomena of sexting have been attributed to a highly sexualised mainstream popular culture, as mainstream media uses content with sexual implications, thus having an impact on how youth perform sexual behaviour among themselves (Ringrose et al., 2013). However, to attribute sexting solely to sexualisation of mainstream popular culture might underestimate how social interaction and romantic/sexual interaction displays itself in a highly mediated environment (Hasinoff, 2012). As young people today grow up in an environment where our sense of privacy have altered with the development of Facebook and other social networking sites (West et al., 2009).

2.4.0 The Online/Offline Dichotomy.

The concepts of *online* and *offline* are often used within the literature, where the distinction is used to describe the difference between the virtual and analogue world. Within the literature, we find a divide in *how* the digital space is referred to, where scholars, on one hand, refer to the *online/offline dimension*, when describing the difference between physical- and the virtual world (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Hirzilla & Zoonen, 2011; Rice & Fuller, 2013), however, some

scholars remain sceptic of this dichotomy, thus utilizing terms such as virtuality/reality, digital/analogue, and physical space/cyberspace (Durante, 2011). These terms point to how the technological development and human dependency challenges the notion of an *offline* world.

Floridi (2007) argues that the threshold between online and offline eventually will disappear altogether, as the digital sphere increasingly become a larger part of our everyday existence. Through our dependency on cyberspace in the form of; banking, healthcare, taxes, pensions, education, crime, and even dating. The frontier between the two is increasingly becoming blurred – e.g. the development of 5G and 'the internet of things' where everyday objects will be connected to WiFi – as the offline world is dependent on the online world (Gaggioli, 2017). The notion of 'offline' and 'online' may contribute to an idea that the actions that take place in the digital sphere is inherently different from those who take place in the physical world, where violent actions viewed in the virtual world are viewed as less serious than acts within the analogue world (e.g. 'trolling').

Trolling also called flaming are verbal acts that aim to provoke or annoy to the point where a reaction occurs, this can come in the form of sexist or racist comments on social media sites, such as YouTube, or in the comment section on a news website. The individual behind the 'trolling' does not necessarily have particularly racist or sexist views, but wish to provoke others for their amusement (Moor et al., 2010). As the online and offline world is merging, we become a part of an increasingly expanding, public world, where actions that take place in the digital sphere have a direct impact on the physical, analogue world (Bates, 2016). To divide the world into an online/offline dichotomy may lead us to view one world as more 'real' than the other, where the digital world might be seen as 'less real' as it is non-physical. TFSV and in our case the non-consensual publishing of sexted images, refutes the notion that virtual sexual violence is experienced as less serious than analogue sexual violence, as the victims experience strong emotional responses, leading to depression, PTSD and in some cases suicide (Henry & Powell, 2016b). The researcher here argues that we need to remove the cognitive divide separating what is 'online' and 'offline', as online occurrences have an impact on the quality of our offline lives.

In this literature review, we draw on research from multiple fields to provide a solid foundation to interrogate how sexual violence is performed in virtual spaces. Where the researcher

discusses sexual violence in relation to objectification strategies and victim blame. The researcher has discussed non-consensual sharing of sexual images and addressed the negative impact this act has on the victims. In addition, the researcher has aimed to provide an insight into sexting and sexting behaviour as well as contemplating a possible merge between the offline/online dichotomy, as acts committed within the virtual world have a direct impact on our physical or analogue lives.

In addition, the researcher has identified a gap in research on websites dedicated to non-consensual sharing of sexual images, as there have yet to be executed a study that specifically reviews the comments on these websites. It is the researchers' view that to gain an understanding of the communication on these websites might provide important insight into the phenomenon of non-consensual sharing of sexual images. Furthermore, the researcher aims to map out prevalent behaviours and identify themes within the comments made on these websites, and stresses that the images will not be object for analysis.

3.0.0 Methodology.

The methodology utilised for this project is theoretically situated within the interpretive stance on the methodological continuum, as the researcher believes that perfect objectivity (such as found in the positivist ideology) is not possible when researching human behaviour (Bryman, 2016; Leavy, 2014). This sets the tone for how the research is conducted regarding data collection and analysis. As the aim of this research project is to interrogate *how sexual violence is performed within virtual spaces,* the researcher seeks to describe and explore the performance of sexual violence within the virtual environment, thus calling for a wholly qualitative approach.

3.1.0 Research Strategy.

The research strategy is the "general orientation to the conduct of social research" (Bryman, 2016: 32), and is [aimed] towards the theoretical position we apply. In this project, we have adopted a fully qualitative approach which carries with it ontological as well as epistemological implications, which lead the project towards certain methods for data collection as well method of analysis. This project has adopted a social constructivist epistemological position, which states that knowledge about the social world (unlike the physical) is in itself socially constructed. As meaning is continuously produced and reproduced by social actors (Giddens & Sutton, 2009), and always is a part of a larger context, where historical development shapes the discourses as well as what we perceive as knowledge and 'truth' (Foucault, 1980). The ontological implications of this project point us toward *subjectivism*, where the ideology stems from the theoretical position that states that social phenomena are created from perceptions and consequent actions to those social actors concerned with their existence (Bryman, 2016).

Combining a deductive and inductive approach was found suited for this research project, as the researcher seeks to explore a phenomenon that has not been extensively researched. By creating a set of possible codes based on literature the researcher is provided with the opportunity to see the findings in relation to existing knowledge within the topic of 'sexual violence', thus providing the researcher with a guide for exploration (Bryman, 2016). As well as giving the researcher flexibility through create code based on the data provide the opportunity

to conceptualise behaviour that might be unique to the data set utilised in this research project (Silverman, 2011).

3.2.0 Research Design.

This research project uses two different websites dedicated to the non-consensual publishing of sexted images where the researcher analysed the comments that the different pictures received.

The researcher first started the data exploration through a series of links sent to her by a 'technological gatekeeper'. The role of the gatekeeper was, in this case, to aid the researcher in finding websites as well as extracting data from the website in a secure manner. The researcher is well aware that the gatekeeper can sway the researcher towards specific sites, as the power dynamic might fall in favour of the gatekeeper due to the researchers' dependence on him to access the field (Hughes, 2011). However, the researcher did not experience the need to negotiate which website the gatekeeper was willing to extract data from, neither did any conflict regarding the research project arise – which might be due to the open and ongoing dialogue regarding the research project, as well as their friendship outside of the research project.

The gatekeeper is an expert on cyber security and highly knowledgeable within the research topic, as well as having the technological skills and foresight to advise the researcher on how to manoeuvre in this part of the Internet. This was highly appreciated as digital safety for the researcher needs to be maintained throughout the research project. The researcher also found a handful of websites through searches, although they were excluded from this research project as they were under payment barrier. To directly contribute financially to this phenomenon was deemed unethical and not something the researcher wished to be a part of.

To narrow the scope of research and limit the amount of data, as well as to ensure that the data used were relevant to the research question the following criteria were put in place.

The websites must contain or have the opportunity to:

- Upload pictures and/or videos of the victims.

- A description of the victim.

- Comment(s) on the content.

The amount of data:

- Minimum two different websites.

- Minimum one week of data from the sites (depending on traffic).

- Minimum 25 cases per site.

As both websites chosen for this research project – named *Peeping Tom* and *Upload your Ex!* – contain posts from multiple countries, and the researcher found it best to limit the data to location as well as time frame. The website (here named) *Peeping Tom* consist of multiple sub categories such as: Spain, Norway, UK, Canada, France, Sweden. The different sub categories contained posts where the comments were written in the individual native language, thus, by extracting data from the entire website the researcher would be left with a large amount of data in a language she does not understand. Hence, the locations 'UK' and 'Norway' were selected, in addition, the two countries have both criminalised the non-consensual publishing of sexted images, this could provide a potential opportunity to compare the communication on the website across national and linguistic boundaries. The same rationale was applied when extracting data from *Upload your Ex!* Although, the posts and comments were written in English[2] despite the different locations, the researcher chose to view posts from the locations 'Norway' and 'Scotland' – there was no location called 'UK'.

The two websites are different in terms of the amount of traffic as well as layout. Therefore, the researcher found it necessary limit the amount of data with individual criteria, as *Peep Tom* is a high-intensity website the researcher found it most productive to limit the data extract from 01.06.2017 to 21.06.2017. *Peeping Tom UK* contained a high level of traffic, and the researcher found it necessary to limit the time frame even further, to contain posts from 01.06.2017-07.06.2017, as *Peeping Tom Norway* contained a lower degree of traffic[3] the original timeframe was used. *Upload you Ex!* on the other hand, is a low-intensity website and limit the data to location rather than time frame were viewed most productive – the researcher chose the to limit the locations to Norway (10 posts in total) and Scotland (18 posts in total), the posts were created from 2014-2017.

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[2] *Upload your Ex!* contain a search engine where it is possible to search for locations, it is not divided into subcategories as *Peeping Tom*.

[3] This was not surprising as the population of Norway is far smaller than the population of United Kingdom, thus the number of possible users/participants is far smaller.

3.3.0 Method: Virtual Ethnography?

In this research project, the method of data collection could be viewed as 'virtual ethnography' as transcripts from Internet websites have been extracted and analysed, thus implying that the researcher has conducted a virtual version of 'direct observation' (Bryman, 2016). Where the researcher remains distant from the participants on the websites, by analysing the written text on the websites.

Ethnographic research refers to a method for data collection where the researcher immerses themselves in the environment of the researched to truly understand the world of the participants, through direct observation and participation (Hammersley, 1992), and is often triangulated with other methods such as in-depth interviews (Forsey, 2010). *Virtual ethnography* refers both to a methodological stance that views the interaction between the digital and non-digital world, where behaviour found in the virtual world is sought to be tied to non-digital phenomena (Fielding, 2008).

> "Viewing texts ethnographically, then, entails tying those texts to particular circumstances of production and consumption. The texts become ethnographically (and socially) meaningful once we have a cultural context(s) in which to situate it" (Hine, 2000: 52).

This is an approach to virtual ethnography that take into account the social and historical context that surrounds the 'research site' (Hine, 2000). As the research site is not a fixed place, to view a virtual space as traditional research site - where the researcher enters a space and through observation (and sometimes interactions with participants) - carries with it the possible limitation of not fully appreciating social processes that occur outside of the virtual space we seek to understand, as well as the research might focus on the written text, and ignore multimedia (Beneito-Montagut, 2011). The researcher has sought to address these limitations by drawing relevant theoretical contributions that enable the researcher to view the data in the context of contemporary Western society. In addition to providing the reader with a general description of the websites analysed.

3.4.0 Method of Analysis: Thematic Coding.

This research project has applied 'thematic coding' as a method of analysis, which refers to a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. A 'code' refers to a label or construct applied by the researcher to explain a certain topic, e.g. 'positive

comments on appearance', while a theme aims to capture something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represent a level of meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The data have been thematically coded by creating a descriptive 'code' for each topic as they emerge. This is an inductive approach as the researcher attempts to create codes, and discover themes solely based on the data, where the researcher attempts to 'let the data speak for itself' thus allowing the researcher to maintain objectivity throughout the coding process (Hardman, 2012). However, it needs to be stated that the researcher never will be fully objective, as the themes are conceptualised based on a pre-understanding of how a certain theme is or should be conceptualised, which is coloured by the literature as well as when (historical context) where (social context) the researcher is situated in (Haraway, 1988). The researcher, therefore, needs to maintain a reflexive relationship to the data, and constantly questioning her conceptualisation.

Prior to the data analysis, a few codes were created by drawing on research on sexual violence (see chapter 2.1.0). As the act of publishing intimate images without consent is here viewed as an act of violence, the researcher aims to explore how the violence is performed (i.e. which themes the users on the websites draw on when commenting on the pictures). The codes created prior to the data analysis was intended as a guide – or theoretical aid for the researcher as the coding process started. The codes prior to the coding were as follows:

- Objectification (e.g. that is a nice ass (as opposed to 's/he has a nice ass')).

- Victim blame (in relation to creating the content in the first place).

- Physical violence in general (e.g. s/he should be beaten, etc.).

- Sexual violence (e.g. victim should be raped).

- Negative comments on appearance (e.g. s/he is 'ugly' or 'fat').

- Positive comments on appearance (e.g. s/he is 'beautiful' or 'attractive').

The researcher chose to create a new code for each emerging 'topic' that was found in the data. Where each code has been assigned a colour, and the data set colour coded. The positive aspect of this approach is that it allowed the researcher to quickly identify which codes are most

pertinent on which website, as well as it reveals any potential group dynamic, and how the themes emerge. The different comments (codes) were then collected into paragraphs to check their accuracy, as it provides the opportunity to re-evaluate the interpretation and coding of the data set and alter mistakes or miscoding, as the researcher is well aware of that the coding process itself might alter the perception by making the researcher less sensitive and thus code inaccurately (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This way of analysing data requires repeated readings, where the codes continuously are scrutinized and evaluated (Braun & Clark, 2006).

A total of 27 codes were created from our datasets. Moreover, it was found most fruitful to conceptualise themes that consist of a cluster of similar codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). E.g. the codes 'requesting pictures of specific people', 'requesting images from specific locations' and 'requests for more content in general' where all gathered under the theme 'Requests'. This due to the similarities that all three codes contained requests for either information or pictures.

3.5.0 Ethical implications.

In any research project, there are ethical considerations to be made, where we need to consider the possible harms and benefits from conducting our research (Jamieson, 2000). As virtual spaces are fairly new as research sites, set ethical guidelines has yet to be fully developed for research of online social interaction (Fielding, 2008; Beneito-Montagut, 2011).

However, there are key ethical issues when researching within the virtual world, such as informed consent to the participant involved, the techniques used to record and extract data from the websites researched, in addition to maintaining the anonymity of the individuals that interact on the websites (Beneito-Montagut, 2011).

This project analyses the comments found on websites dedicated to non-consensual sharing of sexual images, and do not rely on participants *per se*. Thus, informed consent was not viewed as necessary for this project, as contacting perpetrators or victims might be a harmful act on its own, as well as unnecessary for this research project. In addition, the information analysed is found on the 'open web,' meaning that the information is open to anyone, unlike 'closed' websites or forums where a username/password is required.

However, this does not mean that the information *should* be viewed as public document and thus used 'freely' without considerations of the possible repercussions to the victims. As drawing attention to the websites might cause further victimisation (Stroud, 2014), as well as the knowledge that although the information is publicly available, it was (probably) not

intended or considered as research material (Trevistan & Reilly, 2014). Nevertheless, researchers should not categorically avoid research sites or topics either, as this might contribute to important issues not being raised in the public discourse, as well as the possible harm of *not* researching a phenomenon, as greater understanding of an issue may provide valuable insight into how we solve the problem at hand (Townsend & Wallace, 2016)

As the nature of the topic is highly sensitive applying for ethical approval from the College Research Ethics Committee at the University of Glasgow was found to be appropriate (see appendix 1).

In this project, the main ethical issues highlighted were in relation to the identity of; victims, perpetrators, and websites, as maintaining anonymity is vital for this project to avoid future harassment of both victim and perpetrator. This has been solved by creating pseudonyms for websites, victims, and usernames throughout the research process. Also, all quotes have been paraphrased to the extent that the original source cannot be found through search engines. No pictures have been downloaded or printed in this project. The Tor Browser was used as a search engine for this project, as it automatically erases the search history every time the browser is closed, as well providing a certain degree of anonymity for the researcher. The data was extracted securely by Ludwig Sandell through Dignatio AS (see appendix 2).

3.6.0 Limitations of the methodology.
The limitations of this methodology are tied to two main concerns. Firstly, as this project is analysing two websites within a limited timeframe the researcher cannot generalise the findings to *all websites* that non-consensually publish sexted images. As the tone might differ from website to website, as well as depending on the given political context of the nationality dominating the website, and who the users of the website are.

The second limitation is related to the researchers coding: as the researcher is the only coder in this project, she is aware that *intercoder reliability* or *intercoder agreement* has not been achieved. The coder is therefore aware that a coder with a different theoretical background might code the themes differently (Kelle, 2007). However, this limitation has been addressed through consulting literature throughout the coding process, where the analysis relies heavily on theoretic and empirical works of other scholars.

A second limitation to this research project is that the social markers of the perpetrators are unknown to the researcher, such as social class, ethnicity and cultural background, age, and

gender. The two latter details can be viewed as problematic for the research project, as especially knowledge of age and gender is important to try to understand the behaviour we are confronted with. However not having information about the individuals behind the comments might give the researcher the opportunity to view the comments in a more objective manner, as social markers such as age and gender might influence the researcher's perception.

4.0.0 Findings.

In this chapter, the researcher starts by providing the reader with a description of the two websites utilised in this analysis. This is to contextualise the findings, as well as give the reader an insight into the similarities and differences between the websites. The researcher stresses that due to ethical implications no screenshots were taken or downloaded from the websites. The description of the websites was conducted when the researcher accessed them in the process of finding the data, where she used the Tor Browser that automatically deletes the search history when closed.

The researcher moves on to present the themes conceptualised in the data set and has chosen to present them in a thematic order. To present the findings thematically were challenging, as the different themes often draw on each other and merge into each other within the communication on the websites analysed. However, the researcher has chosen to present the themes conceptualised under the two headlines 'Group dynamic' and 'Sexual Objectification', with following sub headlines that contain prevalent themes the researcher wishes to draw attention to. Each section starts with a description of the findings as well as a selection of paraphrased quotes followed by an analysis where the researcher draws on relevant literature to provide insight into the comments in the data set.

This chapter ends with a conclusion where the researcher directly ties the findings to the research question, as well as providing the reader with a brief discussion of the limitations of the research project and suggestions for future research.

The websites chosen for this project has been named *Upload your Ex!* and *Peeping Tom*, the websites were selected due to accessibility. Additionally, websites are different in terms of layout and type of communication that occur. The names are pseudonyms of the website

Upload your Ex! has a layout which gives the impression of a fusion between the social media site Pinterest, and Gumtree – a website for selling and buying items. The website contains a search engine where users may search for victims based on name and location, as well as subsections with 'girlfriends' and 'boyfriends', making it easy for new users to manoeuvre on

the website and finding particular victims. Also, the website contained a bar containing 'most views', 'new exes' and 'most rated'. Which allows for popular and new posts to be further exposed, as posts with a high number of views or rates might repeatedly be viewed (Haugseth, 2013). The individual posts contain the following; victim's full name and place of residence, sexually explicit pictures and/or video of the victim, a headline and a short description provided by the original poster – often along the lines of 'cheated with my friend' or 'slut that likes to fuck', as well as the opportunity to comment and rate (1-5 stars). The post contains information about how many views and rates each individual post has. The website contains advertisements of mainstream pornography websites, webcam services and pornographic video games. Based on this, the website seems to be aimed at a broad audience that might not have advanced technological skills. The majority of the posts from Norway were created in 2015.2017. The posts from Scotland predominantly date from 2014-2015. However, several of these posts contained comments from 2016 and 2017, this underlines how the victim may experience humiliation over a longer period of time. E.g. in one instant a post from June 2015 was commented on in August 2016, where the participant claimed to know who the victim was and her place of employment.

Peeping Tom, on the other hand, is a far 'messier' website, as it does not have a mainstream looking layout, but draw closer resemblance to the forum reddit.net. The website is divided into subsections based on location (e.g. Spain, UK, Canada, Norway, Sweden), and does not have the opportunity to search for specific individuals/locations. The posts are uploaded 'as you go', meaning that there are no individual folders for each victim as we see on *Upload your Ex!*. Rather the website consists of different threads where the participants reply to requests for pictures of specific people, or from specific locations, or comment on images posted, neither does the website contain the same level of advertisement. The participants do not have a personalised username as the website seems to aim for anonymity, although the victims often are named, their full surname is not included, or their name has been masked with code (e.g. 'Susan B' or Su$an Br*dy). This might mask the posting from search engines such as Google, and might imply that the victims may not be aware that the images are being shared.

A disproportionately high number of female victims were found on both websites. In the sample from *Peeping Tom* no male victims were found, while on *Upload your Ex!* there were three male victims out of ten posts from Norway, and one male victim out of 18 posts from Scotland. The difference in gender distribution across national borders stands as an interesting finding, as

male victims are more predominant from Norway. Although the researcher will not provide an extensive discussion of why this is the case in our sample, it is worth noting a possible explanation. The researcher draws on the *Global Gender Gap Report*[4] of 2016 as the level of gender equality might be a possible explanation. While Norway ranked 3rd (score 0.845), the United Kingdom ranked 20th (score 0.752) on a global scale. Although this might not be an explanation on its own, it is worth mentioning that a higher level of gender equality might have an impact, as gender difference in violence is reduced in social settings with a higher degree of gender equality (Lei et al., 2014).

That the victims are predominantly female is not surprising, as sexual violence is a highly gendered crime featuring majorly male perpetrators and female victims (Shepherd, 2008; MacQueen, 2016). As these websites operate with usernames, the identity of the perpetrators remains anonymous, which means that the researcher cannot confirm the perpetrator's gender with an absolute certainty. However, based on the comments and the gender of the victims (female) the researcher does believe it is safe to assume that there might be majorly male perpetrators/participants on the websites analysed.

The overall communication varied between the websites, as stated *Peeping Tom* has a higher sharing frequency and the general traffic (uploading of pictures and comments) than found on *Upload your Ex!* On *Upload your Ex!* the number of comments varied from post to post, however, this is not further discussed in the analysis, as the data set consist of text only, as no pictures were downloaded or used in the analysis. Thus, to provide a discussion of the pictures falls outside of the scope of this research (to analyse comments on the websites), as well as it would be ethically inappropriate, as the ethical approval for this research project is restricted to text only.

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[4] The Global Gender Gap Report (2016) measure the gender gap between men and women on; economic, education, health, and political influence across the globe where nations are ranked after level of gender equality where highest possible score (equality) = 1 and lowest possible score (inequality) = 0.

4.1.0 Themes.

The research question, *how is sexual violence performed within the virtual world* is addressed through an analysis of the behaviour on the websites *Upload your ex!* and *Peeping Tom* through a thematic analysis. The themes conceptualised from the data set are seen in a broader social context. Thus, this research project takes a social constructivist approach (Giddens & Sutton, 2009).

Multiple themes were conceptualised in the data set as 27 codes were applied. However, to answer our research question the following themes were further addressed, these are *sexual objectification* – where I emphasise comments on the victims' appearances and sexual morality and worth, as these both are significant aspects of sexual objectification as well as highly prevalent within our data. – And *group dynamic*, where I draw our attention to how the participants interact with each other when distributing non-consensual pornography. Both themes are viewed as highly important to address our research question appropriately.

As we encounter a vast number of themes, some have been excluded from our analysis due to relevance to the research question. However, the theme 'trolling' was highly prevalent on *Upload your Ex!*. Since it made up a significant portion of the data, the researcher found it necessary to mention it. The code 'trolling' was utilised for comments that were perceived as lacking coherence in relation to the original post. Trolling is viewed as comments that are unrelated to the image/content in the posts, where the participant in question seem to aim to confuse or provoke the other participants (Moor et al., 2010). The difference in the level of trolling across the websites might relate to how 'mainstream' and popular the website is, as well-known and accessible websites might attract a large variety of viewers and participants that might have different motivations for accessing the website in the first place.

4.2.0 Group dynamic: "Sharing is caring."

One key finding in the analysis was related to the group dynamic among the participants across the websites analysed. The theme 'group dynamic' was conceptualised during the coding process, and refers to behaviour where the comments are directed towards other participants on the sites. Group dynamic is viewed as an overarching theme when analysing the communication among the participants. The theme 'group dynamic' consist of smaller themes such as 'reciprocity', 'inclusion/exclusion' and 'authenticity and victims' identity'. 'Group dynamic'

was found on both websites. However, *Peeping Tom* had a higher degree of what is here conceptualised as 'group dynamic', while the comments on *Upload your Ex!* were directly related to the posts or aimed towards the original poster.

In this context, a group is identified as…

> …a social unit which consists of a number of individuals who stand in (more or less) definite status and role relationships to one another and which processes a set of values and norms of its regulating behaviour of individual members, at least in matters of consequence for the group. (Sherif & Sherif, 1956:144 in Donelson, 2006:9)

Although both websites carry a rationale that draws on the definition of a 'group', the researcher found it most appropriate to present the findings from *Peeping Tom* and *Upload your Ex!* in separate paragraphs.

The interaction on *Peeping Tom* majorly consisted of requests for pictures of specific people, or people from specific locations. Uploading content was encouraged in what the researcher interpreted as positive comments, where the participants use words such as, 'mates' and 'us'.

*"Does anyone have anything on Lynn D*ly?"*

"Any nudes of Glasgow sluts?"

"Hey, mates. Post your pics. Let's keep this thread alive."

(Peeping Tom, UK)

Statements such as these make up for a significant portion of the communication on *Peeping Tom*, where the group is highly oriented towards the common goal of sharing sexual images, this is viewed as task-communication, where large parts of the group activity is focused on the primary goal of the group, and all actions are performed to pertain to the group's aim (Donelson, 2006). This form of group interaction is most prevalent on *Peeping Tom*, as the overall aim of the site seems to be directed towards the sharing of intimate pictures.

The participants on *Peeping Tom* can be viewed as a 'group'; this became clearer when the code 'police' was conceptualised. The code 'police' refers to an interaction that contains reference to the criminal justice system. Whether it is threats to report individual participants, requests to take down specific content, or instances where the participants warned each other against sharing content deemed as 'unsafe' to distribute as the content had been reported to the authorities. Thus, showing that the individuals had a collective awareness that the distribution of intimate images is a criminal offence.

"The video of Susan has been reported, you guys should delete it/stop sharing it."

(Peeping Tom, Norway)

However, this was *only* found on *Peeping Tom Norway*[5], as the *UK* site had no mention of the criminal justice system in any form, and the data set utilised did not contain any mention of 'wrongdoing' by the participants. The only comments that mentioned any form of 'them' that were not deemed as positive to the group were when participants displayed annoyance and indignation when 'damaged images' (possibly containing viruses) were found on the website, and 'bogus links' (links that might not work) was published. This was spoken of as "someone that try to ruin the fun for the rest of us". Thus, drawing on a collective 'us' that might function as a manner to reinforce group affiliation (Donelson, 2006).

On *Upload your Ex!* the dynamic among the participants takes a different form, as requests for more content is not found, the communication is firstly aimed towards the content uploaded and the original poster. Although there seems to be a conversation occurring among three of the participants that comment frequently, the researcher did not find evidence of a collective 'we' as found on *Peeping Tom.* Rather the websites were viewed as task oriented when viewing

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[5] As the data set analysed does not contain information that directly explain the motives for their behaviour, thus providing the reader with an explanation as to *why* the code 'police' were only found on *Peeping Tom Norway* is notoriously difficult. However, possible explanations can be due to the general level of gender equality (Lei, et al., 2014), as stated earlier in this research project, as well as the focus on non-consensual distribution of intimate images in the Norwegian mainstream mass media (NRK, 2016; Brenne, 2016; Ignaian et al., 2017). As the participants on the website is not divorced from the general social context, mainstream mass media might have an impact on the behaviour on the website.

the layout of the website (Donelson, 2006), as the websites' overall aim is to publish and comment on sexual images of ex-partners. The participants majorly comment directly on the pictures or to the original poster. However, the original poster does not reply to any comments (positive or negative).

4.2.1 Reciprocity: "I'll show you mine if you show me yours".

The participants express reluctance to share their content without gaining new[6] content in return. This is a common theme throughout *Peeping Tom,* where the participants express annoyance when the sharing frequency is not high enough. This behaviour was exclusive to *Peeping Tom*, thus not found on *Upload your Ex!.*

"I'll upload more if anyone else starts to upload theirs!"

"Oh, come on! Don't be stingy, we all contribute with what we've got."

"No! I've shared plenty already, I think someone else should share too!"

(Peeping Tom, UK)

As found on the *Peeping Tom* website, the participants seem hesitant to contribute with their material unless they know others are going to contribute with theirs, which underlines the importance of reciprocity within the website as it is the posting and sharing of pictures that is the aim of the website. If no one contributes, no new content will be available for anyone. The participants on the website therefore often choose to withhold their content until others have contributed with their own, by promising to upload more content when new content is made available on the site.

When analysing discussions such as described above the researcher chose to draw on literature related to 'gift-giving' and motives behind gift giving (Fiske, 1991; Komter, 2007). As gift-giving is an important part of our society where social bonds are reinforced (Komter, 2007), by viewing the pictures uploaded as a part of a 'gift-giving system' we can view the

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[6] 'New content' or 'original content' refers to pictures that have not been shared at an earlier point.

communication on *Peeping Tom* unrelated to sexual violence, and thus provide insight into how the image distribution occurs.

According to Fiske (1991) gifts can be organised into four main categories, which are: *community sharing* (gift giving to strengthen community bonds), *authority ranking* (gifts that are intended to express authority and power by the giver), *equality matching* (gifts where the giver expects a gift in return), and *marked pricing* (when the individual weight their own input up against possible or expected output). The communication presented above draw on Fiske's (1991) *equality matching* and *community sharing*.

When reviewing the comments at the beginning of this section, we find that the participant initiates a 'gift-giving' process by drawing on equality matching, which implies that the gift-giver expect a gift of equal value in return. However, this is met with a strategy of 'community sharing' as the second participants express a negative reaction towards equality matching. The participant draws on negative loaded words by accusing the first participant of being 'stingy', and after that stating that 'we all contribute with what we've got', where the word 'we' is used to describing the group. The group in this context can be viewed as a community, where everyone contributes with what they have, and do not expect nor demand a gift in return (Fiske, 1991). Which is responded to by moving the focus back to the reciprocal aspect of the exchange, thus emphasising that gift exchange in terms of equality matching are a token of balance, where the underlying idea is that favours or gifts should be reciprocated with the equivalence (Komter, 2007).

By viewing the communication in relation to gift-giving and reciprocity the researcher draws the attention away from the type of content that is being distributed, which allows the researcher to view the communication across *Peeping Tom* as objective as possible. The notion of reciprocity is not morally 'good' or 'bad' in itself. Rather it implies that 'gifts' should be followed by 'counter-gifts' (Komter, 2007), where the participants express frustration or scepticism when the 'gifts' are not reciprocated as expected.

4.2.2 Exclusion and inclusion: "Let's talk elsewhere – I won't share my pics here."

On *Upload your Ex!* requests for private chat room, or other forms of trading content is a rare occurrence. The few times a participant has expressed a desire to share content via private channels other participants have responded negatively, by stating that the original poster has uploaded all available content. This points to an inherent difference between the websites, where *Peeping Tom* has an overall higher sharing frequency, as well as content, often is shared on private chat room.

Requests for private chat rooms were a common trait found on *Peeping Tom* and is viewed as a key component when addressing the group dynamic found on the websites analysed. The participants on *Peeping Tom* expresses a desire to create private chat rooms by victims' location, meaning that chat room dedicated to specific places are either requested or created. Location specific chat rooms frequent more often on the Norwegian site, whereas the participants on the UK site do not use private chat rooms to the same extent. Private chat rooms unrelated to specific locations do occur, however, the demand for such chat rooms are far lower. A possible explanation for location specific website might be related to the place of residence of the perpetrator, as requests for content of specific individuals and individuals from specific locations are a comment occurrence on *Peeping Tom* in general.

"Hey, I need an invite. I have tons of good stuff to share."

"I only have a few pics, so hoping for a bit of kindness."

"Get the chat room up now. Let's see how much we can get of Stavanger-girls."

"I have lots to share. Please send me an invite."

"I'm getting a chat room up now. How many needs invites?"

(Peeping Tom, Norway)

The private chat room carries a sense of 'exclusivity' as the participants included in these spaces have the opportunity to obtain images that are not shared on the website; this creates an exclusivity around the content, that is reviewed "as good stuff that I won't share here [on the website]". Which in turn tap into one core emotional need within humans – to be included in a group (Donelson, 2006). As being included creates positive emotions of belonging and

acceptance, exclusion creates negative emotions and are experienced as highly distressing. "Individuals who seek admission to a group, [such as private chat rooms] might feel disconsolate when turned down – not included." (Donelson, 2006: 68), to be excluded, or more correctly in this case; to not be included have a negative impact on ones' self-esteem and is sought to be avoided (Leary et al., 1995). Although a negative response is mostly tied to social exclusion in the physical world, Williams and colleagues (2000) describe as *cyberostracism* that occurs when people are rejected or not acknowledged in social interaction via the Internet, which creates frustration and a feeling of being excluded. In this case, we do not find direct evidence of negative emotions such as disappointment for not being included in private chat rooms. However, the participants seek to avoid exclusion through promising 'tons of good stuff to share'.

The participants seemingly try to secure their inclusion through the promise of good and/or plenty content, and state that they promise to share their content is often stated just before or after requesting an invitation. Thus drawing on Fiske's (1991) equality matching to obtain an invitation, showing that there is a relationship between the notion of 'reciprocity' and 'inclusion/exclusion', where the promise of reciprocal sharing is used to ensure inclusion to private chat rooms.

4.2.3 Authenticity and Victims' Identity: "Not any real exes here! You can't see her face."

In this section, the researcher wishes to draw the attention to the demand for the victims' identity, as well authenticity. 'Authenticity' and 'victims' identity' was first conceptualised as two different themes. However, during the analysis, the two themes were viewed as interconnected. On *Upload your Ex!* this connection is highly prevalent, as posts containing 'headless nudes' or posts lacking information about the place of residence or full name of the victim were commented negatively on. The connection between 'authenticity' and 'victims' identity', however, is not as prevalent on *Peeping Tom*, as the participant across this website does not provide negative comments for pictures not containing personal information about the victim. On *Peeping Tom,* the desire for the victim's identity or identifying information is expressed through questions, where the participants ask for personal information about the victim, e.g. questions regarding the victims' place of residence, full name and links to the

victims' social media accounts such as Instagram or Snapchat. The connection to 'authenticity' is not prevalent as on *Upload your Ex!*. However, the participants on *Peeping Tom* do repeatedly requests 'original content' that refers to intimate images that have not been in circulation earlier, thus excluding pictures from mainstream pornography websites. Which can be viewed as a manner of seeking authentic material, as the new and original can be tied to the notion of authenticity (Peterson, 2005).

'Authenticity' were prevalent on *Upload your Ex!* and is here utilised to refer to comments that question the quality of the posts. The participants on *Upload your Ex!* stresses the importance that the posts uploaded are of individuals who had a romantic relationship with the original poster (the perpetrator sharing the pictures). Thus, providing negative feedback to those who neglect to provide intimate/sexted images that include the victims face, or providing information about the victim such as; full name or place or residence.

"This website has turned to shit. Not even any real exes here."

"Shit post! Just another headless pic that's probably not even of an ex."

(Upload your Ex!, Scotland)

The authenticity of the posts is being questioned, as the site aims to 'expose sluts' the importance of 'real exes' is stressed. In our contemporary Western society, authenticity is related to 'that how is not false' and carries with it an inherent sense of 'realness'. Where higher value is attributed to that (or those) who can display a sense of inherent 'realness' as opposed to that who is staged, commercialised and mass produced (Strand, 2014). In this case, authenticity and therefore 'worth' is related to the victims' identity, where posts that are not perceived as containing 'real exes' are viewed as having lower value and thus contaminate the website. Where the idea of a 'real' women refers to individuals who do not work in the pornography industry (Dines, 2010).

4.3.0 Sexual Objectification: "Nice one!"

The researcher conceptualised the theme 'sexual objectification' with following sub headings: 'sexual fantasies and violence', 'appearance' and 'victim blame and worth'. As stated in the previous section, the different themes often draw on each other and merge into one another, complicating the process of separate analysis. However, the sub-themes presented are in the manner found most appropriate for this section.

While the theme 'group dynamic' refers to how the participants on the websites interact with each other, 'sexual objectification' refers to how the participants/perpetrators address the victim and comment on the pictures uploaded. The code 'sexual objectification' was first conceptualised based on literature on sexual objectification (see chapter 2.1.0). As the comments on Peeping Tom and Upload your Ex! did not conform directly to the original description of the code – 'that is a nice ass' as opposed to 'she has nice ass' the researcher chose to abandon the code. However, 'sexual objectification' was conceptualised as a theme, as the researcher found evidence through objectifying language, such as: positive/negative comments on the victims' appearance, expressing sexual fantasies about the victim, and derogatory language based directed at the victims worth and sexual morality.

"Hey! Keep the 'I would' comments to your selves! Keep your comments to the posts, like: nice pussy or saggy tits."

(Upload your Ex!, Scotland)

The example provided above was not typical for the data set, however, such strategies that seek to correct and/or alter behaviour among the other participants where viewed as important, as it may function as a way of maintaining the focus on overall task (publishing images and commenting on them) (Donelson, 2006). Through directly demanding other participants on the websites to comment on the victims' body parts. As well as it functions as a highly objectifying comment as the victim is being reduced to a set of body parts that can be rated and reviewed (Szymanski et al., 2011).

On *Peeping Tom,* the researcher did not find behaviour that aimed to direct participants towards rating the pictures in general, or the appearance of the victim. Rather the inherent sexual objectification is found through usage of language, where the victim is transformed to a commodity, this is apparent as the victims are never spoken directly to, rather they are commented *on*, thus transformed into a some*thing* (Naussbaum, 1999).

"Mmmm… tasty… would like some of that."

(Peeping Tom, UK)

Sexual objectification was viewed as an overarching theme that runs through both websites, as the websites aim to publish and share sexual images as well as providing an opportunity to rate and comment on the content. Thus, reducing the individual to a set of body parts or a body that is viewed as a mean for sexual gratification (Gervis & Egan, 2017). Not a space for any mutual exchange between the parties (victim and perpetrator/participant), as the victim is not provided with any opportunity of control or agency in the situation (Naussbaum, 1999). As sexual objectification fundamentally alters the social perception of the objectified individual (Gervais & Egan, 2017) strategies such as described above is viewed as a form of violent behaviour as the individual is reduced to a commodity. Furthermore, sexual objectification functions as a first step to commit violent acts, as the victim is no longer viewed as fully human deserving of respect and consideration (Naussbaum, 1999).

4.3.1 Sexual fantasies and Violence: "I'd like to do her."

The themes 'sexual fantasies' and 'violence' were viewed as connected during the analysis process. The researcher first created the code 'sexual fantasies' based on comments on Upload your Ex! and Peeping Tom, and refers to comments where the participant expresses a desire to perform sex acts with or to the victim, e.g. 'I want to do her'. 'Violence' was not created as an independent code, but were conceptualised during the analysis, as the researcher viewed several comments containing sexual fantasies as having a violent tone, i.e., where the participant

describes sex acts with highly violent implications. 'Sexual fantasies' were more common on Upload your Ex! and had a higher level of violent content.

"I'd like to take her [the victim] *hard from behind, till her butt looks like a blood orange."*

(Upload your Ex!, Scotland)

The researcher viewed this as a sexual fantasy containing violence due to the highly violent implications of the sex act. However, it does point to a more common trait within mainstream pornography, where anal sex (and often performed) in a highly violent manner is becoming more commonplace (Dines, 2010), where sexually violent behaviour might be seen as acceptable. This is emphasised when looking to the pornography genre gonzo pornography that portrays sex acts with a high level of aggression. Where the female often is receiving of highly humiliating and violent acts, as well as gonzo pornography and therefore rough anal sex now has become a normalised and a common occurrence in mainstream pornography (Dines, 2006). Thus, the comment above might imply a connection between the consumption of violent pornography and a projection of sexual fantasies of this kind. Silbert & Pines (1993) highlights, a possible connection between the consumption of violent pornography and aggressive behaviour towards women. Where they interviewed female victims of rape and sexual assault who worked as prostitutes. The participants of the study highlighted that the assailant often made verbal references to pornographic literature. Thus, implying a connection between violent sexual behaviour and the consumption of violent pornography. In this case, participants expressing violent behaviour is describing sex acts that are now normalised and fairly common in mainstream pornography (Dines, 2010).

Expressing violent sexual fantasies were more prevalent on *Upload your Ex!,* although comments expressing a desire to perform sex acts on the victim were expressed on both websites. On Peeping Tom, the desire to perform sexual acts was expressed through a series of 'I want to…', or 'I want her to…' comments, where the participant expresses a desire to perform sexual acts on the victim, or describe sex acts where the victim is described as 'active' part. These comments do not make any reference to the victims' desires, neither do they contain any sense of 'we', implying that the desired sex acts are something one party 'do to the other', and

does not include any sense of 'unity', 'us' or 'intimacy'. Where the interaction between the two is portrayed as a one-way street where one party act as a form of bystander to the others lust, which is not an uncommon portrayal of sex within mainstream pornography (Dines, 2010).

Although expressions of sexual fantasies were not the most prevalent theme in the data set, the researcher has highlighted this theme as it shed light into how the participants portray or view sexual acts in this setting. The sexual fantasies highlighted here carries a resemblance to mainstream pornography – which now is viewed as socially acceptable to consume, as well as popular culture (Dines, 2006), implying that some might view these websites as pornography websites, which might point us to a normalisation of websites such as *Upload your Ex!*. The latter is in the researchers view disturbing, as websites such as *Peeping Tom* and *Upload your Ex!* should not be associated with pornography, as it now is deemed socially acceptable to consume pornography (Dines, 2010). Therefore, it is the researchers view that seeing websites that non-consensually share sexual images as pornographic websites might contribute to a normalisation of this behaviour, which would be highly concerning due to the devastating effects this act has on the victims (Bates, 2016).

4.3.2 Appearance: "Nice face, too bad she's fat."

The pictures uploaded were frequently commented on, on both websites, and is here considered as an element in the overall commodification of the individual depicted. The codes; positive- and negative comments on appearances were utilised on both websites. On *Peeping Tom*, we find a higher degree of positive comments on appearance, where the participant expresses that 'she is a nice one' and proceeds by requesting more content of the victim. Or through requesting more content of particular people that are found highly attractive; this leads the researcher to believe that public humiliation is not the aim of the website. Whereas on *Upload your Ex!* negative comments on the victims' bodies occur with higher frequency and intensity, where the victims are being rated and assessed in terms of what is viewed as sexually attractive. The importance of sexual attractiveness becomes apparent when viewing the positive and negative comments related to the victims' appearance. As being described as 'old' (over the age of 35), 'fat', 'ugly' or have 'loose skin' is spoken of in relation to a lesser value than those who are 'fit', 'gorgeous', 'tasty', 'tight'. On both websites, we find that 'high value' is related to what is considered sexually attractive.

"Disgusting! Fat! Wouldn't even fuck her from behind."

"I'd do her, but I'd close my eyes ;)"

"Nice body, butterface[7] though."

(Upload your Ex!, Scotland)

Negative comments on victims' appearance were often related to body shape, where being 'fat' is discussed in relation to being: ugly, cheap, and sexually unattractive. This needs further explanation, as body weight functions as a powerful social marker in our society, where thinness is related to positive values such as, health and self-control (Chrisler, 2012). Thus, to be labelled as 'fat' in contemporary Western societies points us to a larger discourse concerning the body, gender, and value (Chrisler, 2011). Where the word 'fat' is not only used descriptively – a person with a certain amount of body fat comparative to their height, - but is used in a derogatory manner which points us to how we view beauty and attractiveness in contemporary Western society (Raisborough, 2016). The attention that both 'fitness' and 'fatness' in mainstream media display how bodies often are divided into desirable and undesirable – or to draw on Gail Dines (2010): fuckable and unfuckable, where 'unfuckable' bodies are perceived to have a lower value. This points us to a possible 'pornographication' of the mainstream (McNair, 1996) as 'fuckable' bodies in this case are tied to a pornographic ideal of attractiveness, where the victims level of attractiveness is being assessed and evaluated.

The code 'appearance' were also applied in instances where participants made assumptions of the physical qualities of the original poster or other participants. The researcher wishes to draw attention to this as it might provide an insight into how masculinity is constructed within these websites.

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[7] The word 'butterface' is known from the American television show *How I met your Mother* and describe person that are physically attractive with exception of their face – "She is hot, but, her face…". The word 'butterface' is considered slang and is used in the same manner within our data sample.

"OP [original poster], she left cause of your tiny dick. She needs a real man to fuck her."

"Pathetic tiny dicked losers. Commenting on women you'd never dare talk to. You'd shit yourself if she looked in your direction."

(Upload your Ex!, Norway)

As we see in the comments above, the original poster and participants on their websites receive negative feedback for their actions or that the girlfriend in question left. However, the comments here are not related to being sexually unattractive, rather is directed towards his performance and masculinity. As penis size is (here) described in relationship with being a good sexual partner, or being confident. The relationship with the perceived high level of masculinity and penal size is communicated through advertisement in mainstream media (Ostberg, 2010), and mainstream pornography (Dines, 2006). Which may imply that physical attributes and sexual performance are weighted when assessing an individual's worth and worthiness of love and attention in our society.

4.3.3 Victim Blame and Worth: "Cheating slut!"

On *Upload your Ex!* often post a derogatory description of the victims along with the pictures. The descriptions often portray the victim as 'a cheater', 'cheap' or a 'gold digger'. Although the code 'victim blame' was not used in the manner expected - the victim creating the content in the first place (Sweeny, 2017), the code was recalibrated and used when the victim was deemed deserving of public humiliation. Although, *Peeping Tom* also contained derogatory comments containing words such as: slut, slag, bitch and cheap the nature of the website did not seem to be directed towards public humiliation and exposure, as found on *Upload your Ex!*.

"Slut loves cock. Cheats with your friend."

(Upload my Ex!, Scotland)

This comment is a description of a victim where her alleged appetite for sex is viewed negatively, as well as pointing out her alleged adultery. Descriptions such as this might reveal how responsibility is moved from the perpetrator onto the victim were the victim viewed as somehow responsible for their victimisation (Hayes et al., 2013). It is worth noting that this is the only context when the victim is [rewarded] some form of agency. The victim is viewed as an active subject when she commits immoral actions (e.g., being unfaithful, or being deceitful). Where the perpetrator might experience a loss of control or that is masculinity is under attack, as 'his women' have committed acts that are highly hurtful (Dworkin, 1989). This, in turn, might point to a desire to obtain power and control over the victim, where the perpetrator might feel that the victim 'belonged' to him, thus responding negatively when the victim has committed actions that are experienced as hurtful. The perpetrator then might try to retain control over the victim through responding to his loss of control in a violent manner (Dworkin, 1989). Where the perpetrator executes harm through exposing the victim and diminish her worth through derogatory descriptions, as well as the comments directed towards victim are highly objectifying through assessing her sex appeal.

However, the few male victims on *Upload your Ex!*, were either ignored or received few comments. The comments directed towards male victims were related to the size and appearance of his penis. The male victims did not receive derogatory comments regarding their sexual appetite through the usage of words such as: 'cheap' or 'slut', whereas female victims received a high level of comments targeting their worth through slut shaming. This points towards the *double standard* girls and women meet in society, where behaviour deemed as positive for men to engage in is out of bounds for women. Where women experience negative sanctions for behaviour that both genders engage in (Baumeister & Twenge, 2002), which is a trait of contemporary Western culture (Zaikman & Marks, 2014).

5.0.0 Conclusion.

This research project aimed to interrogate *how sexual violence is performed within virtual spaces* by analysing websites that non-consensually publish and share sexual images. The research project has utilised thematic analysis with a social constructivist mindset. I.e., the researcher analysed the themes in relation to the cultural and historical context of which we are situated in, this provides the opportunity to view the data set as a part of a larger social context.

The key findings of this research project are related to two main areas. Firstly, the group dynamic found on *Peeping Tom* was highly oriented towards the sharing and collecting of sexual images, as the website are seemingly oriented towards reciprocal sharing, rather than public humiliation. This was emphasised when the participants expressed frustration when there seemed to be a shortage of new content. As well as the participants (especially on the Norwegian site) use private chat rooms to share content, where the desire to be included in such chat rooms might function as a motivation for obtaining new original content. As well as the participants often mask the victims' name through altered spelling, thus leaving the impression that public humiliation is not the goal.

Upload your Ex! on the other hand, contains a higher degree of derogatory language, as well as the victims' identity is revealed, making it possible to find the victims through search engines. The perpetrators/participants on the websites draw heavily on objectification strategies, through rating and commenting on appearances as well as expressing sexual fantasies that they would like to do to the victim. The impression is that the overall aim of this website is to publicly shame and humiliate the victim, where the victim is found deserving of this humiliation after alleged infidelity and/or being highly sexually active.

The main differences were found between websites, not across nationalities. The comments on *Upload your Ex!* were all written in English, which implies that the perpetrator have a desire to reach out to as many viewers as possible, as well as the comments could be written by someone outside of Norway. This is emphasised when the researcher found three participants that commented on the majority of the posts. The comments on *Peeping Tom* were written in the language of the origin of the posts (Norwegian in posts from Norway and English in posts from the UK), however the behaviour was highly similar, with exception of the code 'police' that were only used on the Norwegian site. The latter might point us to a cultural difference

regarding gender equality (Lei et al., 2014), or criminal law. However due to the media attention non-consensual sharing of sexual images have received in Norway, the researcher is inclined to view this as a possible explanation to this difference.

Lastly, the researcher would like to take the opportunity to highlight a possible problem when referring to this phenomenon as scholars today often use the terms 'revenge pornography' or 'non-consensual pornography'. These terms can be viewed as inaccurate, as 'revenge pornography' assumes the perpetrator's motivation, and 'non-consensual pornography' might imply that the sexual image might have been created without consent in the first place. Furthermore, the researcher would like to point out that the word 'pornography' might be problematic in this context, as consuming Internet pornography have become socially acceptable and thus normalised in our society (Dines, 2010). By utilising the word 'pornography' in this context, we might (unwillingly) contribute to a normalisation of this phenomenon. As several websites, already are behind payment a barrier, the researcher is concerned that non-consensual publishing of sexual images might be mainstreaming/normalising. It is important to stress that websites such as *Upload your Ex!* and *Peeping Tom* are websites dedicated to harm that cause horrid effects to its victims (Bates, 2016), thus considering them as 'pornography websites' is therefore not advisable.

5.1.0 Limitations of this research project.

The limitations of this research project are mainly tied to three aspects. Firstly, the data utilised in this analysis consist of a small extract of the websites in question, meaning that the findings cannot be generalised to *all websites* of this type. As well as not being able to make judgements of *how* the communication has changed over time, as increased media attention, as well as legislations, might have an impact on the communication. A second limitation is tied to the spaces the researcher had access to. As major parts of the communication on *Peeping Tom, Norway* is moved to private chat rooms where the researcher did not have access to, thus indicating a possible cultural difference between Norway and UK might be misleading.

The final limitation of this research project is that it does not take the pictures shared into account, as a number of comments on each post varied (especially on *Upload your Ex!*). Thus, not having access to the pictures the researcher was not able to comment on which posts received few or multiple comments. This is problematic in cases where the victims' appearance is being criticised, as the researcher cannot comment on whether it is the victims' actual

physical appearance that is being criticised or if the perception of the victims' appearance change given whether she is described as being unfaithful. However, an analysis of the images was not the scope of the research project, as well as analysing the images might not be ethically advisable as this might imply that the researcher would need to download and store images that were distributed against the victims' will. Pictures whose distribution are considered a criminal offence according to both UK and Norwegian law, thus downloading and storing such images by the researcher might be considered a criminal offence.

5.2.0 Suggestions for future research.

As non-consensual sharing of sexual images is a recent phenomenon, further research on the topic in general is both wanted and needed to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon at hand. The researcher thinks that further research of the perpetrators is highly needed, as the research up to this point has been largely focused on the legal aspect of 'non-consensual pornography', as well as the victims' emotional responses to this act (Citron & Franks,2014; Bates, 2016). Further research on the perpetrator's motivations for non-consensually publishing sexual images is therefore greatly needed, since understanding how the perpetrators (and participants/re-sharers/downloaders) rationalise their actions might provide a further understanding of how sexual violence is constructed in an era of smart phones and social media. In addition, research that interrogates non-consensual publishing of sexual images within the context of domestic abuse is desired, as this may highlight how this act (and TFSV in general) might be an extension of other forms of domestic abuse.

6.0.0 References.

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Ethics Committee for Non Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects

NOTIFICATION OF ETHICS APPLICATION OUTCOME – UG and PGT Applications

Application Type: New   **Date Application Reviewed: 16/6/17**

Application Number: SPS/2017/820/SOCIAL SCIENCE

Applicant's Name: Denise Haugen

Project Title: Technology Facilitated Sexual Violence: An analysis of online sites for distribution of 'revenge pornography'

APPLICATION OUTCOME

(A)   Fully Approved   ☐ *Start Date of Approval: End Date of Approval:*

(*B)*   Approved subject to amendments

If the applicant has been given approval subject to amendments this means they can proceed with their data collection with effect from the date of approval, however they should note the following applies to their application:

Approved Subject to Amendments without the need to submit amendments to the Supervisor ☐
Approved Subject to Amendments made to the satisfaction of the applicant's Supervisor ☒

The College Ethics Committee expects the applicant to act responsibly in addressing the recommended amendments.

(C)   Application is Not Approved at this Time

Amendments must be made to the satisfaction of the School Ethics Forum (SEF) ☐
Complete resubmission required. Discuss the application with supervisor before resubmitting ☐

Please note the comments in the section below and provide further information where requested.

If you have been asked to resubmit your application in full, send it to your supervisor who will forward it to your local School Ethics Forum admin support staff.

Where resubmissions only need to be submitted to an applicant's supervisor.

This will apply to essential items that an applicant must address prior to ethics approval being granted. As the associated research ethics risks are considered to be low, the applicant's response need only be reviewed and cleared by the applicant's supervisor before the research can properly begin. For any application processed under this outcome, it is the Supervisor's responsibility to email socpol-ug-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk with confirmation of their approval of the re-submitted application.

APPLICATION COMMENTS

Major Recommendations:

Section 2.1 states that no images will be "downloaded by [the researcher]". Technically, the way a browser works is that a copy of the image is downloaded to the local machine when viewing a website. Please discuss with supervisor adequate measures so that any unintentionally created local copies of images are destroyed. This could be achieved through ensuring the browser cache is cleared at end of each period of research, using 'Private' / 'Incognito' mode when browsing that auto-clears the cache when the browser session ends, or using broswer plugins / addons that disable images from being downloaded and displayed on the local machine.

In relation to 24.4 noting action to be taken in event of coming across "images of individuals that are under age", please not that the Internet Watch Foundation website allows individuals to submit reports (including anonymously) of any websites containing illegal material. They then pass the details to the relevant authorities who can take action against the website.

[The recommendations have been addressed and amendments were made to the satisfaction of supervisor Dr Oona Brooks]

[The title of this project was changed to "The Performance of Sexual Violence in Virtual Spaces: An analysis of Websites Dedicated to the Non-Consensual Sharing of Sexual Images" after the ethical approval was granted]

Data gathering and validation

We hereby declare that the data gathered has been obtained through legal methods, from websites accessible to the general public, utilizing standardized hardware and software.

Data was gathered directly from the websites through a technique known as "grabbing". The particular area of the site is downloaded as a working offline version of the site. This is primarily done to minimize exposure to actual online threats like phishing, malware and other malicious software. It is not uncommon to find infected media files on websites like the ones in question. Having an offline copy of the site, will also allow data mining in a secure and controlled environment. The actual downloads were conducted between July 1st and July 8th, 2017

The Tor browser was used in this process, as it allows a certain degree of online anonymity while downloading content. All content was downloaded to a controlled area partitioned on one of our secure hard drives. No attachments were opened in the process and no links were followed to external or internal areas or sites. As soon as the downloads were completed, the hard drive was mounted in a secure, closed network without internet connection.

Once compiled, the data was validated through timestamps and a second download to compare the two datasets. Once deemed legit, the second dataset was erased from the controlled area of the hard drive. The documents were put together through an online application run in offline mode and saved as PDF-files. While run in offline mode, the online application does not store any data fragments during the process.

The PDF-files were uploaded to a file sharing service with adequate security measures for remote access and download. Once uploaded to the service, the PDF-files have been thoroughly erased at the partition once containing the files, has been purged by formating the partition before it was overwritten 7 times, according to standard. Once downloaded, the

PDF-files were deleted from the file sharing service, and the actual folder scrubbed and deleted.

'Ludwig
Sandell
Founder
& CTO

Appendix no 3: Coding sheet.

1. **Code:** Identifying victims: "I know who she is".
2. **Code:** Request for information about victim: "Is that Mary? Who is it? What's her contact? Do you have stories on her?".
3. **Code:** Information about the victims: "I think she's from Bergen, but not sure"
4. **Code:** Request for images/ content: "Anyone got anything new?"
5. **Code:** Request for pictures of specific people/answering – giving a picture of said person: "Do you have any pics of Linda?", "Here is more of Sandra".
6. **Code:** Vulnerating information/pictures: "I think I have something of Bergen/Ine/trading content".
7. **Code:** Request for pictures in specific locations and age groups: "Want more of Edinburgh girls".
8. **Code:** Promise of good content/willingness to share/know good content exists.
9. **Code:** Positive comments on appearance: "Tasty", "nice", "pretty".
10. **Code:** Negative comments on appearance: "Disgusting (bodyparts: vagina)", "Too fat".
11. **Code:** Claim that victim likes sex: "fucks a lot – likes it".
12. **Code:** Comments on moral: "cheap slut", "used up whore".
13. **Code:** Hurt: Making the private public; "expose this person".
14. **Code:** Holding back till more share: "I'll show you mine if you show me yours".
15. **Code:** Request for trading: "Anyone want to trade with me? I'll pay".
16. **Code:** Exclusion/inclusion: "let's talk somewhere else".
17. **Code:** Requesting removal/shames perps: "Pathetic losers".
18. **Code:** Group dynamic: sharing is caring – positive feedback on sharing/"I'll be kind and share to you/I'll try to help by sharing to you".
19. **Code:** Group pressure (don't leach of me) "come on, share more".
20. **Code:** Sexual fantasies. "I'd like to…"
21. **Code:** Police: "I have reported you."
22. **Code:** Victim blame: the victim is deemed deserving of exposure/ "Expose the slut."
23. **Code:** Ridicule of perpetrator: "Haha. Pathetic".
24. **Code:** Trolling? "I'm the president stupid cunts".

25. Code: Conquest: "I fucked her".

26. Code: Bump. – a bump will increase visibility of the post.

27. **   : UPLOADING IMAGES.