

“Stripped”: An Analysis of Revenge Porn Victims’ Lives after Victimization

by

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Abstract

This study examines the experiences of female revenge porn victims. To date, no other academic studies have exclusively focused on experiences of victimization in revenge porn cases. Researchers have focused on legal and moral aspects of revenge porn rather than on victims' experiences. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted between February 2014 and January 2015 with 18 revenge porn victims to understand how they experienced victimization and its effects on their lives. Inductive analysis revealed six main themes among the interviews: (1) emotional effects of revenge porn, (2) coping mechanisms, (3) relationships, (4) dealing with the law, (5) revenge porn as a gendered crime, and (6) intimate partner violence. The findings underscore the need for new policies and laws that would afford protection to revenge porn victims and the need for in-depth research on revenge porn victimology.

Keywords: Revenge porn; feminism; cyberbullying; sexual harassment; sexual assault; qualitative research

Dedication

I dedicate this project to the 18 women who allowed me to interview them about their victimization, and to revenge porn victims everywhere – I hope this thesis will help shed some light on the horrors of revenge porn and what victims truly go through.

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Glossary

DMCA takedown notice	DMCA is short for the <i>Digital Millennium Copyright Act</i> , which guarantees a person copyright ownership over a photo they have taken themselves. If a person other than the copyright holder uses a person's photo without the copyright holder's permission, the copyright holder can send a DMCA takedown notice to remove the photo. With revenge porn, if a victim took the naked photo herself and the photo appears on a revenge porn website, the victim can send a DMCA takedown notice to the website administrator claiming copyright infringement.
Doxing	The practice of researching and publicly broadcasting identifying information of someone, such as their home address and where they work. The purpose is to intimidate the target and bring the online victimization into their offline life.
Endrevengeporn.org	A website that was founded by Dr. Holly Jacobs in August 2012. After being victimized herself, she started endrevengeporn.org to host a petition to collect signatures of those in favour of criminalizing revenge porn. The website has more recently turned into a national campaign against revenge porn, and a place where victims can speak with advocates. The advocates offer support, advice, and referrals to other professionals such as lawyers or takedown services (endrevengeporn.org, 2015)
Revenge Porn	"A form of sexual abuse that involves the distribution of nude/sexually explicit photos and/or videos of an individual without their consent. Revenge porn, sometimes called cyber-rape or non-consensual pornography, is usually posted by a scorned ex-lover or friend, in order to seek revenge after a relationship has gone sour" (endrevengeporn.org; 2015)
Selfie	"A photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media" (Oxford Dictionary).
Sexting	Sending nude/semi-nude/sexually explicit photos or videos to another person through electronic means, most often through text messaging.
Snapchat	A photo-sharing smartphone app where users are able to take/send photos or videos to other users. The photo/video will only appear for up to 10 seconds and then disappears from the recipient's phone. It is often referred to as a "sexting app" because of the perceived safety with the photo/video being deleted after 10 seconds.

Chapter 1.

Introduction

Dear Revenge Porn Victim, The moments after you first see your naked photos on the internet for display is a pivotal moment in your life. It's a moment when time stands still, and everything, EVERYTHING changes. In an instant you lose not only your privacy and your confidence, but you are soon made to feel you've lost your voice as you cry out for help, and it seems no one's listening. I don't have to imagine how helpless you feel, I know how helpless you feel. I've lived it. (Toupes, 2013)

stripped: "remove the clothes or covering from (a person or thing)...deprive (a person) of property, titles, etc. (Concise Oxford English Dictionary)

Revenge porn, or non-consensual pornography, is a relatively new phenomenon that has grown substantially in the past few years. Revenge porn involves a perpetrator – typically an ex-partner from a previous romantic relationship – uploading nude or semi-nude images/videos of a person online without the consent of the person appearing in the content. The effects revenge porn can have on victims are devastating. Revenge porn is often done to get back at an ex-lover, hence the name. This practice is not limited to ex-lovers as some revenge porn websites use computer hacking to obtain nude photos from victims, and then extort them by pressuring them to pay a fee to have their photos removed (Laird, 2013).

During the course of this project, the topic of revenge porn has grown exponentially in the media. Recently, the young adult novel *Blue Gold* (Stewart, 2014), shortlisted for a BC book prize award in 2015, touched on the dangers of sexting. Furthermore, a criminal case in Victoria, BC involved a jealous girlfriend "getting back" at her boyfriend's ex-girlfriend with naked photos. She learned that her boyfriend still had

naked photos of his ex, photos that she stole, sent to various people, and posted on the ex's Facebook page to humiliate her (CBC News, 2015b). Another woman recently victimized by revenge porn in Vancouver, BC did not even take naked photos. Andrea Ng posted a fully clothed "selfie" in 2010 when she was sixteen years old, and discovered in 2013 that someone had taken the photo and photoshopped breasts into it, making it appear that she had taken a nude photo of herself (Judd, 2015). The person who photoshopped the picture created a Facebook account featuring the photo and added her friends and family members, furthering her humiliation. Andrea was able to get the Facebook page taken down, but the photo has kept resurfacing over the past two years. She reported the incident to the police, who told her they were unable to help. She is studying Public Relations in university and is worried about the photo hindering her chances at future employment, but she has created a blog detailing her experiences of cyberbullying to help share her side of the story (Judd, 2015).

Several revenge porn websites encourage users to submit nude photos of their ex-partner(s) for revenge. These photos can be fully nude photos, semi-nude, or generally sexual in nature (such as a woman performing oral sex while fully clothed). As long as the photo is sexual in some way, it can be considered revenge porn or non-consensual pornography. Such websites often have sections that allow others to leave derogatory or salacious comments on the photos and the victim. The first revenge porn website - isanyoneup.com - was created in 2010 by Hunter Moore (Stroud, 2014). The website gained popularity and had a large number of photo submissions over a short period of time. In a three-month period in 2011, the website received 10,000 photo submissions. Moore gained a significant profit from advertising on the website, sometimes bringing in \$30,000 per month in revenue. The website was eventually shut down after Moore sold the website to an anti-bullying organization, for an undisclosed amount, saying he was "tired of the legal hassles and the underage pornography that was being submitted to him" (Visser, 2012). However, several other revenge porn websites have since been created and have gained a large following (Stroud, 2014).

Currently, there is no specific federal legislation in Canada regarding revenge porn. Victims have the option of pursuing a civil case for damages, but this requires a lawyer and is often very costly and uncertain. A criminal case can be pursued if there are

illegal aspects that accompany the revenge porn, such as criminal harassment, frequently known as stalking, (s.264, Criminal Code) or defamatory libel (s. 298-299). However, it is often hard to prove that a person is responsible for uploading revenge porn. Hackers can steal naked photos from victims' cell phones or computers and post them online. Naked photos only need to be posted online once – after they are uploaded, they can be re-posted dozens of times by other users, and are often impossible to completely remove from the internet. Other criminal cases are hard to pursue because it is often hard to prove a crime was occurring. Police and other officials are frequently unsympathetic to victims and even chastise them for foolishly taking the photos in the first place (Cecil, 2014). In the United States, there are no federal laws criminalizing revenge porn, though many states have begun to criminalize it or are currently drafting bills that would criminalize revenge porn. Options for civil and criminal cases are fairly similar between Canada and the United States, as the two countries have comparable legal systems.

The impact of revenge porn includes public shame and humiliation, being unable to find romantic partners, negative mental health effects such as depression and anxiety, job loss or problems in securing new employment, and real-life harassment and stalking (Citron & Franks, 2014). Citron and Franks (2014) reported on 1244 individuals who were victimized by revenge porn: “over 50% of victims reported that their naked photos appeared next to their full name and social network profile; over 20% of victims reported that their e-mail addresses and telephone numbers appeared next to their naked photos” (p. 351). Once a photo is posted online, it is in cyberspace and is extremely hard to remove completely, which means the harm is continuous and long-lasting (Cecil, 2014). In an attempt to avoid harm and reduce the emotional impacts of revenge porn, some victims delete their online social media accounts. A revenge porn victim could create a new social media profile under a pseudonym, but it only takes one malicious person to discover the real identity behind the profile to re-link it to a revenge porn website. Removing all social media profiles often separates the victim from positive social connections with friends and family, as social media is a commonplace, contemporary way to keep in touch with loved ones. Apart from the internet, in “real life,” some victims completely alter their lives and routines to minimize the impact of revenge porn:

They change jobs, drop out of school, relocate to new cities, or “go into hiding” to avoid threats of sexual abuse and stalking. Along with these external stressors, coping with anxiety, depression, and self-blame that follows the distribution of nonconsensual pornography proves difficult, and some victims commit suicide. (Cecil, 2014, p. 2524)

Revenge porn is a relatively new phenomenon which did not exist on this broad scale even five years ago. Smart phones, digital cameras, and computers have revolutionized photography and it is no longer necessary to have a photo lab print photos. Individuals can take photos with their phone or digital camera, and upload them to the internet with the click of a button in the privacy of their own home. A richer discussion of revenge porn has been present in the media recently. Feminist backlash against female oppression has gained more popularity with the rise of social media platforms, allowing thoughts to be broadcasted to a larger audience (Rentschler, 2014). Even more recently, a widespread “celebrity photo leak” involving naked photos of many A-list celebrities including Jennifer Lawrence and Kate Upton sparked an even deeper discussion in the media regarding revenge porn and female oppression. A Google search of “celebrity photo leak 2014” provides 2,950,000 results with many online news articles, and even an entire Wikipedia page about how a long list of female celebrities became victims of revenge porn on a single day, i.e. August 31st, 2014.

Despite recent media attention to revenge porn, relatively few academic studies focus on the issue. The few studies of revenge porn concentrate mainly on its legal aspects and legal theories for revenge porn cases. As of June 2015, no published academic studies focus exclusively on the experiences of revenge porn victims. This research study is designed to address this gap in the literature by providing a detailed analysis of the experiences of revenge porn victims and the effects that revenge porn can have on women in areas such as relationships with friends, family, and lovers, negative mental health issues stemming from being victimized by revenge porn, and issues with finding and keeping employment. Eighteen women who self-identified as victims of revenge porn were interviewed for this research study to answer the central research question: “what are the experiences of female revenge porn victims?”

The following chapter (Chapter 2) consists of a review of the relevant literature surrounding the topic of revenge porn. Chapter 3 outlines the feminist theoretical

perspectives of this research project, as well as Mills' (1959) theory of the sociological imagination. Chapter 4 discusses the methodology used in the study, including recruitment and participant selection, interviewing, ethical considerations, and data analysis methods. Chapter 5 includes the findings and discussion, where six main themes and many subthemes are discussed in greater detail. Chapter 6 concludes the study, with recommendations for future research and practical conclusions that can be drawn from the findings.

Chapter 2.

Literature Review

"This isn't something I ever thought would happen to me." (Hannah)

Sexting

Sexting involves the sending of nude or sexually explicit photos or videos through text messaging or other forms of electronic communication (text messaging is the most common way for people to sext). In revenge porn, the nude photos are often photos that the victim sent to the perpetrator while they were dating, so understanding how and why people decide to engage in sexting is imperative. This section on sexting is broken down into three subsections: sexting among teenagers as child pornography; sexting among adults; and cyberbullying/negative outcomes of sexting.

Sexting among Teenagers as Child Pornography?

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2008) conducted a survey of 653 teenagers and 627 young adults regarding their sexting behaviour. The National Campaign is a United States organization that seeks to provide comprehensive sex education to teenagers and reduce teen/young adult pregnancy rates. It was founded in 1996 with the goal of reducing teen pregnancy rates by one third over a ten-year period (History and Awards, n.d.). Their 2008 study, the first statistical study conducted on teenage sexting, is one of the most widely cited studies on teen sexting. It provides informative statistics regarding teen sexting; however, one limitation of the study is that respondents were considered teenagers if they were aged 13-19. The results may have been different had teenagers been categorized as ages 13-17, since

17-year-olds are typically still in high school who do not have as much freedom, whereas those aged 18-19, while still technically teenagers, are legally adults and are often in university where they experience much more freedom if they are living away from home. Results of the study indicate that one-fifth of teenagers have sent nude/semi-nude photos/videos of themselves. Of those teenagers who have sent sexts, 71% of females and 67% of males sent them to someone they were in a relationship with, meaning most teenagers send sexts to someone they know and trust rather than strangers or less intimate acquaintances. It is also not as gendered a practice (males and females are engaged in sexting pictures of themselves) as some other practices. Samimi and Alderson (2014) also found in a survey of undergraduate students that males and females are equally likely to sext. Sexting has become a regular part of relationships as a new way for teenagers (and others) to explore their sexuality. In the National Campaign's (2008) study, 22% of teenagers acknowledged that they are "personally more forward and aggressive using sexually suggestive words and images [with sexting] than they are in 'real life'" (The National Campaign, 2008, p. 3), and 38% said that sending sexually suggestive content precedes hooking up or dating. For example, a teenager who is romantically interested in an acquaintance from school may initiate a sexting conversation with that person to "test the waters" and gauge how interested he/she is in a potential romantic or sexual relationship.

Despite the prevalence of teen sexting, 75% of teenagers surveyed agreed that "sending sexually suggestive content 'can have serious negative consequences'" (The National Campaign, 2008, p. 3). Furthermore, 36% of teenage girls and 39% of teenage boys said it is common for the recipient of a nude photo to share that photo with others. Hence, at least some teenagers understand some of the risk of revenge porn when sending a naked photo. One noteworthy gendered difference with teen sexting is that 51% of females said that "pressure from a guy" is the reason that they sexted, while only 18% of teenage boys said pressure from females is their reason for sexting. It is very common for males to pressure females into sex (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013; MacKinnon, 2005), so it is unsurprising that males also pressure females into sexting.

There has been an overwhelming fixation on teen sexting, with a media focus on how teens need to stop sexting because it is wrong, shameful, and could ruin their lives.

The general discourse surrounding teen sexting is that teens should not be sexting, and that we should be doing our best to discourage them from doing it. Albury and Crawford (2012) discussed a popular anti-sexting advertisement in Australia titled *Megan's Story*¹, which appeared on *YouTube* in 2010. This advertisement depicts the fictional story of a girl named Megan, who sends a “boob shot” (Stewart, 2015, p. 8) to a boy in her class. Throughout the advertisement, beeping noises from other students’ cell phones are heard as the photo is forwarded to several other students in the class. Megan looks increasingly worried as she realizes what is happening. She is given looks of disgust by students in her class. Finally, her teacher receives the message and he gives Megan a disappointing look. The advertisement ends with a message: “Think you know what happens to your images? Who will see them? How they will affect you? Think again.” (Albury & Crawford, 2012, p. 464).

This sample ad focuses on the victim – “Megan” – played by a teenage girl. However, even though Megan is a teenage girl victimized by someone she trusted, the advertisement essentially blames her because she was the one who thoughtlessly took and sent the photo in the first place. There is no discussion about the teenage boy who forwarded her photo to other people in the class (which could arguably be seen as revenge porn, and dissemination of child pornography), and the onus is on teenage girls to protect themselves from victimization. This is not unique to sexting – women are expected to take precautionary measures in all aspects of their lives to protect themselves from victimization. The video is a cautionary tale – teenagers watching will receive the message that Megan should have known better, her picture being forwarded is a consequence of her actions, and to avoid a similar fate they should not send nude images of themselves.

These scare tactics to discourage teenagers from sexting have not worked, as teenagers continue to sext. Another example of how teenagers are discouraged from sexting is found in the rising number of teenagers charged with child pornography offences. Gong and Hoffman (2012) analyzed three cases involving child pornography and sexting. In one case, *Miller v. Skumanick* (2010), the local District Attorney

¹ Link to *Megan's Story* video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwKgg35YbC4>.

threatened to charge a group of teenage girls with possession/dissemination of child pornography unless they participated in a “re-education and counselling program” (Gong & Hoffman, p. 578). The photos taken by the 13-year old girls included photographs of themselves from the waist up, wearing opaque bras, a photograph of a girl wrapped in a towel, and a photograph of a girl wearing a bathing suit. This educational program was designed to tell them that their actions were wrong and shameful and to “gain an understanding of what it means to be a girl in today's society” (Gong & Hoffman, 2012, p. 583). The underlying purpose of this program was to instil fear and shame into these teenage girls for daring to express themselves sexually, reinforcing morality norms. Gong and Hoffman (2012) argue that punishing teenagers who sext perpetuates a culture of slut-shaming. While teenage girls and boys both engage in sexting, only girls are punished and told that their actions are wrong. Gong and Hoffman (2012) declare that “we focus our attention on young women, because the double standard of slut-shaming has particularly pernicious effects on them and because the most public examples of punishment for sexting are directed at girls” (p. 583). This harkens back to the adage that “boys will be boys,” so we should expect boys to be actively and overtly sexual, but since girls are innocent and need to be protected, they should not be ruining their innocence by sexting. It also contributes to a wider culture where blaming victims of revenge porn is tolerated.

Because teenagers are under the age of 18, teen sexting is legally considered child pornography in Canada (*Criminal Code*, s. 163.1(1)(a)) and in the United States (18 U.S. Code § 2256). Recently, teenagers are beginning to be formally charged with child pornography offences. For example, *R. v. T.C.D.* (2012) is an Alberta, Canada case involving teen sexting and child pornography charges. A 14-year old girl (“S”) sent naked photos of herself to a 17-year-old boy (“N”) she was dating. After the two of them broke up, “N” sent the photos to an 18-year old girl, who then sent the photos to several students at the school “S” attended. The 18-year old girl was charged with three counts of child pornography possession, but took a plea deal of a lesser charge, criminal harassment. Another similar case (*R. v. W.*, 2014) occurred in North Vancouver, British Columbia, after “W” (name under publication ban) sent a Facebook message to a 16-year old girl demanding five nude photos of herself otherwise he would release a video of her having sex with her ex-boyfriend to her entire *Facebook* friends’ list. She had

recorded the sex tape in 2007 on her boyfriend's phone, which was eventually stolen by W. The next day W followed through with his threat and sent the pornographic video to her *Facebook* friends, and uploaded it on a pornography website. W pled guilty to extortion and was sentenced to 60 days in prison. Similar to the above-mentioned Alberta case, a widely reported case in Victoria involved a 16-year-old girl who obtained naked photos of her boyfriend's ex-girlfriend. She texted the naked photos to others and posted one photo on the victim's *Facebook* page to humiliate her. The teenager who shared the victim's photos was found guilty of child pornography charges, but she will not face jail time or have a criminal record as long as she writes an apology letter to the victim (CBC News, 2015b).

Gong and Hoffman (2012) argue that charging teen sexters with child pornography offences is inappropriate because it perpetuates a culture of slut-shaming by telling girls it is wrong to sext while not paying as much attention to boys who sext. Slane (2013), on the other hand, believes that teen sexting does not meet the necessary requirements for child pornography. She argues that in Canada, child pornography involves nude photos of people under the age of eighteen being used for sexual ends by an adult. However, when teenagers forward nude photos to other teenagers without the person appearing in the photos giving consent, it is – according to Slane (2013) – meant to inflict social shame, not to meet sexual ends as such. When a teenage couple sends sexts to each other and the photos are never shared with a third party, no harm comes to the individuals. Slane (2013) concludes that the graduated law regarding the age of consent² does not match laws regarding appearing in nude photos. In general (see footnote below), teenagers are deemed legally able to consent to having sex by the age of sixteen, but they are legally unable to consent to sexting until they are eighteen. Sexting arguably could have fewer risks involved than sex (no risk of pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections), yet it is punished under the law for those under eighteen

² In Canada, from the ages of 12-13, a person may consent to sex with someone who is up to two years older (*Criminal Code*, s. 150.1(2)) as long as the partner is not in a position of authority (such as a volunteer junior mentor at a youth group). From 14-15, a person may consent to sex with someone who is up to five years older as long as the partner is not in a position of authority over them (*Criminal Code*, s. 150.1(2.1)). From 16-17, a person may consent to sex with someone of any age, but not if the person the partner is in a position of authority over them (such as a doctor or a teacher) (*Criminal Code*, s. 153).

when they are caught. If the photos are never shared, it is less likely that teenage sexting will be discovered, but when parents or teachers look through students' cell phones, teens that sext may be discovered by adults.

Sexting Among Adults

A thorough understanding of sexting must involve both negative and positive aspects of the practice. Samimi and Alderson (2014) surveyed 525 undergraduate students at a Western Canadian university to understand the characteristics of sexting and why people sext. They found no gender differences in sexting behaviour – both men and women were equally likely to sext. However, men and women tended to have different attitudes about sexting. Men were more likely to believe that “sexting is fun,” “sexting is a regular part of romantic relationships nowadays,” and “sexting improves my relationship or potential relationship” (p. 234). Women were more cautious and likely to believe that “you should be careful about sexting,” “sending sexually suggestive texts is risky,” and “parents should control how children use their cellphones and their text messages” (p. 234). The most interesting finding of Samimi and Alderson (2014) was that the biggest predictor of sexting behaviour was relationship status. They found that those who were in an ongoing relationship were more likely to sext than those not in a relationship. However, a lot of the negative media attention given to sexting revolves around the idea that careless young women are sending nude photos to anyone without thinking about the potential risks. What we learn from Samimi and Alderson’s (2014) finding about sexting and relationship status is that women are generally not carelessly sending nude photos to men they do not know. Instead, it is likely that a level of trust is needed between two people before someone can feel comfortable sending a nude photo. This outlook counters the “she should have known better” argument – an argument especially prominent in revenge porn cases. Negative consequences from sexting such as revenge porn can then also be understood within the context that most women are more likely to be sexually assaulted by someone they know rather than a stranger (Clay-Warner & Burt, 2005).

Dir et al. (2013) also examined sexting behaviours among young adults. In their survey of 278 undergraduate students at a large public university in the Midwestern

United States, they found similar results to Samimi and Alderson (2014). Those in a committed romantic relationship were more likely to sext than those who were not, giving more support for the idea that a firm level of trust needs to be established before someone will feel comfortable sending a nude photo. Another interesting finding in Dir et al.'s (2014) study is that men were more likely to have positive feelings about sexting than women were. One possible reason for this could be that women may be more likely to associate negative outcomes with sexting more than men. Given the generally negative media attention regarding women and sexting (Albury & Crawford, 2012), as well as the risk of revenge porn, it is possible that women may feel an anxiety that men do not about what would happen if their photo was shared without their consent. In their study on sexting, Gordon-Messner and associates (2012) reported that men were more likely than women to receive sexts without sending them. This could (but not conclusively) be attributed to men receiving sexts that were not intended for them, when their peers forward naked photos of women they have been sexting.

Recently, there has been a new trend of adults/adult couples posting naked photos of themselves online “as a means for broadening the aesthetics of the body and offering a form of resistance to social control” (Jones, 2010, p. 253). Jones (2010) calls this “mediated exhibitionism,” which he defines as “the phenomenon of amateur performers exposing their nude bodies on the internet” (p. 262). People who willingly post naked selfies online find it empowering, and couples can use it as a way of enhancing their sex lives. Some people find “re-enchantment” with their partner after online responses to their partner’s naked photos are positive. Furthermore, others find it empowering that there are spaces accepting of those who do not fit traditional standards of beauty. It is no secret that young, thin bodies are conventionally attractive in Western society, which can contribute to embarrassment or unhappiness with one’s body if these standards are not met. On these exhibitionist websites, there are often sections dedicated to those who are older or overweight, where naked photos are received positively by the community (Jones, 2010). However, even though people can find posting naked photos on these websites to be empowering, Jones (2010) notes that posters are aware of the potential risks and consequences. Many people do not include their faces in photos due to fear of them being seen by friends, family, and colleagues.

Cyberbullying and other negative outcomes with sexting

Although there are few studies devoted to revenge porn, some studies link sexting with negative outcomes, including cyberbullying. Revenge porn could arguably be seen as another form of cyberbullying, as discussed below.

Franks (2011) discusses discrimination in cyberspace, including the overrepresentation of women who are victimized online. Many citizens believe that the internet should not be policed, because the beauty of the internet is that there is so much freedom and liberty to post anything one desires. Franks (2011) discusses these “cyberspace idealists” who believe that the internet is a place of free speech (while others may dispute this, arguing that this is license and should be regulated to some extent). Cyberspace idealists believe that the internet is a place that maximizes liberty, allowing people unlimited freedom online. These cyberspace idealists argue that cyberbullying is not a real problem because cyberspace itself is not really real. Franks (2011) points out the hypocrisy in this argument: “freedom of speech, for example, in cyberspace is ‘really real’ and must be vigorously protected; harassment in cyberspace is not ‘really real’ and thus should not be taken very seriously” (p. 226). Furthermore, the liberty that is supposed to be experienced in cyberspace is not available to all of its users.

In “real life,” (IRL) women experience objectification when doing everyday activities. For example, during the 2015 Stanley Cup playoffs in Calgary, women were harassed and cat-called on the Red Mile by men wanting women to take their shirts off. Men used the slogan “show your cans³ for Monahan,⁴” and generally made many women feel unsafe on the Red Mile (CBC News, 2015a). This prompted one woman to organize a group to fight back. This group, the “Pussy Cats Consent Awareness Team,” promotes consent and condemns sexual violence against women. The Calgary Flames

³ By “cans,” the slogan is referring to women’s breasts.

⁴ Sean Monahan is a hockey player on the Calgary Flames team.

organization also publicly condemned the actions of men harassing women on the Red Line. The Flames' CEO Ken King issued the statement, "our view is that if you're a true Flames fan, you are not engaging in this kind of behaviour" (Ferguson, 2015). Another example of objectifying behavior toward women is the recent trend of harassing female journalists while they are recording live news segments by yelling "fuck her right in the pussy" on camera, which is then broadcast live (Prestwich, 2014). Since the reporters are generally reporting live, they are left to respond to this behaviour while they are also being watched by thousands of viewers. In May 2015, one Canadian female reporter confronted a group of men after they shouted the phrase at her while she was reporting, which was recorded and posted on YouTube (CityTV Official, 2015). In the video, she says, "no seriously, it's a disgusting thing to say, it's degrading to women... you would humiliate me on live television?" (CityTV Official, 2015, 0:25-0:31) and "when you talk into my microphone and say that into my camera to viewers at the station I work at, it is disrespectful and degrading to me" (0:46-0:54). After the video went viral, one of the men harassing her was identified by his employer and was immediately terminated from his job. The company was upset with his public comments, and issued the statement: "Respect for all people is ingrained in our values. We're committed to a work environment where harassment of any kind is met with zero tolerance and a swift response" (Feldman, 2015).

In these "real life" situations, public backlash and pressure can assist in fighting against inequalities and sexualized violence. However, inequalities are strengthened online because there are few if any "real-life" consequences for users who make racist or sexist comments for which they would face backlash in public, and there are no safe havens for those being victimized other than to avoid going online. Online, women face harassment from men simply for being female and are thus subject to objectification. For example, one very common phrase in online forums is "tits or GTFO."⁵ This phrase was created by users on 4chan, a popular online forum, and is one of the "rules of the

⁵ GTFO stands for "get the fuck out" – i.e. "get off the internet."

internet⁶” (rule #30: “there are no girls on the internet”) (Bartlett, 2013). The phrase “tits or GTFO” insinuates that the only time it is acceptable for a woman to be online is when she is serving a sexual purpose for men. In the online environment, when someone claims to be female she is often met with the response “tits or GTFO” (Bartlett, 2013). Females who try to participate in regular, non-sexual internet activities typically face sexualized cyber harassment. Wotanis and McMillan’s (2014) study involved a comparison and analysis of two very famous Youtube channels – one male youtuber (Ryan Higa) and one female youtuber (Jenna Mourey). They found that the female Youtuber received more critical/hostile comments on her content and personality, as well as more sexist and sexually aggressive comments than the male Youtuber. Another example of online female oppression is found with the Gamergate controversy. Gamergate concerns sexism and hostile online environments for female gamers, and involved severe online harassment, threats, and doxing⁷ of a few prominent females in the gaming community. One participant, Zoe Quinn, received threats of stalking, rape, and death. She was eventually forced to leave her home for a safer location after her address was made public by those who had doxed her (Hern, 2014). When victims do attempt to defend or stick up for themselves, they are told that they should not bother, as they are only “feeding the trolls.”⁸

Franks (2011) discusses how there are people who have had an online presence forced upon them, whom she calls “unwilling avatars.” One example of having an unwanted online presence is when revenge porn is uploaded online. The victim did not consent to the nude photo being shared online, but it has been shared online regardless. Furthermore, these “unwilling avatars” often have their real names, addresses, and contact information posted online without their consent, while the persons posting the information are protected by their online pseudonym and do not have to fear any sort of

⁶ There is a list of “rules of the internet,” which was created by anonymous 4chan users. It is not a serious legitimate list of rules that govern the internet, but many users treat them as legitimate rules. Rules #30 and #31 are the rules regarding females on the internet (<http://archive.org/stream/RulesOfTheInternet/RulesOfTheInternet.txt>).

⁷ Doxing is the practice of researching and publicly broadcasting identifying information of someone, such as their home address and where they work. The purpose is to intimidate the target and bring the online victimization into their offline life.

⁸ Another “rule” (#14) of the internet is that victims should not engage the “trolls” because that is what they want. The word “troll” is internet slang for an online bully.

“real-life” consequences like the victim does. Occasionally victims are successful in defending themselves against internet trolls. For example, former Boston Red Sox pitcher Curt Schilling posted a congratulation tweet in February 2015 after his daughter accepted an admission to Salve Regina University in Rhode Island where she would also play on the school softball team. Shortly afterward, he began receiving replies from many Twitter users containing extremely vulgar and sexual messages about his daughter. To help defend his daughter and try to “take down” some of these internet trolls, he publicly posted the identities and workplaces of some of the people who had sent vulgar messages. In a blog post, he displayed several screenshots of the vulgar tweets he received, which revealed the trolls’ Twitter account names (Schilling, 2015). In the blog post Schilling listed the workplaces of two of these trolls, stating

“The Sports Guru⁹”? Ya he’s a DJ named Adam Nagel (DJ is a bit strong since he’s on the air for 1 hour a week) on Brookdale Student Radio at Brookdale Community College. How do you think that place feels about this stud representing their school? You don’t think this isn’t going to be a nice compilation that will show up every single time this idiot is googled the rest of his life? (Schilling, 2015)

“The Sports Guru” was eventually suspended from his community college, and another troll lost his job (McCalmont, 2015). However, negative outcomes for online trolls are not the norm, whereas the victims, especially women in revenge porn cases, can have extreme real-life consequences such as stalking and harassment.

Reyns, Burek, Henson and Fisher (2013) surveyed 974 college students between the ages of 18-24 at a large Midwestern United States university in 2009. The survey focused on sexting and cybervictimization. They found that cybervictimization was positively and significantly associated with sexting, as was gender. Out of the four types of cybervictimization (repeat unwanted contact, harassment, unwanted sexual advances, threats of violence), females were more likely than males to experience victimization. The gendered nature of the findings included the following: females were 1.49 times more likely than males to experience one type of victimization, 2.67 times more likely than males to experiences two types of victimization, and 8.71 times more

⁹ One of the trolls had a Twitter account with the name “The Sports Guru.”

likely than males to experience three or more forms of victimization. Thus, although men and women are equally likely to sext (Dir et al., 2013; Samimi & Alderson, 2014), men do not experience the same cybervictimization that women do. This differential can be attributed to the age-old double standard between men and women when women are expected to remain sexually docile while men are expected to be sexually aggressive (Valenti, 2009). When women fall outside of this very narrow spectrum of how they are “supposed to” behave sexually, it becomes socially acceptable to treat them as undeserving of basic respect. That girls and women are more likely to experience victimization after sexting can also be attributed to the commodification of female bodies.

Ringrose, Harvey, Gill and Livingstone’s (2013) study on teenage sexting included a discussion of women’s bodies as commodities and a form of digital “currency.” They found that males who had more nude photos of women (obtained from sexting) on their phones were more respected by their male peers. These teenage boys were seen as asserting their masculinity, because presumably they would have had to persuade several teenage girls to send them photos. They were even more respected by their male peers if they were able to obtain nude photos of a girl who seemed to be the type of girl who would not take nude photos of herself (i.e. seemingly innocent or non-sexual). Turning female bodies into commodities and forms of digital currency between men had negative consequences for the women, however. Once a man had a nude photo of someone on his phone, she was often no longer seen as respected or worthy of dating. Ringrose et al. (2013) discuss a female participant who believed that sending nude photos was empowering and showed self-respect for oneself. Unfortunately, this positive spin on sexting was not a common view among all participants. One participant in the study discussed how he would view a woman after receiving a nude photo from her:

But girls like this I wouldn’t love. I don’t know why, I just wouldn’t love. I wouldn’t have respect for them ... It might sound rude yeah but girls like that ... I would just have sex with her and then leave her... I would talk to her, but I wouldn’t get in a relationship with her. (pp. 316-317)

This viewpoint on sexting is damaging to the females with whom they sext, as they are deemed unworthy of respect after they have sexted. Ringrose et al. (2013) conclude their study with a discussion on the problematic sexual double standards that exist

among teenagers who sext. There is a disconnect between a practice whereby girls' body parts are valued as commodities and highly valued among males, yet the reputations of the women who send nude photos are tainted or at risk when these photos are forwarded without permission to other recipients.

Victim Blaming & Sexism

Victim blaming, the act of unfairly accusing victims of contributing to their own victimization, is common with cases of sexual victimization (Valenti, 2009). This is done either subtly or blatantly. A more subtle form of victim blaming would include asking a sexual harassment victim what they were wearing when they were sexually harassed, implying that if they had been dressed more modestly they would not have been harassed. Blatant victim blaming includes telling revenge porn victims that if they did not want their nude photos to end up online, they should not have taken them in the first place. Because victim blaming is common in revenge porn cases, it is important to examine how and why victim blaming occurs so frequently with female victims. Sexism involves prejudiced, biased, and/or discriminatory opinions of someone based on their gender. An example of a traditional sexist belief is the notion that women have no place in the workforce and should stay home to take care of the children.

Valor-Segura, Exposito and Moya (2011) examined victim blaming in domestic violence cases. In their survey of 485 people aged 18-30 (the location was not specified) they found that people were more likely to engage in victim blaming if they held sexist beliefs, whether benevolent or hostile. *Benevolent sexism* involves sentiments and beliefs about women that on the surface seem like positive beliefs (e.g. women are pure) but are used to justify violence/prejudice against women who do not conform to these beliefs, such as judgements about women who have premarital sex. *Hostile sexism* involves overtly aggressive sentiments and beliefs about women, such as women who "provoke" their husbands deserve to be hit. Males were more likely to engage in victim blaming than females, especially when the men held benevolent or hostile sexist beliefs. These findings are important because they help us understand some of the context in which victim blaming occurs. Thus, when women fall outside of the spectrum of what is expected of them, people who hold traditional beliefs about gender roles are more likely

to blame them for their victimization. Despite women legally having equal rights on paper, many people still hold traditional beliefs about gender roles, which many fourth-wave feminists are trying to change. For example, over the past few years, feminists have protested against misogynistic *Facebook* pages that promote violence against women, as well as sexism in the music industry (Cochrane, 2013). One notable result of this feminist backlash can be found in a widespread ban of Robin Thicke's *Blurred Lines*, a #1 hit song with lyrics that promote sexual coercion, and an accompanying music video featuring completely topless women in an uncensored online version. Many feminist student groups have successfully worked to have the song banned on their college campuses (Carter, 2013; Cochrane, 2013).

Capezza and Arriaga (2008) examined victim-blaming tendencies and psychological abuse with their survey of 118 college students at a large Midwestern United States university. They found that women who were perceived as warm and more likeable were less likely to be blamed for their abuse, while women who were perceived as lacking warmth or unlikeable were more often blamed for their abuse. In their discussion, Capezza and Arriaga (2008) talk about how people can blame victims of psychological abuse because if the victim is not a likable person, they must have done something to deserve the abuse, justifying the perpetrator's abusive actions. When a woman fights back against her abuser, she is often viewed as having less warmth and thus deserving of the abuse in the first place, contributing to a culture where abuse is tolerated, and where abused women will not receive the support they need. Because the expected feminine role for women is to be warm and likable, Capezza and Arriaga's (2008) findings can be understood in the context that women who deviate from their expected roles in society are more likely to be blamed when they are victimized. This in turn justifies punishing women who do not adhere to the standards expected of them. With revenge porn specifically, women can be understood as deviating from cultural morality norms by taking and sending nude photos, because from a traditional outlook on femininity and sexuality, women are not "supposed to" be overtly sexual (Valenti, 2009; Valenti, 2013). Knowing this, the victim blaming of revenge porn victims can be more easily understood.

Women are so easily blamed for their own victimization, in part, because of cultural expectations that women fit into certain molds dictating “proper” ways for women to behave. When a woman does not fit into these prescribed roles of femininity, her actions are questioned and she is often blamed for any misfortune that comes upon her. Wolf (1997) comments on the impact of this regarding sexuality: “if we were out of line sexually, we could become sluts; if we became sluts, we could die several deaths” (p. 64). Wolf’s (1997) connection of being a slut and dying “several deaths” reflects the notion that sluts face severe consequences. In terms of revenge porn and crimes of a sexual nature, slut-shaming is a prevalent response when a woman is victimized. It is often said that if a woman did not want her naked photos to end up online, she should not have taken them – or allowed another to take them – to begin with, and that women who do take naked photos are sluts who deserve the victimization they get. Many revenge porn websites have comments sections that accompany a naked photo of someone, where commenters often post derogatory comments about the person in the photo. This is made possible by the widespread acceptance of slut-shaming and policing of women’s sexuality and by literally using such women as object lessons, warning others to not be so naive, trusting or simply stupid.

Sexual Harassment/Sexual Assault

Bloom (2014) argues that revenge porn “should be classified as a sexual offense because of its similarity to other types of sexual offenses, like sexual assault and sexual harassment” (p. 278). Sexual harassment has been linked to negative mental health outcomes among victims (Ho, Dinh, Bellfontaine, & Irving 2012). Women who are victims of sexual crimes are also likely to be blamed for their victimization, which has been detailed in the previous section on victim blaming. Weber, Bauer, and Martinez’s (2012) study involved a survey of undergraduate students to understand the relationship between a woman’s clothing and a person’s likelihood to blame them for sexual harassment. In a pilot study, the researchers showed a range of photos to college students and professors asking them to rate the clothing from 1 (very conservative) to 5 (very provocative). The image with the highest score was used as the provocative clothing photo, and the lowest scored photo was chosen as the conservative photo for

the study. Participants were shown one of two pictures of the same woman – in one picture the woman was dressed conservatively, and in the other she was dressed provocatively. The study participants were asked a series of questions regarding sexual harassment and regarding punishment of a man for sexually harassing the woman appearing in the photos. Men were more likely than women to believe that the harasser should not be punished. Participants answered questions on the Likelihood To Sexually Harass Scale (how likely they would be to engage in sexually harassing behaviour), and participants who scored highly on this scale were more likely to believe there should be less punishment for the harasser of the woman in the photo. This finding is consistent with previous research findings when women who are seen to be more “provocative” are deemed less worthy of deserving respect and that women dressed certain ways are “asking for it” when they are sexually harassed. Relating this back to revenge porn, a parallel can easily be drawn where women are told if they did not want a nude photo of themselves to end up online, they should not have taken one in the first place. Weber et al. (2012) leave this important closing argument regarding the findings of their study: “Applied in a forensic setting, male jurors may suggest unfairly lenient consequences for a sexual harasser. Applied in an organizational setting, male supervisors may be more likely to allow [sexual harassment] behaviour to go unpunished” (p. 113).

Similar to sexual harassment, with sexual assault cases there are “ideal” victims – victims who are “real” victims, who were not “asking for it.” Du Mont, Miller, and Myhr (2003) found that women were more likely to report a sexual assault if the assault conformed to stereotypical ideas about what rape is supposed to be. Women who suffered severe physical trauma (cuts, bruises, internal injuries, fractures) and who were physically coerced (had their clothes ripped off, were kicked) were more likely to report to the authorities, and were considered “real” victims. This finding of women being more likely to report when they suffered physical injuries is likely due to preconceived notions and societal stereotypes that rapists are evil men hiding in the bushes at night, not an attractive, trustworthy stranger met at a bar or a lover. If a woman does not sustain physical injuries, her unwillingness to report may be due to her believing that it was “not really rape” or that the authorities will not take her claim seriously, though it may also be due to the fear of victim blaming as well.

Police attitudes toward rape are important, as the police are responsible for investigations into sexual assault claims. Page's (2008) survey of 891 police officers in two southeastern US states revealed that police were more likely to believe victims when they conformed to this "real victim" stereotype. Similarly, LaFree (1989) found that rape victims who were seen as "promiscuous" and did not conform to traditional gender expectations for women were less likely to be believed by law enforcement. LaFree (1989) also noted that police were less likely to make an arrest if the victim engaged in drinking alcohol or premarital sex. These findings show an established theme where women are not seen as "real" victims if they do not adhere to traditional gender roles, and legal action is less likely to be taken. Furthermore, it must be noted that racial and class factors also relate to crime victims' satisfaction with the police. Dowler and Sparks' (2008) survey of 14,000 United States residents provides evidence that Hispanic and Black crime victims are less satisfied than their white counterparts with how the police treat them when they are victims of any crime. They also found that those who "were older, educated, and reported higher incomes were more likely to be satisfied with the police" (p. 404).

Gotell (2008) discussed perceptions of sexual assault victims and how the court treats them. After examining legal cases where the victim's actions were questioned, Gotell (2008) comments on the mixed messages women receive as they are either blamed or excused for standard interactions with men:

Even as judges convict, complainants are depicted as behaving carelessly for failing to recognize the sexual risks inherent in perfectly normal social interactions... including ... attending a party, accepting a ride from or visiting prospective employers... Failing to display appropriate caution is often excused as youthful ignorance, a situational and temporal deviation from the norms of a mature and cautious femininity. Nonetheless, careless disregard for personal safety becomes a site for an altered form of victim-blaming, as complainants are constructed as flirting with risk. (pp. 879-880)

A parallel can be drawn between this idea of "behaving carelessly" and failing to recognize sexual risks with how females who sext and are subsequently victimized by revenge porn are treated by society as a whole. Much like the sexual assault cases described by Gotell (2008), women are expected to always have their safety in mind,

avoiding situations where potential for victimization could be present, which is basically any time a woman leaves her home, even though women are more likely to be assaulted by someone they know.

Risk management is a prominent sexual assault prevention tactic advised by authorities, society, and some sexual assault prevention campaigns, where women are responsible for avoiding sexual assault. Examples of risk management with sexual assault are suggestions such as “travel in groups,” “put change in your wallet for a ride home,” and “verbalize your resistance loudly” (Carmody & Carrington, 2000, p. 11). Risk management to prevent sexual assault comes from the context and belief that women’s bodies are “risky spaces” (Hall, 2004, p. 3). From a risk management perspective, sexual assault is seen as something that is part and parcel of life and the only way to prevent it is for women to take preventative measures to avoid being raped. Taken to its extreme, this places the responsibility solely on women to avoid being raped, and absolves the rapist of responsibility because women’s bodies are “inert spaces waiting to be invaded/taken” (Hall, 2004, p. 3). While there has been a recent shift away from risk management by other sexual assault campaigns such as the “yes means yes” slogan (LaFrance, Loe, & Brown, 2012) which advocates for affirmative consent, risk management perspectives remain popular.

These risk management perspectives are also common with revenge porn, where taking naked photos is seen to be inviting oneself to be victimized. Media and online communities commonly advocate for risk management strategies to avoid revenge porn. One online blog lists “8 sexting rules” to avoid becoming a victim of revenge porn, with rules such as “don’t sext if you have been together less than a year,” and “don’t sext if you have your head in the photos (come on, people!)” (Brown-Warsham, 2012, p. 1). Another online news website posted an article about avoiding revenge porn victimization is titled “to avoid revenge porn, don’t let someone film you having sex” (Gray, 2014). Much like sexual assault prevention risk management, these common “avoiding revenge porn” suggestions place the responsibility solely or primarily on the woman and often seem to absolve the perpetrator of any responsibility. However, women are in an unfair position when unfortunately they often do need to follow this type

of advice because if they do not and they are victimized, they are blamed for not taking proper precautions.

Sexual Victimization & Mental Health

Sexual harassment can have negative mental health effects on women. In Ho et al.'s (2012) study, surveys of Asian and White female undergraduate students were conducted to gain a better understanding of the relationship between post-traumatic stress (PTS) symptoms and sexual harassment, and if Asian women experienced more/less of these symptoms than White women. They found that PTS symptoms were indeed related to sexual harassment, and found that the most upsetting sexual harassment experience reported by participants was "staring, leering, or ogling [them] in a way that made [them] feel uncomfortable" (p. 100). Furthermore, Asian women reported fewer experiences of sexual harassment than White women, but the severity of PTS symptoms was higher. Ho et al. (2012) suggest that this results from racial discrimination in the sexual harassment of Asian women. For both Asian and White women, sexual harassment frequency and the severity of PTS symptoms "significantly predicted depression and overall psychological distress" (p. 102). Yoon, Funk, and Kropf (2010) surveyed 410 college women in two southern U.S. states to examine sexual harassment among Black and White women. Sexual harassment was operationalized using the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire, "which consists of three sub-scales: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion" (p. 11). Participants were asked to rate their experiences of items in these scales from 0 (never) to 4 (many times). Yoon et al. (2010) found that 97% of participants had experienced some form of sexual harassment in their lives, and that both Black and White women were likely to experience the same quantity of sexual harassment. One racial difference they found was that White women were more likely to experience sexual harassment through gendered harassment and unwanted comments, while Black women were more likely to experience sexual coercion (being coerced into sexual acts they did not want to engage in).

While Ho et al.'s (2012) and Yoon et al.'s (2010) studies examined sexual harassment among adult women, Guber and Fineran's (2007) survey of 369 middle

school and 199 high school students in New England examined how sexual harassment and bullying affects students' health (self-esteem, mental health, physical health). They found that sexual rumours being spread about oneself were the most distressing bullying experiences compared with all other forms of bullying that participants experienced. They also found the most common bullying experiences in middle school were the most common bullying experiences in high school (bullying thus seems to continue over time), the frequency of sexual harassment increases from middle school to high school, and certain bullying experiences – those that are sexual in nature – have more significant effects on the victim's health. Clearly sexual harassment is a common occurrence among females of all ages, and is not limited to any one race (though different races can experience different types of sexual harassment). What is also noteworthy is the amount of psychological distress that sexual harassment can cause. Knowing this, we can place revenge porn within this context – we can understand how and why revenge porn victims deal with such distress.

Weiss (2010) examined the involvement of shame in sexual victimization cases, and how shame plays a role in one's decision of whether or not to report sexual victimization to police. Weiss (2010) conducted an analysis of sexual victimization narratives collected by the US National Crime Victimization Survey. Three prevalent female "shame narratives" were identified in this study: the deserving victim, the disgraced victim, and the defamed victim. Narratives that fell under the deserving victim category involved incidents when the victim believed it was her own fault because of something she did/did not do (i.e., if she was drunk or "should have known better"). The narrative of the disgraced victim included themes that the victim felt humiliated or too embarrassed to report the sexual assault. The narrative of the defamed victim included situations when victims were afraid that their private lives/sexual pasts would become public, or that their friends/family would find out. Relating these findings to revenge porn, another act of sexual victimization, these three narratives are easily understood. Since many women are told they should not have taken nude photos in the first place, the "deserving victim" narrative holds some truth to how a revenge porn victim may feel. The "disgraced victim" narrative can also be easily understood within the context of revenge porn – having such personal and private photos of oneself put online could very easily humiliate a victim, who may be too embarrassed to admit to the police what happened.

Finally, the narrative of the “defamed victim” can also be easily understood within the context of revenge porn – the fear of one’s friends or family finding out about nude photos on the internet is not hard to imagine, especially if they have conservative or traditional views about sex.

Consent and Breach of Trust

A key reason that revenge porn is so upsetting to victims is the breach of trust and lack of consent when a friend, lover or ex-lover uploads naked photos online of an ex-partner. Often, sending naked photos happens within the context of a trusting, loving relationship with the expectation that privacy will be respected and that the photos will not be shared with third parties. Revenge porn victims confirm that the only reason they shared the photo to begin with was because their partner promised it would remain confidential. Citron and Franks (2014) argue that if a person shares naked photos initially restricted to a trusting intimate relationship, those photos should not be subjected to an online environment once the relationship is over:

Individual and societal expectations of privacy are tailored to specific circumstances. The nonconsensual sharing of an individual's intimate photos should be no different; consent within a trusted relationship does not equal consent outside of that relationship. We should no more blame individuals for trusting loved ones with intimate images than we blame someone for trusting a financial advisor not to share sensitive information with strangers on the street. (p. 348)

Danish journalist and revenge porn victim Emma Holten has declared publicly that the most upsetting part of being victimized was the lack of consent when naked photos of her were posted online. In a video posted online she said, “who should be able to see you naked? Do you think you deserve a say? Four years ago someone decided that I didn’t” (Holten et al., 2015). In the video, she explains how her e-mail and Facebook accounts were hacked, and naked photos of her were stolen and posted online. She was upset that even though people knew the photos were posted non-consensually, they still viewed the photos and many went further, insulting and harassing her: “Most of those men knew those pictures were posted against my will, and my humiliation was part of their thrill.” After people began telling her that she was a slut and should not have taken

the photos in the first place, she decided to take back some of her agency by doing a nude photoshoot with a photographer. The photos were not overly explicit, and in fact could be seen as tasteful, even playful and celebratory. She posted several of these photos online to underscore that this project was her choice, not somebody else's. She commented on the admonition, "don't take naked photos of yourself":

Many people have said that these women shouldn't have taken the pictures in the first place, that our behaviour is the problem. But you don't end misogyny by limiting women's rights to expression and privacy. (Holten et al., 2015)

The lack of consent with revenge porn is similar to the lack of consent in sexual assault cases, so the remainder of this section examines the literature surrounding consent. As described by Randall (2011), "consent is the legal dividing line between wanted and unwanted sexual contact" (p. 3).

Burkett and Hamilton (2012) explored how women negotiate consent with sexual partners. They suggest that the onus is on women to prevent unwanted sexual activity. In their interviews with eight young women, the women stated that men assume consent is in play unless they specifically say no to sex. This assumption places women in a perpetual state of implied consent and sexual availability. Jozkowski and Peterson (2013) conducted a survey of 185 college students at a large Midwestern university on sexual consent, which had had similar findings to Burkett and Hamilton's (2012) study. They found that their participants largely adhered to a traditional sexual script where men were responsible for initiating sexual activity and women had a passive role in sex. For example, men were typically the ones who initiated sexual encounters, whereas women would not indicate their willingness to have sex without being asked. They also found that male aggression and use of deception to gain access to their female partner's body was common among male respondents. Relating this to revenge porn, just as men seem to feel they are entitled to women's bodies and sex, they also feel that it is their decision on whether to post naked photos of someone online regardless of how the woman may feel about that.

Gotell (2008) discusses Canada's shift to an affirmative consent model in 1999 (*R. v. Ewanchuk*, 1999), where ongoing active consent is required in any sexual activity.

In the Ewanchuk case, Steve Ewanchuk brought a 17-year-old female to his van for a job interview. He made sexual advances toward her; as soon as she said “no,” he stopped. However, after a few minutes passed, he made advances again until she said “no,” a pattern which was repeated until she left the van. Ewanchuk argued that because he stopped his advances when she said “no” it was not sexual assault. The court determined that “implied consent” cannot be used as a defence, and that affirmative consent must be shown. This means that a person must take “reasonable steps” (Gotell, 2002, p. 254) to ensure that a person is consenting to any sexual activity, and that a “clear and unequivocal ‘yes’” must be given for consent to be present (*R. v. Ewanchuk*, 1999, para. 51). This case law provided a shift from a “no means no” model to a “yes means yes” model of consent, and implied consent can no longer be used as a legal defence. However, implied consent is still the cultural norm in typical relationships (Burkett & Hamilton, 2012). Gotell (2008) comments that with Canada’s affirmative consent model, it is the responsibility of the person initiating sexual contact to ensure that consent is given, and that there is no consent until it is explicitly obtained. Under Canadian case law, consent has to be obtained verbally:

The specious defence of implied consent... as applied in this case, rests on the assumption that unless a woman protests or resists, she should be “deemed” to consent... On appeal, the idea also surfaced that if a woman is not modestly dressed, she is deemed to consent. Such stereotypical assumptions find their roots in many cultures, including our own. They no longer, however, find a place in Canadian law. (*R. v. Ewanchuk*, 1999, para. 103)

Randall (2011) argues that although the *Ewanchuk* case provides clear legal guidance for sexual assault cases, the law still “remains complicated and murky” (p. 1). She also argues that it is particularly difficult to prosecute sexual assault cases when married or intimate partners are involved and verbal consent is typically not used in sexual encounters. In these types of sexual assault cases, the defence of an “honest but mistaken belief in consent” is often used. Randall (2011) discusses that this defence means past sexual history with the defendant is often used to argue that the defendant believed consent was present. However, Randall (2011) argues this is problematic:

Essentially, these lawyers are arguing that in the case of wife rape the fact that she has consented before is evidence suggesting that she

consented this time, arguably relieving husbands of the legal obligation to ask. (p. 26)

Randall (2011) also discusses how s. 276 of the *Criminal Code* stipulates that a defendant's past sexual history cannot be brought up in court except in very specific circumstances. She argues that when judges admit the complainant's past sexual history into evidence, it is often a misapplication of the law:

This judicial approach is a very surprising repudiation of the statutory requirement for a s. 276 application by the accused. Instead, the judge has already done the work for the defence by simply asserting the relevance of the sexual history and, furthermore, by factoring it in to bolster the "honest but mistaken belief in consent" defence. Moreover, it relieves the accused of having to prove that he took the "reasonable steps" the criminal law requires. (p. 27)

Since the *Ewanchuk* case, there has been some question whether the *Ewanchuk* ruling applies to married couples. In *R v. A.W.S* (1998), the court of appeal stated that it is unrealistic to expect married couples to ask for verbal consent before every sexual encounter:

The law cannot ignore *the reality of normal human behaviour* [italics in original]... it would be wrong to conclude that a person involved in an ongoing intimate relationship must secure the express consent of his or her partner prior to initiating any sexual act. (Randall, 2011, p. 24)

Overall, there is considerable legal and social ambiguity regarding sexual consent. There has been a small but distinct cultural shift toward a "yes means yes" model of consent¹⁰ with the help of sexual assault awareness campaigns and feminist groups, and after *Ewanchuk*, there is Canadian case law that states affirmative consent is necessary, though some believe it is not appropriate to apply it in certain situations (Randall, 2011).

¹⁰ For example, California recently passed an affirmative consent law, which requires colleges and universities to redefine rape under the school's student code of conduct or disciplinary code. Students have to obtain affirmative consent during sexual encounters; otherwise, they can be expelled. This new law does not change the legal, criminal definition of rape, so those found guilty by the school will not necessarily face criminal charges. Even so, the threat of being expelled from one's school is a heavy punishment for students (Student safety: sexual assault, SB 697, chapter 748, 2014).

Given the current unsettled state of legal guidance surrounding revenge porn, the “yes means yes” model could be applied as a way to protect victims and to align revenge porn laws with current sexual assault laws. For instance, requiring affirmative consent from a person appearing in a nude photo before it could be shared or posted online would be an appropriate addition to current sexual assault legislation.

Another important aspect of consent is that consenting to one act is not consent to another. In terms of sexual assault law in Canada, consenting to kissing or foreplay, for example, does not mean that a person is automatically consenting to sexual intercourse. In *R. v. Ewanchuk* (1999), the court determined that consent needs to be gained before proceeding with a sexual act, and that consent to other sexual activities could not be implied from consent to one sexual activity. In *R. v. J.A.* (2011), the court ruled that a person has the right to give (or not to give) consent to each sexual act, and that consent may be revoked at any time. With regard to naked photos, it can (and should) be argued that consent to taking and sending a naked photo to a partner is not consent for the recipient to post it online or share the photo with others. As Citron and Franks (2014) put it, “while most people today would rightly recoil at the suggestion that a woman’s consent to sleep with one man can be taken as consent to sleep with all of his friends, this is the very logic of revenge porn apologists” (p. 348). Citron and Franks (2014) use examples of everyday activities as analogies to show how consent is contextual:

Consent to share information in one context does not serve as consent to share this information in another context. When a person gives her credit card to a waiter, she is not consenting to let the waiter use that card to make personal purchases. When a person entrusts a doctor with sensitive health information, he is not authorizing that doctor to share that information with the public. What lovers share with each other is not equivalent to what they share with coworkers, acquaintances, or employers. Consent is contextual; it is not an on/off switch. (p. 355)

Catherine MacKinnon (2005) argues that many women reluctantly consent to sex as a way of “giving in” to persistent pressure from a male partner. Her stance is that this is not real consent because when a male partner is a “sex pest,” putting continuous pressure on a woman to have sex, she will feel that she does not have a choice and that she needs to say “yes” in order to get the male to stop pressuring her. This is likely rooted in

the traditional sexual script of male sexual aggression and females as sexual gatekeepers whereby it is the man's job to "convince" them to have sex (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013; La France, 2010). It is likely that some men are pressuring women who take naked photos. In Samimi and Alderson's (2014) study, while men were more likely to believe that sexting was a fun part of relationships, women were more likely to believe that sexting is risky. Perhaps a portion of female sexters only consent to sending naked photos because of pressure from a partner. Comparing this to MacKinnon's (2005) view on this form of "gaining consent," consenting to sexting due to persistent pressure would be non-consensual sexting.

Revenge Porn & Current Laws

In Canada, although there are currently no *Criminal Code* provisions declaring revenge porn a crime, there are some legal avenues available for victims. A victim can pursue a civil case or criminal prosecution. With a civil case, a victim could pursue a defamation suit if the perpetrator created an unsafe environment for the victim with revenge porn. Furthermore, if perpetrators could have reasonably predicted a negative outcome as a consequence of their actions, they become liable under tort law. This argument can be considered through the Proximate Cause reason, also known as the "but for" test. This test is used in cases to contend that an outcome has resulted from a particular action, with the argument of "but for the action, the result would not have occurred." For example, if a victim of revenge porn committed suicide, this test could be applied: "But for" the uploading of revenge porn, the victim would not have committed suicide, therefore leaving the perpetrator liable for their actions under Proximate Cause. Bloom (2014) gives examples of possible tort claims victims can make in the United States. For example, a victim can use the argument that revenge porn "constitutes public disclosure of private facts" (p. 257). To successfully win the case, a victim would have to prove that the revenge porn uploader "publicized an element of her private life that would be highly offensive to a reasonable person and is not a legitimate public concern" (p. 257). Another tort claim a victim can pursue is the "theory of intentional infliction of emotional distress" (p. 257). To win a case with this argument, the victim would have to prove that the perpetrator's actions of uploading revenge porn were "extreme and

outrageous” and that he¹¹ did so to intentionally cause severe emotional distress in the victim. Bloom (2014) also notes that unfortunately, victims would likely have to spend thousands of dollars in legal fees to pursue a civil case, without any certainty of a favourable outcome.

With Canadian criminal law, if the revenge porn uploader is causing harm to a person’s reputation by spreading false information about them, the uploader can be charged with defamatory libel under s. 298-300 (*Criminal Code*, 1985). To make a libellous claim, there must be a clear and obvious target, and the libellous content must be seen by people other than the perpetrator and the victim. Revenge porn has an obvious target, as photos of the person are included; because revenge porn happens publicly in “cyberspace,” the content is being seen by several people, meaning that it is possible to make a libel suit with a revenge porn case. Those found guilty of defamatory libel face up to five years in prison, as per s. 300 of the *Criminal Code*. Furthermore, revenge porn perpetrators can be charged with harassment. Criminal harassment, as per s. 264 of the *Criminal Code*, occurs when a person says or does something that makes the target fear for his or her safety, even if the perpetrator did not intend to instil fear in the target, and is punishable by up to ten years in prison. Criminal harassment also includes stalking, which many revenge porn victims experience after being victimized.

A defamatory libel or harassment suit can help victims to bring charges against their perpetrators, but there are some defences available to the perpetrator. For example, in a defamatory libel case, under s. 314-315 of the *Criminal Code* perpetrators can use the defence that they were trying to “right a wrong” or that they believed what they were writing was true and fair. In the case of revenge porn, perpetrators could believe that they were making things “even” between them and the victim if they felt that the victim had done wrong to them (such as in a breakup). Although it would have to be proved extensively, it is a defence that a revenge porn uploader could make.

¹¹ Although revenge porn typically involves naked images of women posted by men, revenge porn can also involve same sex couples as well as those in other types of relationships.

Nova Scotia recently passed the *Cyber-Safety Act*, which addresses cyberbullying behaviours including sharing intimate photos of someone without their consent. The act was passed in September 2013 after the death of Rehtaeh Parsons, a teenager who attempted suicide after being cyberbullied by her peers. She attempted suicide by hanging on April 4th 2013, and was taken off life support on April 7th 2013. Her death sparked a conversation about the inadequate legal guidance on cyberbullying (Slane, 2013). Highlights of the *Cyber-Safety Act* (2013) include a definition of cyberbullying as:

Any electronic communication through the use of technology including, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, computers, other electronic devices, social networks, text messaging, instant messaging, websites and electronic mail, typically repeated or with continuing effect, that is intended or ought reasonably be expected to cause fear, intimidation, humiliation, distress or other damage or harm to another person's health, emotional well-being, self-esteem or reputation, and includes assisting or encouraging such communication in any way. (s. 3 (1)(b))

This definition is quite broad, so revenge porn could be considered cyberbullying under the Act. Individuals found guilty under the *Cyber-Safety Act* can be fined up to \$5000 and/or imprisoned for up to two years.

The United States has no federal legislation criminalizing revenge porn, but similar to Canadian law, victims can pursue civil suits and sue for damages. Tort law allows a plaintiff to sue for damages if being victimized by revenge porn cost them in some way (e.g., loss of a job, money spent on counselling). However, many revenge porn website administrators believe they are immune to lawsuits under Section 230 of the *Communications Decency Act*. This Act, passed in 1996, essentially grants immunity to websites that allow users to post obscene or illegal content. Franklin's (2014) analysis of Section 230 applies revenge porn websites to current case law rulings, giving some potential arguments that could be used to contend that revenge porn websites should not receive immunity under Section 230. If a revenge porn website does not receive immunity under Section 230, it could be declared unlawful and the website administrator could be charged under the *Communications Decency Act* for the content on the website. Franklin (2014) argues that if a website manager/owner is requesting users to post illegal material, the website cannot have immunity under Section 230, using case

law from *Fair Housing Council of San Fernando Valley v. Roommates.Com* (2008) as an example. In this case, roommates.com encouraged users looking for housing to post their gender and sexual preferences. It is illegal to discriminate in housing based on someone's gender or sexual preferences, so asking users to post this information facilitated housing discrimination. The decision in the case was that roommates.com did not have Section 230 immunity because users were asked to post illegal content. Franklin (2014) argues that with revenge porn websites, since the administrators are often encouraging users to post illegal material, they should not be granted immunity under Section 230. Encouraging users to post naked photos of someone nonconsensually, often with degrading comments and identifying information about the person in the photos, could be harassment or defamatory libel.

In the United States, 23 states¹² have criminal laws in place against revenge porn (Goldberg, 2015). The specifics of each of these state laws vary. For example, under Alaska's law, revenge porn is harassment in the second degree (Alaska Stat. 11.61.120), Maryland's revenge porn law falls under stalking and harassment (Maryland Code Section 3-809), and Idaho's is classified as a video voyeurism felony (Idaho Code 18-6609(2)(b)). There are also several states that have bills pending in legislation.¹³

End Revenge Porn praises the law in Illinois as "the best" revenge porn law in the country (endrevengeporn.org, 2014). The first reason End Revenge Porn praises the Illinois law is because the offender's motive does not matter. In other states, in order to prosecute someone for violating revenge porn laws, the offender has to intend to inflict harm upon the victim. However, many revenge porn uploaders are not motivated to inflict harm: they do it "out of a desire for financial gain, for the 'lulz,'¹⁴ for entertainment, for sexual gratification, or for no particular reason at all" (Endrevengeporn.org, 2014).

¹² Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, DC, Delaware, Florida (effective Oct. 1, 2015), Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, New Mexico, New Jersey, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas (effective Sept. 1, 2015), Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin (Goldberg, 2015).

¹³ Arizona, Connecticut, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maine, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Washington (Goldberg, 2015).

¹⁴ "Lulz" is a play on the popular online phrase "lol," which stands for "laughing out loud." When a person is doing something "for the lulz," they are doing it for the "laughs" or amusement.

Furthermore, “selfies” are included in the Illinois law, unlike other laws that require the photo be taken by someone else to be considered revenge porn. This is particularly important, as nude selfies have become quite popular in Western culture, especially with smartphone apps such as Snapchat that give the illusion of safety when sending naked photos. Photos also do not have to contain nudity to be considered revenge porn in Illinois. For example, the Illinois law covers photos where “a victim is depicted performing oral sex or has been ejaculated upon, regardless of whether the victim is nude” (Endrevengeporn.org, 2014). The Illinois law also has very strong penalties – it is considered a class 4 felony, punishable by up to three years in prison and up to \$25,000 in fines. One recurrent issue with revenge porn is that once a photo is uploaded, it can be redistributed dozens of times by others. Under Illinois law, people who knowingly redistribute or forward revenge porn photos are also held liable, which may help slow the distribution of photos. As previously mentioned, revenge porn victims often find their personally identifying information posted along with the naked photos on revenge porn websites. The identifying information facilitates offline stalking, harassment, and limits the victim’s employability and safety. Taking this into consideration, the Illinois revenge porn law “applies when a victim is identifiable from his or her face as well as when as other identifying information is displayed in connection with the image” (Endrevengeporn.org, 2014). Finally, the Illinois law honours the First Amendment and does not limit freedom of speech – the law does not apply to photos posted for a “lawful public purpose” or photos that were taken in a public setting (Endrevengeporn.org, 2014).

One prominent revenge porn case that gained significant media coverage was the trial of Kevin Bollaert, a revenge porn website administrator. In April 2015, the San Diego Superior Court sentenced him to 18 years in prison after finding him guilty of several counts of identity theft and extortion relating to his website. This was the first American case in which a person was found guilty and sentenced to prison for operating a “revenge porn ring” (McKay, 2015). Bollaert’s revenge porn website, “U got posted,” featured nude/semi-nude photos of women without their consent, often with personal and contact information accompanying the photo(s). Bollaert frequently extorted these women by asking them to pay a fee of \$300-\$350 to remove the content. As previously mentioned, Hunter Moore owned and operated a popular revenge porn website until he

sold it to an anti-bullying organization (Visser, 2012). He was arrested in January 2014, and in February 2015 he was reported to have entered into a plea bargain:

His guilty plea covers aiding and abetting hacking (unauthorized access of victims' computers for private financial gain) and aggravated identity theft. Moore admitted to paying his co-defendant to hack into victims' email accounts to steal their nude photos. (Citron, 2015)

Moore has not gone to trial yet, but he faces up to seven years in prison. Under the plea bargain he will serve two years in prison for identity theft, up to five years for the computer hacking charges, and a fine of \$500,000.

The following chapter includes a discussion of the theoretical perspectives used in this thesis. Many feminist perspectives have been incorporated into this section to provide background on how systemic female oppression plays a role in maintaining inequality between men and women. Of note, a few of these feminist perspectives included are, "the personal is the political" mantra, gender performance, hegemonic masculinity, feminist theories regarding sexual assault, and feminist consciousness-raising.

Chapter 3.

Theoretical Orientation

This research is not designed to test a particular hypothesis or theory, but it is guided by theoretical perspectives. The two primary theoretical perspectives adopted here are C. Wright Mills' (1959) classic critical approach to "the sociological imagination" and feminist perspectives. Mills (1959) states that in order to fully understand society and social reality, it is necessary to understand the social environment of individual people as well as the wider social structure of society as a whole. Mills (1959) argues that "the sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals" (p. 5) and "the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period" (p. 5). Hence, to effectively examine an issue, the surrounding cultural context must be understood. Mills goes on to further describe the implications of the sociological imagination and the relationship between individuals and the larger society they are a part of – "perhaps the most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between 'the personal troubles of milieu' and 'the public issues of social structure'" (p. 8). "Personal troubles" refer to troubles experienced by an individual that are to be worked through by the individual. "Public issues" are systemic issues that affect many individuals due to the larger societal structure and institutions. When personal troubles become widespread on a larger scale for many individuals, they become public issues rather than personal problems. Mills (1959) gives the example of unemployment:

When, in a city of 100,000, only one man is unemployed, that is his personal trouble, and for its relief we properly look to the character of the man, his skills, and his immediate opportunities. But when in a nation of 50 million employees, 15 million men are unemployed, that is an issue, and we may not hope to find its solution within the range of opportunities

open to any one individual. The very structure of opportunities has collapsed. Both the correct statement of the problem and the range of possible solutions require us to consider the economic and political institutions of the society, and not merely the personal situation and character of a scatter of individuals. (p. 9)

Feminists began using a similar line of thinking during the Second Wave feminist movement. Carol Hanisch's famous statement in her 1969 speech that "the personal is political" became a defining moment in the feminist movement. Hanisch's speech was originally written as a memo sent to the woman's caucus of the Southern Conference Educational Fund – a feminist group she had been working with. She wrote it in response to another staff member's assertion that feminist consciousness-raising was just "therapy" and questioned if it was really "political" (Hanisch, 2006). In her speech, Hanisch expressed her anger over feminist meeting groups being called "therapy groups" for women who were "more political" (Hanisch, 2000, p. 113). She felt it diminished the importance and seriousness of feminist thought and argument because these groups were not intended for therapy to discuss personal problems – they were groups where women came together to discuss societal issues of systemic oppression:

The very word "therapy" is obviously a misnomer if carried to its logical conclusion. Therapy assumes that someone is sick and that there is a cure, e.g., a personal solution. I am greatly offended that I or any other woman is thought to need therapy in the first place. Women are messed over, not messed up! We need to change the objective conditions, not adjust to them. Therapy is adjusting to your bad personal alternative. (p. 113)

So the reason I participate in these meetings is not to solve any personal problem. One of the first things we discover in these groups is that personal problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution. I went, and I continue to go to these meetings because I have gotten a political understanding which all my reading, all my "political discussions," all my "political action," all my four-odd years in the movement never gave me. I've been forced to take off the rose colored glasses and face the awful truth about how grim my life really is as a woman. I am getting a gut understanding of everything as opposed to the esoteric, intellectual understandings and *noblesse oblige* feelings I had in "other people's" struggles. (p. 114)

The mantra “the personal is political” has become a core feminist platform and is still a prevalent thought in feminist literature. Feminists identified that many “personal problems” were widespread across society and common for women. As Mills (1959) argues, once it becomes established that personal problems are widespread due to societal structure, they are no longer simply personal, they become public issues that cannot be solved by the individual. Feminists have identified many public issues women collectively face as a group, including problems with the nuclear family structure, unequal pay between men and women, sexuality and reproductive rights, and sexual assault/sexual harassment. As much as feminists have taken on these and other public issues, we must appreciate that there are differences of opinion and differences in strategies among feminists.

While there is very little theoretical literature written on revenge porn, sexual assault is arguably a similar crime to revenge porn, therefore this literature will be explored. The “public issue” of sexual assault is currently being discussed across society by feminists, though the discussion has been going on for decades. However, a wider discussion of sexual assault has become even more prominent with the use of social media to broadcast feminist ideas to a wider audience (Rentschler, 2014). With the focus of this thesis project on revenge porn – an act of sexual victimization similar to sexual assault – feminist writings on sexual assault can show a close theoretical parallel to revenge porn.

Feminist scholars have been arguing for decades that the attitudes, norms, and traditions of Western society produce a “rape culture” where rape is tolerated and accepted, a culture which includes the institutional treatment of sexual violence (Fraser, 2015; Ward, 1995). Feminist studies on rape culture have been measured largely through observation studies at the macro-level, with analyses of the legal aspects of sex crimes, policies toward sexual assault, the treatment of sexual assault victims, and how rape has been portrayed in the media (Koss, 2000; Randall, 2010; Ward, 1995). Rape culture has been maintained and sustained through the widespread acceptance of rape myths, which have been defined as: “Arguments that tend to attribute responsibility to the victims, exonerate the perpetrators of rape and trivialize the severity of a rape

experience, but which are not supported by empirical evidence” (Anderson & Doherty, 2008, p. 9).

In her groundbreaking book, *Against Our Will* (1975), Susan Brownmiller identified some common rape myths, such as “no woman can be raped against her will,” “she was asking for it,” “if you’re going to be raped, you might as well relax and enjoy it” and “all women want to be raped” (pp. 312-313). Burt’s (1980) “rape-myth acceptance scale” identified other common rape myths, such as “a woman who goes to the home or apartment of a man on their first date implies that she is willing to have sex,” “in the majority of rapes, the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation,” “any healthy woman can successfully resist a rapist if she really wants to,” and “if a girl engages in necking or petting and she lets things get out of hand, it is her own fault if her partner forces sex on her” (pg. 223). Although Brownmiller’s and Burt’s work is dated, rape myths and rape culture persist today (Fraser, 2015). Rape myths serve to normalize rape and sexual violence, and allow for victim-blaming to occur when women experience sexual violence. For example, when a woman is raped she is often questioned with invasive interrogations about why she was with the perpetrator, her past sexual history, whether or not she had consumed alcohol, and what she was wearing at the time of the incident, implying that if she had not engaged in certain behaviours she would not have been raped (Deming, Covan, Swan, & Billings, 2013; Page, 2008; Randall, 2010;). Rape myths perpetuate the idea that under certain circumstances nonconsensual sex is not a crime, and can sometimes be enjoyable for women. Rape myths belittle sexual violence and allow survivors of sexual assault to be seen as “not really” victims, especially when rape myths become prominent beliefs in society. In “Compulsory Sexuality and Lesbian Existence,” an essay originally published in 1980, Adrienne Rich (1996) discusses men’s control over women through sex and sexuality, calling it “compulsory heterosexuality.” She argues that men use compulsory heterosexuality to dictate what is expected of women, and those who deviate from this expected behaviour – for example, lesbians - are punished. Rich explains the components of compulsory heterosexuality as an institution, which include denying women their own sexuality, forcing ideas of male sexuality upon women, and exploiting their labour to control their “produce” which includes their offspring and more broadly “marriage and motherhood as unpaid production” (p.132). When women do not fulfil these prescribed “female” roles, they are

punished through various means. Rape myths can also be understood within this context as a control mechanism to force women to comply with these roles – if a woman has a “promiscuous” reputation and is sexually assaulted, she can be blamed for her own victimization because she failed to meet the imperative of monogamous sexuality, for example. These societal beliefs about sexual assault are public issues that can only be changed by a shift in a re-shaping of institutional beliefs regarding women, sexuality, and men who commit sexual assault. With regard to revenge porn, which is now becoming more of a public issue than a personal trouble, part of the reason it is happening on such a large scale is arguably because of Western society’s widespread negative views on women and sexuality (Valenti, 2009) and its prizing of male privilege.

Studies show that attitudes toward rape affect the following: the likelihood of a rape victim reporting the rape and of an investigation into a rape allegation, that a victim will be believed, and the likelihood of a conviction (Clay-Warner & Burt, 2005; Du Mont, Miller, & Myhr, 2003; Page, 2008; Randall, 2010; Spohn & Tellis, 2011). Du Mont et al.’s (2003) study of 186 female sexual assault victims in Ontario revealed that women were three and a half times more likely to report a rape to the police if they sustained physical injuries. Beichner and Spohn’s (2012) study had similar findings. In their study of 666 sexual assault cases, they found that police were more likely to file charges when a victim sustained physical injuries and the perpetrator used weapons such as a knife or gun. Victims have internalized the idea that unless their rape conforms to stereotypical ideas about rape, it must not have been “real rape” and they know they are less likely to be believed if they do not fit the “genuine victim” stereotype. This caricature is supported by Fraser’s (2015) article on rape culture. She argues that women who do not display physical injuries, who have previously been sexually active, and who had known the assailant prior to the assault are less likely to be believed by police. Frequent complaints of unsympathetic treatment by rape victims can be linked to attitudes and beliefs held by members of the criminal justice system that tend to place responsibility and blame on the victim. Furthermore, Spears & Spohn’s (1996) study found that prosecutors were less likely to file charges if there were questions about the victim’s “moral character” or concerns about her behaviour at the time of the sexual assault. Judgments about a woman’s moral character and previous sexual history are reflective of rape-myth acceptance (Burt, 1980), which shows how institutionalized beliefs and attitudes about

rape affect how rape victims will be treated by the criminal justice system, and by society as a whole. More recently, Beichner and Spohn (2012) found that when the sexual assault victim had a previous criminal record, police were less likely to file charges. Similarly, the public often makes moral judgments about a woman's character in revenge porn cases, where a woman who willingly would take a naked photo of herself is seen as "deserving" of being victimized by revenge porn. For example, a female teacher at a Christian school in Ohio was suspended after becoming a victim of revenge porn. The school administration decided that retaining a teacher whose naked photos could be found online would "compromise" the Christian learning environment of the school (Matyszczyk, 2013). Furthermore, the *San Antonio Current* reported on an interview with the administrator of a revenge porn website. The administrator was quoted as saying,

Do they [the victims] deserve it? Absolutely, and judging by the comments to your articles, your readers seem to think so, too. If you are stupid enough to take naked pictures and send them to some boy (or girl), then that is your problem. ... You deserve anything that happens to you when you do something as dumb as that. (Barajas, 2013)

A societal shift needs to occur in order for women who have been victimized in a sexual way to be taken seriously and sympathetically. To build on Mills' theoretical formulation, sexual crimes against women should be seen as a public issue rather than a personal problem, and should be about male rather than female behaviour.

Feminist theories of rape have reinforced a critical understanding of rape as "the result of enduring, deep-rooted social traditions in which males have dominated nearly all important political and economic activities" (Ellis, 1989, p. 10). Many feminist theorists view rape as a direct function of the degree to which women are politically and economically at a disadvantage in relation to men, and that rape serves to intimidate women and restrict them to "safe" environments under the "protection" of men. These restrictions on women then function to keep women from succeeding occupationally, economically, politically, and outside of confined spaces which men have control over (Ellis, 1989).

Brownmiller (1975) also theorized on this function of rape as a control mechanism. She reflected on cultures that use rape as a way in which to "keep women

in line” through such examples as the threat that if women “disobey” their fathers or husbands and leave the private sphere, they deserve to get raped. While it is unlikely that many people in Western culture today really believe that women deserve to get raped for disobeying their father or husband, this idea reflects modern rape myths, such as the idea that if a woman is walking alone at night and is raped, she is at fault for being alone at night. This also reflects common ideas about revenge porn victims; for example, if a woman takes naked photos of herself it is her own fault if the photos end up online. These threats keep women “in line” with societal values regarding female sexuality and conservatism – women are supposed to be “pure” and dress conservatively (Valenti, 2009). Revenge porn is a threat against women who ignore this value of modesty. As Brownmiller (1975) stated, “as man conquers the world, so too he conquers the female” (p. 289).

Feminist explanations of rape focus on rape as an act of male domination over women rather than rape as an act of sex. When men commit acts of rape, it is not simply out of an uncontrollable urge for sexual gratification but rather motivated by desires of power, a hatred of women, and the need to reaffirm stereotypical gender roles that place women under the control of men (Chapleau & Oswald, 2010; Ellis, 1989; Day, 1995). Chiroro et. al (2004) conducted three studies involving the same survey with three different groups of men. Their first group was 113 males at a German university, their second group was 114 males living in Southeast England, and their third group was 83 males at five different Zimbabwe colleges. Chiroro et al. (2004) elaborated on this idea of rape as a function of control/dominance over women. They found that men have a motivation to exert power over women through sex, and that being dominant over a woman is sexually stimulating for men. The men in their study indicated that they would enjoy “getting their way” in a rape situation. This suggests a desire to have sexual dominance over the victim, rather than rape as the “loss of control” due to being too sexually aroused to stop. Similarly, in many revenge porn websites, the men who upload naked photos enjoy the power they have over the victim and the amount of suffering they are able to inflict.

In the early 1990s, feminist language began to shift to what many feminists now consider a “post-modern” view (sometimes referred to as “fourth wave” feminism), which

became a prominent feminist position among feminist scholars by the end of the 1990s (Cameron, 2005). With internet access more widely available, feminists have recently been able to use social media and the internet as a means of activism. For example, Laura Bates created the “Everyday Sexism” campaign, which encourages women to share their stories of street harassment, body shaming, and general sexism they experience in their everyday lives (Cochrane, 2013). Within one year of beginning the project, it became “so successful that it was rolled out to 17 countries,” with “tens of thousands of women worldwide” participating in the campaign (Cochrane, 2013).

While post-modern/fourth wave feminism became more prominent, it did not necessarily replace older waves of feminism – the different waves of feminism are not a linear process where fourth wave feminism would completely replace tenets and strategies of the third wave, for instance. Different approaches to feminism “are better seen as representing tendencies in feminist thought which have historically overlapped and coexisted” (Cameron, 2005, p. 483). Post-modern feminists hold the view that gender is not static, and there are no real differences between genders other than that which is socially constructed. A dominant view in everyday life in today’s culture is that there are two genders – male and female – that are determined by one’s biological sex. Gender “is the sense of being appropriately masculine or feminine” (Crawley, Foley, & Shehan, 2008, p. 41).

Post-modern feminists view gender as “performative” – people “perform” in a way that reflects dominant discourses on what is expected of their gender. This language of gender performance started to gain prominence in the mid-1990s with Judith Butler’s concept of performative gender, and it continues to hold significance to post-modern feminist scholars today (Cameron, 2005). Women act “female” based on hegemonic discourses regarding femininity. In the same way, those who are biologically male perform masculinity, dictated by hegemonic discourses of masculinity.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was first proposed in 1982 in an Australian study regarding social inequalities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This concept gained popularity and prominence in feminist studies criticizing male authority and dominance in society. Today, some feminists argue that hegemonic masculinity is

the source of female oppression (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Schippers (2007) explains hegemonic masculinity and femininity as follows:

Hegemonic masculinity [comprises] the qualities defined as manly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to femininity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. Given the centrality of the relationship between masculinity and femininity in the new definition, we now have conceptual space for hegemonic femininity. Hegemonic femininity consists of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (p. 94)

Hegemonic masculinity influences how men should act, focusing on characteristics that guarantee men's power in society. For example, masculinity culture values "physical strength, the ability to use interpersonal violence in the face of conflict, and authority" (Schippers, 2007, p. 91). For hegemonic masculinity to survive, women must occupy the desired role of femininity, which "includes physical vulnerability, an inability to use violence effectively, and compliance" (p. 91). If women become too much like men by holding hegemonic male characteristics such as physical strength and authority, they threaten male authority. To maintain hegemonic masculinity, women who deviate from femininity must be socially punished. For example, when women embody characteristics such as "being promiscuous, 'frigid', or sexually inaccessible, and being aggressive" (Schippers, 2007, p. 95), they are refusing "to complement hegemonic masculinity in a relation of subordination and therefore are threatening to male dominance" (p. 95). Therefore, these women must be "contained" and sanctioned for their divergent actions. They are labelled a "'slut', a shrew or 'cock-teaser', [or] a bitch" (p. 95), which are considered undesirable labels and carry a social stigma. The unfortunate paradox regarding expectations for female behaviour is that females are expected to avoid being "slutty" while also avoiding being a "cock-teaser."

Males and females are trained from birth how to perform their assigned gender. Girls are taught from a young age to behave in certain ways – they are supposed to be "petite and thin, soft spoken, [and] demure" (Crawley, Foley, and Shenan, 2008, p. 45). Boys are taught that having large muscles, confidence, and being aggressive are appropriate male characteristics. The popular phrase "boys will be boys," can be used to

justify young boys' misbehaviour to a degree without consequence because exerting one's masculinity often means acting aggressively. However, it is important to note that misbehaviour, especially sexualized misbehaviour, by Black or Aboriginal boys often does not receive this same treatment. While young white boys' misbehaviour is dismissed, racial minorities typically receive harsher treatment by school authorities and the criminal justice system due to a long history of institutional racism and minorities being seen as "hypersexual" beings whose behaviour needs to be corrected (Pascoe, 2011). When young boys grow up to be aggressive men who do not respect female bodies or consent, we often have hegemonic masculinity to blame. Of course not every young boy grows up to be aggressive or exemplify all characteristics of hegemonic masculinity – there are many other characteristics that men embody. However, some of the most celebrated men in society are athletic sports stars or movie stars who fulfil the hegemonic masculine role, and are often idols for young boys to look up to, for example the recent highly publicized fight between Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao. Both men are famous boxers with millions of fans, and are considered "the best two fighters of a generation" (Andrew, 2015). Leading up to the fight, fans frequently talked about the upcoming "fight of the century" (Wagner-McGough, 2015) with excitement, cheering for their favourite fighter to win. However, there was relatively little discussion or criticism of the troublesome personal lives of both fighters. Mayweather has a long history of domestic violence, with the first domestic violence incident reported in 2001 (Scott, 2015), yet fans are willing to push that aside (or agree with) due to his boxing accomplishments. Furthermore, Pacquiao has made public statements condemning gay marriage and as a politician has fought against sex education, contraception, and family planning (McCalmont, 2015; Moskovits, 2015), which again, fans seem to push aside because of his talents. This unwavering widespread support for Mayweather and Pacquiao contributes to a culture where problematic actions are acceptable when committed by men who are appropriately masculine.

Revenge porn can be understood within the context of hegemonic masculinity. Young boys are told "boys will be boys" when they misbehave, and young girls are told that if a boy is picking on them, it is because he likes her. As children grow up believing these phrases, male aggression against females is belittled because aggressive males are only "acting like men," and females who experience aggressive behaviour from men

may think it is a sign of affection. For example, two incredibly popular book series, the *Twilight* series and *Fifty Shades Of Grey* romanticizes and normalizes stalking, coercion, and extreme jealousy in dating relationships. Bonomi et al. (2014) conducted a survey of 714 females aged 18-24 at a large Midwestern university, where they found that women who had read *Fifty Shades of Grey* were more likely to have been in abusive dating relationships. The authors suggest that because the book promotes abusive dating behaviours as desirable and normal, women expect these behaviours from their partners as a normal part of relationships. When men post non-consensual naked photos of their exes on the internet, beliefs about masculinity can be used to justify their behaviour (Dewey, 2015). Furthermore, women who take and send naked photos are deviating from the desired femininity that is expected of them. Women are not supposed to act like “sluts,” and taking naked photos is often seen as “slutty.” As Schippers (2007) comments, when women deviate from desired femininity, they must be punished to maintain the social order. Hence, when a woman ends a relationship with a man, she threatens his masculinity. One facet of masculinity culture is male entitlement to women – young boys are brought up with the belief that if they do everything “right” they will have a happy life with a beautiful woman who loves them (Kimmel, 2013). A woman leaving a relationship shatters this illusion of entitlement, which can prompt a man to retaliate against this “wronging” of him. Kimmel (2013) comments on “getting back” at an ex as part of his discussion of male violence against women. He argues that at its extreme, men “kill their partners when they feel their sense of entitlement and power is thwarted” (p. 176). Kimmel also argues that men who commit violence against women do so because the woman is not acting “appropriately” or the man does not feel powerful like he is “supposed to.” Hegemonic masculinity is often taken to mean that it is acceptable to “act out” when one’s sense of manhood is threatened.

Feminist theories have come under scrutiny from some empirical researchers. Some scholars believe that because feminist theory largely relies on inductive research, it is not a valid theory for explaining how and why crime exists/happens (Ward, 1995). Much feminist research relies on inductive, qualitative research, when the researcher reflects on emerging themes in the data rather than certain predetermined themes or indicators being sought out in a dataset. The validity of feminist theories and methods then depends on the standards and perspectives of the critic. While there is no standard,

universal way to operationalize feminist theory within criminological research, feminist researchers Stanley and Wise (1983) maintain that there are three tenets of feminist theory that can be used to guide feminist research: (1) that women are oppressed; (2) that the personal is the political; and (3) that research must have a feminist consciousness that is concerned with the basic implications with feminism itself. These three facets of feminist research are still adopted by feminist researchers today, often with modifications regarding race/class as intersections affecting levels of female oppression (Ardovini, 2015). Feminists accept the idea that all women are oppressed on the basis of their own experiences and the experiences of other women (Ardovini, 2015). The “personal is the political” mantra, perhaps one of the most famous arguments of feminism, was discussed above.

The third feature of feminist research – feminist consciousness – concerns “the new understanding that women gain through consciousness-raising activities” (Stanley & Wise, 1983, p. 54). Consciousness-raising attempts to showcase the lived experiences of marginalized populations, using their own interpretations of reality and valuing their perspectives rather than imposing a universal “truth” over them (Ardovini, 2015). It acknowledges that there are “different truths because there are many women and cultures with many different points of view that were and are silenced by mainstream research methods and theories” (Ardovini, 2015, p. 53). Feminist researchers believe that women and minorities have valuable experiences, concerns, and perspectives, which have traditionally been ignored by other researchers. Research is valued by social scientists, and once the perspectives of minorities are “given” value, their experiences become validated and are taken seriously (Ardovini, 2015). For example, if a woman experiences a particular hardship in her own life, one may think her experiences are purely anecdotal and unimportant. However, when a researcher conducts a study on this particular issue and finds it is common among a group of people, the lived experiences of this group become validated and considered “real” by the research community. Feminist consciousness-raising is concerned with giving voice to these marginalized populations who otherwise have their voice taken away from them – “the researcher is a vehicle for which the participants are granted voice” (Ardovini, 2015, p. 54).

Feminist theories and feminist research on sexual crimes tend to follow the three guidelines listed by Stanley and Wise (1983). They acknowledge that women are oppressed by widespread sexual assault, sexual harassment, and very recently, revenge porn. They acknowledge that society's rape culture is oppressive and that a cultural movement of widespread social and policy change is necessary in order to achieve full equality (Anderson & Doherty, 2008). Furthermore, feminist research on rape culture has been "almost solely responsible for creating social and political awareness about rape" (Ward, 1995, p. 36). It has also assisted in passing laws to provide more protection to rape victims, such as rape shield laws that forbid discussion of a rape victim's past sexual history in court (Held & McLaughlin, 2014; Koslow, 2013). Similarly, with my current thesis research, I acknowledge that women are oppressed through revenge porn as well as society's views toward revenge porn and its victims. In keeping with C. Wright Mills' vision, I also address and acknowledge through this research that the "personal" problems that come with being victimized by revenge porn are political and societal issues that can only be truly tackled through widespread collective action socially and politically. Finally, this research is guided by my own feminist consciousness as my goal is to raise awareness of the "public issue" of revenge porn that victimizes and oppresses women in a widespread systemic way.

Feminist theories therefore are not theories that can typically be "tested" in the conventional sense of studying tangible matter. While statistical studies provide context, numbers, and a background to feminist issues, qualitative studies provide in-depth thick descriptions of women's lived experiences and assist with consciousness-raising (Ardevini, 2015). Many researchers prefer qualitative methods when conducting feminist research for this reason. These feminist researchers stress the importance of studying women in their natural contexts, and understanding women's experiences within the larger context of living in a patriarchal society that holds patriarchal values (Ward, 1995). They prefer to "work with women in the real world, in familiar situations which reflect everyday life, sacrificing the "control" necessary for a well-designed experiment, but achieving a study which has meaning and value for the participants" (Ward, 1995, p. 12). These researchers understand the value and importance of quantitative studies being significant enough to accept or reject hypotheses, but also understand and realize the value that understanding a woman's lived experience can bring. The two types of data

collection are both important to feminist research, just in different ways. My goal with the current research project is to understand women's experiences as revenge porn victims within the larger context of living in a patriarchal society, by gaining insight into their lived experiences and making sense of those experiences on a collective scale. For that reason, this research employed in-depth interviews with female victims of revenge porn, which are explained in the following chapter about the methodology used for this project.

Chapter 4.

Methodology

This chapter provides information on the qualitative methodology used in this project. The sections of this chapter explain sampling and recruitment, participant characteristics and the interview process, ethical considerations, and data analysis.

Introduction

In this qualitative, interview-based study, I sought to understand the experiences of revenge porn victims and how revenge porn has affected their lives. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 revenge porn victims. Participants had to be 19 years of age or older and had to self-identify as victims of revenge porn. This approach resulted in having a broad range of revenge porn cases ranging from victims experiencing a widespread web release of naked photos, to photos being shared on a smaller scale (such as with their social circle), to being threatened or blackmailed with naked photos. Although there was a broad range of revenge porn experiences among victims, common themes and patterns were found among all participants.

Sampling and Recruitment

Using purposive sampling, I began looking for participants to discuss their experiences as revenge porn victims in February 2014 for a course project. With purposive sampling, participants “are selected on the basis of known characteristics, which might be socio-demographic or might relate to factors such as experience, behaviour, roles etc. relevant to the research topic” (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003, p.

108). With this project, the selection criteria were that participants needed to be adults who self-identified as victims of revenge porn. Having no idea where to find these participants, I typed “revenge porn” into Google’s search engine. One of the first results linked to endrevengeporn.org, an organization dedicated to helping victims and advocating for revenge porn criminalization. After browsing through the website, I learned that the website founder was a victim herself. The website had a “contact us” form, which I used to send a letter to the website administrator asking if she would be willing to do an interview with me. I did not hear back from her, however two of End Revenge Porn’s victim advocates (also victims themselves) messaged me back saying they would be happy to do interviews with me.

After completing interviews with the victim advocates at End Revenge Porn, one of them offered to put me in contact with other victims she had worked with, which is known as snowball sampling. Snowball sampling “involves asking people who have already been interviewed to identify other people they know who fit the selection criteria” (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003, p. 94). The victim advocate sent an e-mail on my behalf briefly explaining the purpose of my thesis and asked if anyone who would be willing to participate to let her know. After these women indicated that they wanted their e-mail addresses passed on to me so I could contact them, the victim advocate sent me copies of her correspondence with them. She put me in contact with a total of 31 women. I contacted three of them to do interviews for the course project I was working on (which had been granted ethics approval through the course instructor). However, due to waiting for ethics approval from Simon Fraser University for my thesis research, six months passed before I was able to contact the rest of them to conduct interviews for my thesis. Once ethics approval was received from the university, e-mails were sent with a detailed information sheet about the project to each of the remaining potential participants.¹⁵ Of those participants, ten responded and agreed to be interviewed.

Two of the participants were friends of mine who knew about my research interests. They both contacted me and offered to do an interview about their experiences

¹⁵ See Appendix D for this informed consent document/information sheet.

with revenge porn. My final participant was a friend of a friend who also knew about my research. She contacted me through *Facebook* and offered to do an interview.

Participants all identified as being in a heterosexual relationship with the partner involved in the revenge porn. The exclusion of same sex couples was not intentional, as I did attempt to find victims of any gender identity or sexual orientation. However, I was unable to find any participants who identified as LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, queer/questioning) with the sample I was given and out of my own acquaintances. The limited range of participants undermined the potential for a richer, intersectional approach, which would highlight multiple oppressions as well as a wide range of resources and strategies. In retrospect, I would have explicitly asked participants about their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Certainly, future research on the impact of revenge porn should further explore these factors by covering a much wider range of sexual relationships including LGBTQ relationships.

Because of the location barriers, it was not possible to meet or interview any participants in person. Participants I did not have a previous relationship with were first contacted through e-mail, and interviews were then scheduled if the participant agreed to an interview after reading through an information sheet about the study. The initial “introduction” was electronic communication, so the construction of this initial introductory e-mail was especially important. Of particular note, I made sure to sign the e-mails with my full first name. On the surface this may not seem all that important, but given the sensitive nature of the research, it was necessary to sign e-mails as “Samantha” rather than “Sam,” the name I typically go by. The prospective participants had all been victimized by revenge porn, typically by a man who wanted to hurt them. Much like how female sexual assault survivors do not feel comfortable discussing their experiences with males due to the likelihood of judgment or secondary victimization (Campbell et al., 2001), I expected that these women who had been victimized by men with revenge porn might not want to talk to a male researcher about their experiences. Since “Sam” is a gender-neutral name, but most frequently associated with men, I was worried that some of the victims I contacted would assume that I was male, which might make them uncomfortable or deter them from granting an interview. With this in mind, I

signed all e-mails as “Samantha” to ensure that the women being contacted knew that I was female.

Participants and interviews

There were three stages of interviewing for this project. The first stage involved five interviews conducted in February and March of 2014 for a class project for CRIM 862: Qualitative Research Methods at Simon Fraser University. Minimal risk approval was granted from the course instructor, and participants were interviewed about their experiences as revenge porn victims to gain an understanding of the effects revenge porn can have on victims. These five interviewees gave consent for their interviews to be used for this thesis project: AnnMarie, Anisha, Tasha (pseudonym), Gloria (pseudonym), and Maria (pseudonym).

The second stage of interviewing occurred between September and October of 2014. By this time, official minimal risk approval for the thesis project had been granted through Simon Fraser University’s Office of Research Ethics. Eleven interviews were conducted during this period (Hannah, Dawn, Karla, Nikki, Claire, Josephine, Sacha, Regina, Piper, Emma, Sarah – all pseudonyms except for Nikki). Seven of these interviews were used for a class project for CRIM 864: Advanced Qualitative Research Methods at Simon Fraser University. All participants interviewed during this time frame gave consent for the interview data to be used for both the thesis and class project.

The third stage of interviewing occurred in January 2015. Two interviews were conducted (Jessica, Judith - pseudonyms), putting the total number of people interviewed to 18.

Participants were aged 21-54, and the average age was 31 years old. Four participants lived in Canada, thirteen lived in the United States, and one lived in England (though is originally American). Because the focus of this project is on personal experiences and generic social processes, physical location was not seen as an important factor contributing to the experience of being victimized by revenge porn.

However, location was noted to contextualize experiences with law enforcement and the legal system.

This table provides information on participant characteristics including age, profession, their geographical location, the date the revenge porn happened, and the type of revenge porn experience.

Table 4.1 Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Profession	Location	Date	Type of revenge porn
Anisha	24	Undergrad student/Desktop Manager at a gym	New Jersey	2011	Posted online
AnnMarie	43	College professor	Maryland	2010	Posted online
Claire	48	Business	United Kingdom	2013	Shared with others; attempted to post online but posting failed
Dawne	24	On disability	Oregon	2009-2010	Posted online
Emma	44	Instructional Technology	South Carolina	2011	Posted online
Gloria	22	Tattoo artist	Arizona	2011	Posted online
Hannah	22	Bartender	Alberta/British Columbia	2013	Posted online
Jessica	22	Grad student	Ontario	2013	Shared with others; not posted online
Josephine	Early 40s	Former politician	United States	2012	Blackmailed/threatened; not posted online
Judith	25	Grad student	Quebec	2014	Blackmailed/threatened to share with her professors; not posted online
Karla	23	Law student	New Brunswick	2010	Sent to university professors; not posted online
Maria	25	Undergrad student	California	2008-2009	Posted online
Nikki	34	Paralegal	California	2010	Posted online
Piper	21	Waitress/retail	New York	2013	Posted online

Name	Age	Profession	Location	Date	Type of revenge porn
Regina	54	Former school superintendent; current law student	Illinois	2012	Posted online
Sacha	26	Food sciences	Virginia	2012	Shared with co-workers and then posted online
Sarah	34	Mental health	Nevada	2009	Posted online
Tasha	33	Online retail company	Pennsylvania	2013	Posted online

Interviews were conducted through telephone phone calls, Google Hangouts, Skype, or FaceTime. Google Hangouts uses an internet connection to call another person's telephone, so the participant would talk on the telephone while I talked using the microphone on my computer. FaceTime is an Apple-exclusive video chat feature where two people who use Apple devices (Macbook computers, iPads, iPhones) can chat with each other using a data connection through a cell phone company or an internet connection. The video quality is much higher than a Skype video chat. Skype video chats are similar to FaceTime, where two people can do a video or voice chat through an internet connection. All of the Skype interviews were voice-based, with the exception of one text-based interview. One participant did not feel comfortable speaking out loud about her experiences, so at her request the interview was a text-based real-time Skype chat. The data collected from this interview were similar to the data collected in other interviews, so using a text-based interview structure did not seem to hinder the interview, though the absence of nonverbal cues meant it was not possible to make note of silences or tone of voice.

Three interviews were done through FaceTime, which allowed a face-to-face aspect where facial expressions could be noted. The face-to-face aspect did not seem to change the quality of the interview; however, in two of these interviews it did seem more personal in nature and easier to build rapport. This could have been because one of these two participants is a friend of mine, so there was already a pre-existing relationship that helped make the interview more personal. Additionally, the other interviewee seemed to be a very open person and had been excited to do the interview

for a while, even sending links to newspaper articles about her story during the initial e-mail contact. The third interview done through FaceTime was similar to the Skype and Gmail phone call interviews.

The remaining interviews were done through phone calls, either through a cellphone, Google Hangouts, or the Skype calling feature. These interviews went as well as the three FaceTime interviews discussed above, and the absence of the face-to-face communication did not seem to affect the information provided by the participants during the interviews. The average time length for an interview was around 80 minutes, with the shortest interview lasting 30 minutes and the longest lasting 120 minutes. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants and then transcribed, except for the one interview with the text-based chat. For this interview, the entire conversation was copied and pasted into a word document, which served as the interview transcript, and identifiers were removed for confidentiality purposes. The remaining interviews were transcribed verbatim except for “likes,” “ums,” and other similar filler words, unless the filler word seemed to contribute heavily to the construction of the sentence. For example, when participants got very upset and seemed to be trying to hold back tears, they would say “um” frequently to try and collect themselves before giving a more detailed answer. Leaving these “ums” in helped capture the nature of the participant’s strong emotions at the time.

One recurrent difficulty with participants located all around North America was the different time zones in which everyone lived. As the researcher, I attempted to be as available as possible to ensure the least amount of difficulty for the participant with scheduling. This meant that if a participant suggested a time, unless I was in class or working, I agreed to the times suggested by participants pushing aside personal social activities. Weekend mornings were typically a popular time for participants, since weekends are generally when most people have time off work. Many participants lived in the Eastern Time Zone, which meant that if they requested 10:00 am in their time zone, it was an early 7:00 am interview for me in the Pacific Standard Time Zone. I quickly learned that as a researcher, having a flexible schedule is an asset when conducting a large amount of interviews. This was especially important during the second phase of interviewing where 11 interviews were conducted in a 2-month time frame. There was

one unfortunate time zone mix up where I miscalculated the time difference. I missed the interview due to the mix up, and although an e-mail was sent to the participant apologizing profusely as soon as I realized my error, I did not hear from her again.

A brief timeline of the interview schedule is provided in Appendix A.

Ethical Considerations

As was briefly mentioned, some of the interviews used for this thesis were also used for other previous class projects for two qualitative research methods courses at Simon Fraser University (SFU) (CRIM 862, CRIM 864). These two projects were granted minimal risk approval from the course instructors (Dr. Ted Palys and Dr. Sheri Fabian), although by the time I began the CRIM 864 project, ethical approval of the thesis had already been granted by SFU's Research Ethics Board (REB). When the application for ethical review to Simon Fraser University was submitted, I was contacted by someone from the Office of Research Ethics asking for additional information regarding the CRIM 862 project. I was asked to provide an updated version of the study details, with a section explaining why my research was not higher than minimal risk, which was accepted by her after it was sent. Some highlights from this added section included: (1) Participants recruited from End Revenge Porn would have already spoken with a victim advocate to deal with negative or upset feelings regarding their victimization; (2) Participants from the CRIM 862 project expressed joy and gratitude for being able to take part in a study about something so important to them; and (3) Participants in the CRIM 862 project expressed that they were happy that a researcher was paying attention to the issue of revenge porn, and that "speaking out" about their experiences helped them cope with their victimization. These comments suggest that participants could likely experience an emotional satisfaction from participating in this study. After this set of revisions, the proposed study was approved as a minimal risk project.

Because several of the interviews used for this thesis were also used for other projects, participants were asked if they consented to their interviews being used for both the class projects and this thesis project. All participants said yes.

To protect their identity participants were given the option of their identity remaining anonymous in papers/presentations of the data. However, participants were also given the option to remain public with their identities. After much consideration, although most of the participants expressed they were fine with their first names being used, I decided to assign all of them pseudonyms except for Nikki, AnnMarie, and Anisha (all of which are their real first names). Although participants expressed they were “fine” with their first names being used, during the interviews many of them said they were worried the revenge porn photos would harm them again in the future. As a researcher, I felt that attaching their names to their story had the potential to harm them, given they still had this fear. When participants gave consent to have their first names used, they made statements such as “it’s fine if you use my name,” but did not express an enthusiastic desire to have their name attached to the study. However, AnnMarie, Anisha, and Nikki have all been very public with their stories and have done interviews with newspapers and the media. The world already knows their stories and what they went through, so including their real first names in this study would not result in any potential harm to them. They were all very adamant about having their real names included with the study too, unlike other participants. Furthermore, they are all involved with activist work regarding revenge porn, so including their names in this study is a way of respecting them, their contribution, their advocacy work, and their wishes.

Data Analysis

Transcripts from the 18 interviews were imported into *NVivo* for analysis. Three stages of inductive coding were done to organize and separate the different themes that arose throughout the interviews. Descriptive Coding, also called Topic Coding, summarizes small sections of data with a word or a short phrase (Saldana, 2012). Descriptive Coding was used during the initial read-through of the interview transcripts in *NVivo* to get a broad sense of what the primary themes were during each of the interviews. This coding method helps researchers sort out their data to understand what is going on with the information they have collected. Because this project is exploratory and the purpose is to understand general victim experiences, letting themes emerge from the data rather than imposing certain themes is an appropriate method. There were

roughly twenty descriptive codes that arose out of the interviews, which broadly describe what the participant was discussing. Some of these codes include “employment,” “family,” “friendships,” “law enforcement,” and “abuse.” The second phase of coding involved going into each of these broad descriptive codes and narrowing them down with subcodes. For example, in the code “family,” some of the subcodes that came about were “judgment from family,” “support from family,” or “embarrassing.” The third phase of coding involved reorganizing the themes into main areas that would be discussed in the findings section: for example, categorizing “family,” “friendships,” and “dating,” into one section of “relationships.”¹⁶ The following chapter provides a description and analysis of each of these findings. There were a final total of six overarching themes with many subthemes, which are all explored in-depth in Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion.

¹⁶ An organized list of the final codes used is set out in Appendix B.

Chapter 5.

Findings and Discussion

Each participant is a victim of revenge porn, and the eighteen interviews shared many similarities among participant experiences. Inductive analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in six main themes, which are presented in this chapter. These themes are broken down into subthemes. There is also a discussion of relevant literature throughout this chapter, where particular findings have been contextualized through discussion. Several of these findings shared similarities with other literature on revenge porn, as well as literature on sexual assault, sexism, victim blaming, and intimate partner violence (IPV).

Emotional Effects of Revenge Porn

This section explores how revenge porn takes an emotional toll on victims. Participants experienced a variety of negative mental health effects, such as trust issues, PTSD, anxiety, depression, elevated fear, and loss of confidence and self-esteem.

“I am much more hesitant to give my trust”: Trust issues after revenge porn

Nearly all participants discussed a *general* loss of trust in people after being victimized by revenge porn. Many went from being very trusting to rarely trusting anyone after their trust was betrayed by someone they had loved and cared about. Anisha explained her dramatic shift in trusting others:

I used to be that type of person that would like, I'd meet you and I'd trust you. Like, I trusted you until you proved that you couldn't be trusted. Now I'm the type of person that I don't trust you until you prove that you can be trusted. (Anisha)

She was friends with her ex-boyfriend for ten years and dated him for four years before he cheated on her and posted naked photos of her online after they broke up. Anisha felt that if someone she had trusted so deeply could betray her, it would be best to be a bit more cautious about whom to trust. Emma expressed similar feelings:

Someone that told me that they loved me and wanted to spend their life with me turned around and did everything in their power to hurt me and to make my life miserable... I've traditionally been one of those people who's been like, "I will give you my trust until you damage it," and now I am much more hesitant to give my trust. I think in the last three years, with the exception of my husband, I haven't really formed any new friendships. (Emma)

Likewise, AnnMarie mentioned that she will not answer e-mails from unknown senders or answer phone calls from unknown numbers: "if I get an e-mail from someone, I raise a hairy eyeball to it. I think 'is this person really for real, and what does this person really want?' I do my own little Google investigation and I try to find out as much as I can before I respond." Dawn also feels wary of strangers, and "often expect[s] the worst" from them.

Claire's trust in her fiancé has diminished, as she feels it was partially his fault that his ex-wife had access to the "boudoir photos" of Claire. Her fiancé's ex-wife was visiting at their home because they had children together during their marriage. The ex-wife managed to go through his tablet - which was not password-protected - and found boudoir photos of Claire. The ex-wife attempted to post them on a website from the tablet, but a technical issue occurred and the photos have not appeared on the website. Claire and her fiancé discovered the ex-wife's attempts by looking at a "sent" folder on the tablet. Although the photos have not appeared online, she is worried that they might be posted. Claire is still engaged to her fiancé, but does not feel that she can completely trust him to protect her privacy because she feels he is "too accommodating" to his ex-wife.

Sacha's ex-boyfriend was a co-worker. She is wary of trusting co-workers at her new job in case they have ulterior motives. Now that she has a new job, she does not interact very much with her co-workers, especially men.

At my job now I don't really want to talk to any men or anything 'cause like you just don't know who's capable of, like I didn't think he [ex-boyfriend from previous job] was capable of something like that, and I just don't want to get involved. I mean I guess that's a good thing, I don't need to talk to guys or anything, but it's just I don't want to be close friends, I don't know, 'cause I didn't try to get involved with the other guy either, but it just kind of like happened because he tried to get me to trust him and stuff, so that's not gonna happen again, it's just too much for me. (Sacha)

When people experience a betrayal of trust from someone they had a close, personal relationship with, they are likely to feel emotions of disappointment and hurt (Joskowicz-Jablonek & Leiser, 2013). Joskowicz-Jablonek and Leiser (2013) suggest that receiving a sincere apology is the most effective way to alleviate negative emotions relating to the betrayal of trust, however they do note that the relief is only moderate because oftentimes "the harm is so serious that it cannot be relieved easily" (p. 1809). Being victimized by revenge porn is a serious harm that affects all aspects of victims' lives, so it is understandable why many participants in this study were affected so greatly by betrayal of trust.

"Humiliated, embarrassed, betrayed": PTSD, Anxiety & Depression

Along with loss of trust, many participants experienced more severe and disruptive mental health effects, often being given official medical diagnoses of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. AnnMarie has an official diagnosis of depression and PTSD and she attempted suicide after the revenge porn incident. She became obsessive afterward, making sure that her photos had not resurfaced online, and suffering severe anxiety that disrupted her everyday life and sleep patterns:

I didn't sleep for months... when this happened in 2010, I would pop awake, and I would have to check my e-mail address, my work e-mail

address, my Facebook page, I had this ritual, and I would have to perform this ritual. I'd check eBay,¹⁷ I'd Google my name, you know, the same thing. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7... I had to do these things. I'd do them three or four times, and be able to go back to sleep. But then I'd wake up. Or like in the middle of the day, I'd stop dead and I'd have to do this ritual, I'd have to do it three or four times, and then I'd be okay for a little while. I'd feel like I had to do that, for months. In 2011,¹⁸ when the posting went up... there was nothing I could do, and the police wouldn't help me, I felt so hopeless and so helpless... Someone else had defined my destiny. (AnnMarie)

Her anxiety and depression have lessened, but it took a couple of years for her to feel normal again and to stop constantly thinking about revenge porn. Regina had a very similar experience after her ex-husband released a video of her being raped by him and another man. The video was released to her colleagues at the school board. She spoke through tears as she told her story of the horrible impacts on her mental health:

When the actual video was released, um, well, I can admit now that I was suicidal, and... to let you know how suicidal I was, I didn't tell anybody because I knew if I told anyone that I just wanted to kill myself that they would try to stop me, so I didn't tell anyone because I didn't want anyone to stop me...I lost my reputation... financially I'm ruined, I lost my career, a 25-year stellar career... I had a doctorate degree, I lost everything. So, how did that make me feel? Um, devastated. I just don't even have words to describe it. Horrifying, humiliated, embarrassed, betrayed, I mean, I just never thought that a man I had loved, I married him, he was my husband, I trusted him, how could he do something like this? So I just felt very, very worthless. (Regina)

Bloom (2014) explains that suicidal thoughts are very common among revenge porn victims, especially amongst teenage and younger victims who are more sensitive to bullying. She gives the example of Audrie Potts, a teenage victim of revenge porn – after passing out at a party, three boys took off her clothes and took sexually explicit photos of her, which were shared online. Audrie was harassed and bullied by her peers for three weeks, which led to her hanging herself in her bathroom (Bloom, 2014).

¹⁷ The first time AnnMarie's ex attempted to victimize her with revenge porn involved an eBay auction – he tried to auction a disc containing naked photos of her.

¹⁸ In 2011, another posting went up. A porn website was created with the naked photos of her, which included her name, the name of her town, the name of the college she taught at, and a solicitation saying "hot for teacher? Come get it."

Anisha now suffers from anxiety when she is out in public, especially at night. She has changed her routines and behaviours when she is alone due to strangers showing up at her house looking for sex after seeing photos of her online. Her ex-boyfriend would go into internet chat rooms and pretend to be her. He would send naked photos of her to strangers, give them her home address, and ask them to come over to her house for sex. She talked about one time in particular when a man broke into her house, grabbed her, and tried to choke her. She was able to escape and run away, but now she is very anxious about being alone, even at home:

I'm more cautious of my surroundings of course like, when I go home and I know that I'm by myself and it's dark out I make sure that no one's following me, I make sure that... I like, get in my garage, I turn my car off, I close the garage door right away. I have my alarm on all the time. I keep mace on me. Like, I try to do everything to protect me. If I feel uncomfortable in any situation I make sure someone walks me out... It's life altering 'cause like you realize how cautious you have to be. (Anisha)

Karla discussed how she had never been a nervous or anxious person despite going through a lot of "other difficult circumstances." This changed after the revenge porn incident, as she now gets anxious about a lot of "little things" in her life. Her anxiety is amplified by the fact that her ex-boyfriend still has the naked photos of her, and that she has no control over what he may do with them in the future:

My nerves are still really jumpy, far more so than I ever was before. I'll jump at little things, or I'll get really anxious about things. I never had anxiety before. I've gone through a lot of other difficult circumstances in my life, but I was never anxious. I would worry about them but I never felt panicky in my chest, or like that, and so after that [the revenge porn] happened I felt like it really contributed to how I deal with things that I worry about now, because I get much more panicky and feel like "oh my god, the consequences of this are gonna be earth-shattering," whereas I never really felt like that before, because now it's always in the back of my mind that those pictures are out there somewhere. (Karla)

Nikki and Tasha also suffered adverse mental health effects after victimization. Nikki discussed how her anxiety is tied to worries about her physical wellbeing. Along with the revenge porn, her ex-boyfriend has also made several physical threats against her and her family. She mentioned how she is "very stressed" because of this, and is

often either unable to sleep or sleeps for days. Tasha's doctor has put her on anti-anxiety medication because she was initially unable to concentrate on anything at work after the revenge porn happened. She also has a lot of anxiety in public:

I'm sort of always on edge any time I'm out in public by myself, you know. Because you never know who has seen it or who hasn't seen it, or you know if somebody... looks at you like you look familiar or something like that, you kind of wonder how they know you... You never know who's seen it, which is like the creepiest part about it, like more than anything... So it's really kind of unnerving to be by myself in public a little bit. I usually kind of try to keep my head down and not make a lot of eye contact. (Tasha)

Given that revenge porn shares many similarities with sexual assault and sexual harassment, it should come as no surprise that revenge porn victims experience many of the same effects that sexual assault victims do (Gilboa-Schechtman & Foa, 2001; Littleton & Henderson, 2009). After a sexual assault, many women have high levels of stress, alcohol use, PTSD, clinical depression, and blame themselves for the assault (Miller et al., 2010; Woody & Beldin, 2012). Burgess (1983) calls this "rape trauma syndrome":

The clinical definition of rape trauma... is the stress response pattern of the victim following forced, non-consenting sexual activity. This rape trauma syndrome of somatic, cognitive, psychological, and behavioural symptoms is an active stress reaction to a life-threatening situation. (p. 97)

While revenge porn is not a physical attack on someone's body, it is experienced as an ongoing, visceral attack. It is similar to sexual assault in that the victims have a complete loss of control over their sexuality and body, and a very intimate part of their lives is being shared publicly. Furthermore, while revenge porn may not necessarily be "life-threatening" as Burgess (1983) describes sexual assault, revenge porn can and does have life-altering consequences such as termination of employment, as well as the risk of intimate partner violence. Citron and Franks (2014) argue that revenge porn is often a form of intimate partner violence, so it is likely that revenge porn victims have also experienced abuse from the former partner who posted the revenge porn online.

“He still has that power”: Fear for the future

Various participants reported living in fear that the photos could be posted or used against them again in the future. Jessica mentioned that she and her ex used Dropbox, an online file-sharing service, to store naked photos and videos of them having sex. She is worried that those photos and videos could resurface, not only with her ex using them, but also with staff at Dropbox releasing them. She alluded to the recent celebrity photo leak on August 31st 2014, when a hacker gained access to naked photos of several celebrities and posted them online, and worries about the safety and security of Dropbox if anyone ever hacked the database. She also mentioned how she had also been using SnapChat, a popular photo-sending smartphone app, to send naked photos to her ex. She worries about the security of that app as well. She acknowledged that it may not be very likely for something like that to happen, but she still worries about it.

Sarah discussed how she wants to confront her ex but she feels he has the upper hand on her; that is, he has kept the photos of her and he could re-post them online at any time. She is also worried that confronting him would prompt him to distribute them again more widely, so she has avoided contact with him. Similarly, Karla lives in fear that her ex-boyfriend could distribute the photos more widely than before. He sent naked photos of her to several of her university professors, but did not post them on any websites. To her knowledge, the photos stayed relatively contained. Due to her career aspiration of becoming a lawyer, she is worried that if the photos were posted online, she would be unable to get a job as a lawyer because of a tarnished reputation.

Regina is not worried about her ex re-posting the sex video since it is still online, but she is worried that if she were to publicly speak out against her ex-husband, he would sue her for defamation because she has no “proof” that he posted the video:

So I have to be careful what I say publicly because I don't have proof that it was him, and I think that he could probably sue me for defamation if I publicly started accusing him of doing this stuff, and I don't have any proof to back me up. So then I'm thinking that he could probably sue me, that's another reason why... and you know, that's been very hard also to not be able to tell people what happened. [speaking while crying] My close family knows, my immediate family knows, they know the truth, but it's not like it's something I can just go around telling people like “let me tell you the truth about what

happened” so I mean like, my reputation is ruined and everything and there’s really nothing I can do to speak up for myself, to defend, there’s really nothing I can do to defend myself. (Regina)

It is common for revenge porn victims to live in fear of re-victimization, especially in situations where the poster still has the photos and could re-upload them at any time. Victims also live in fear that they will be recognized in public from their photos online (Bloom, 2014). Many victims go into hiding, delete all traces of social media profiles, evening legally changing their names, switching jobs, and moving to a new address to avoid being re-victimized (Cecil, 2014).

“I didn’t have control over who they were distributed to”: Self-Esteem, Confidence, and Loss of Control

Many revenge porn victims expressed a negative change in their self-esteem and confidence. Hannah mentioned that her confidence and self-esteem were completely gone, stating, “if you were to talk to me 6 or 7 months ago I probably would have been bawling my eyes about it.” Karla discussed how she lost a lot of confidence in herself, especially sexually, after the revenge porn incident:

I felt really strange about my sexuality so I didn’t feel like I could go out in the clubs and be sexy; I just didn’t feel like that was okay. I didn’t feel like I could or I should, or that I would be judged really harshly if I was sexy in any way, shape or form out in public. Even privately, I still feel really weird about being sexy and flirtatious, and stuff like that. Whereas beforehand I was like an expert flirt, never had to buy any of my own drinks in a bar or anything like that, and I could talk to guys no problem and I wasn’t nervous about it. In class I would be social and make friends, but after that I wasn’t as outspoken or outgoing, I was just more reserved and more conservative and more private, so I think that affected my confidence, certainly. (Karla)

Sarah felt that the naked photos stripped her of her femininity and affected how she viewed her body. She said the photos were extremely unflattering and that “nobody should ever be photographed from that angle” which her ex used against her to make her feel like she was not “doing a good job of being a woman.”

Part of the reason that revenge porn had such an effect on participants' self-esteem and confidence was the loss of control they experienced after someone else had taken control over such an intimate part of their lives. Josephine discussed how one of the worst parts of the revenge porn experience was that someone had hacked into the private messages of the man to whom she had sent the photos through Facebook messaging. A jealous woman hacked into the man's Facebook account and read through his and Josephine's messages, which included the photos. The invasion of privacy was particularly traumatic:

Those messages to the gentleman happened on a weekend, my personal life, personal time. For me, it seems like a crime for someone to be hacking somebody's computer and grabbing messages and photos and sharing them with other people, and in my case it was particularly bad because I was a public official and it just seems so wrong to do that to anyone. You know, it's your personal, private, e-mail area whether it's a Gmail or a Facebook e-mail, it's private, it's your domain, you know? (Josephine)

Karla also felt that the loss of control was the most traumatic part of being victimized. Her ex-boyfriend was a photographer, so when he took the nude portraits of her, they had a written contract stipulating that she would have final say over what happened with them or if they were to go public. When he violated the contract Karla was left feeling like her privacy had been invaded and that using the photos for a malicious purpose took away her agency:

It's not that I'm ashamed of the pictures or embarrassed, or thought they were unflattering, or thought that they were too explicitly sexual or anything like that, it was the fact that I didn't have control over who they were distributed to and that they were distributed for a malicious purpose. Like it was to faculty members in my program and my [new] boyfriend's faculty,¹⁹ and it was clearly targeted to shine a negative

¹⁹ Karla's new boyfriend was a professor at the university she attended, though he taught in a different department than she was studying in. The photos were sent to professors in Karla's department to embarrass her, and also sent to her boyfriend's department, likely to put pressure on her new boyfriend to break up with her. Karla's ex-boyfriend was a student at the university, but there was no student code of conduct at the time when he sent the photos. A year after he sent the photos, the school implemented a student code of conduct (for unrelated reasons). Had the student code of conduct been implemented before Karla's ex-boyfriend e-mailed the photos, he would likely have been suspended and a designation of incident would show up on his transcript.

light on me, and like, if those same pictures had been put up in an art gallery with my permission, I would have been fine with it, and any member of the public who wanted to could have walked in there and seen them, but to me it was the fact that they were used maliciously and without my consent, and in my name, that was the part that violated me the most I think. (Karla)

The loss of control over one's body is a particularly violating aspect of revenge porn, which is also the case with sexual assault victims. Frazier (2003) found that when sexual assault victims perceived a loss of control, they experienced more distress and trauma. Loss of control can be divided into three categories: past (e.g. loss of control during the sexual assault), present (e.g. loss of control regarding police investigation, loss of control over the recovery process), and future (e.g. control over re-victimization) (Frazier, 2003). It would seem that many participants experienced all three of these types of loss of control. Walsh and Bruce (2011) also examined sexual assault victims' perceptions of control, and found that a victim's perceived loss of control was related to distress.

Coping Mechanisms

Participants reported that they used many positive and negative coping mechanisms to alleviate feelings of distress and other emotions. Generally, participants engaged in more negative coping mechanisms closer to when the revenge porn happened, and gradually shifted to more positive ones as time passed.

“I can admit now that I was suicidal”: Negative Coping Mechanisms

The negative coping mechanisms participants engaged in ranged from behaviours such as avoidance of the situation, depression with suicidal thoughts, excessive drinking of alcohol, and obsessing over the situation. In terms of avoidance/denial, participants would attempt to avoid the situation and pretend it did not exist. Piper and Tasha talked about how they tried to avoid the situation by refusing to think about what happened and not talking about it with others. Judith talked about how she actually moved to another province, partly to get away from her ex-boyfriend. Since

they worked and studied in the same department at the university and he had just returned from a month-long vacation, she did not want to deal with seeing him at work after his return. She was thankful that shortly after the revenge porn experience happened he left on vacation, but during the few months when they still had to work together in the same building, she avoided going to any meetings or activities that she knew he would attend:

I stopped going to [departmental] meetings, I stopped going to my [other on-campus] job meetings because I knew he would be there, but after he left I could start going again, and then as he got back I left... But yeah, I avoided things I would have gone to normally like grad movie nights and things because I knew I could expect to see him there and I wasn't up for that. (Judith)

Two participants had suicidal thoughts, and one participant even attempted suicide. AnnMarie talked about how she attempted suicide when she was at her “absolute lowest,” when she thought she was going to lose her job and that her life had been ruined. Regina contemplated suicide for a while, and did not tell anybody because she was afraid they would try to stop her. Two other participants turned to alcohol to cope with the stress of revenge porn. Sacha said she “drank a lot in the beginning” before moving on to healthier coping mechanisms. Emma did a lot of “self-medicating” to help her deal with what was happening. She mentioned,

That first summer when everything was so intense, oh my god, did I drink a lot. A lot. I was doing a lot of self-medicating just to put myself in a place where I was numb rather than just fearful and angry all the time. (Emma)

Emma also moved on to healthier coping mechanisms after a while, when she came to the realization that if she did not stop drinking she would drink herself “into oblivion.” This is a common coping mechanism for sexual assault victims. Sturza and Campbell (2005) found that sexual assault victims were more likely to take drugs and “self-medicate” to deal with the trauma. Miranda, Meyerson, Long, Marx, and Simpson (2002) conducted a study in which they found support for their self-medication hypothesis, where women who had experienced a traumatic event, such as sexual assault, were more likely to drink excessively than women who had not faced such a traumatic experience.

Another coping mechanism discussed by participants was obsessing over the situation and why their ex-partner would do such a thing, as well as obsessing over whether or not their ex would escalate his behaviour. Participants could not understand how a person could do such a hurtful thing to someone they had loved and trusted, which resulted in an obsession and need to understand why they were victimized. AnnMarie mentioned,

I needed to find out... what his motivation was, and... of course I wanted him to apologize. I wanted to hear remorse, I wanted to know that he was sorry, and I wasn't gonna get that. (AnnMarie)

It seems that what AnnMarie is expressing here is that what she wanted was a restorative justice approach - to sit down and have a discussion with the offender to gain closure. Restorative justice generally involves different parties who voluntarily agree to speak together regarding an issue or offence that one party has committed. "Some restorative ventures are distinctly 'micro', involving two disputants; others are ambitiously 'macro', involving long-standing societal ills such as South Africa's apartheid era, Northern Ireland's Troubles, and Canada's residential- schools legacy" (Christe, 2013, p. 34). In Canada, restorative justice has been used frequently in Indigenous communities (Christe, 2013). Restorative justice has been used in cases of sexual assault to help a victim gain closure. McGlynn, Westmarland, and Godden (2012) discussed sexual assault cases where restorative justice was used. They described how one sexual assault victim found closure from a restorative justice approach:

The victim-survivor had faced the offender in court but "hadn't had the opportunity to tell him how he'd made me feel". In particular, she was prompted to participate in a restorative conference by the judge's comment to the offender that he had "ruined this woman's life" which, unintentionally, shifted power back to the offender. The victim-survivor commented: "this wasn't what I wanted and wasn't how I saw it." During the meeting, the victim-survivor explained the impact of the abuse: "He heard it from me that day, what he'd done to me, not from someone else saying how I might feel." Afterwards, she concluded: "I got complete closure from that meeting." (McGlynn, Westmarland, & Godden, 2012, p. 218)

For AnnMarie, being able to talk face-to-face with her ex-boyfriend about what he did to her and how it made her feel was something in which she very much wanted to

participate. Perhaps in some cases, restorative justice may be a good approach to take in revenge porn cases when victims are feeling the same way as AnnMarie to help them gain closure.

Jessica's ex-boyfriend shared their intimate photos with his friends but to her knowledge he did not share them online. She spent a lot of time obsessing over his character and the kind of person he was when they were dating to reassure herself that it was unlikely he would post the photos online:

I definitely would try to think back to his character, I dated for two and a half years. I would try and think like would he really post them anywhere? Like I said, he didn't like social media, so I kind of just used what I knew about his personality to reassure myself that... it wouldn't happen. (Jessica)

Regina also obsessed over reasons why her ex-husband would drug and rape her (as well as let another man rape her), film it, and send it to her school board where she worked. She did "a lot of research" to figure out his motivations. She believes her ex-husband is a sociopath:

I did some research into "okay, what kind of a man does this?" you know, "what kind of mentality does an abuser have?" and the psychological workings of an abuser, and I truly believe that my ex-husband is a sociopath. (Regina)

The "essential feature" of sociopathic behaviour, also known as antisocial personality disorder, "is a chronic disregard of the rights of others – usually manifested in repetitive violations of others' rights in the form of unlawful behaviors" (Mohl, 2013, p. 2). It is unknown whether or not Regina's ex-husband is truly a sociopath. However Hoertel, Le Strat, Schuster, and Limsoin's (2012) study involving interviews of 43,093 randomly selected United States residents provides evidence to suggest that sexual offenders are more likely to have anti-social personality disorders.

"I wasn't alone": Positive Coping Mechanisms

Participants also engaged in some positive coping mechanisms to deal with their emotions after being victimized by revenge porn. The most common were seeing a

counsellor or therapist, speaking out and helping others, relying on support systems such as family or friends, and focusing on moving on to living a normal life again.

Counselling was very helpful for most participants. Judith talked about how her counsellor was the only person she actually told about what happened, so her counsellor helped her work through her feelings and what was happening. Judith also mentioned that she was in her first year of graduate studies when the revenge porn incident occurred, so the combined pressures of graduate work and the posting incident left her feeling very stressed and defeated. Regina found a counsellor through a women's crisis centre after her friends convinced her to go check out the centre. She thought having a counsellor to talk to was more helpful than discussing it with her friends and family:

The counselling was very helpful because as much as my family and my friends loved me... it's hard for them to understand abuse, and there's just so much judgment people put on the victim, and it's like I could go to my counsellor and it's like she understood. (Regina)

Karla was the only participant who found counselling unhelpful. She went in wanting to have someone to talk to, and she experienced two problems with the counsellor. The first was that in her small town, different ethnic groups tend to be very close-knit due to the size of the town, and when she finally got a meeting with the counsellor, the counsellor was from the same ethnic group as her ex-boyfriend. She said it was extremely likely that the counsellor knew her ex-boyfriend, which made her very uncomfortable. The second problem with the counsellor was that her counsellor gave her "awful advice" telling her to get over her ex:

[The counsellor] just gave me awful advice. She was like "well maybe you just need to let go of your ex. You just need to write a letter about why you're over him and then throw it into the river," and I was like "I am over him. I'm traumatized by him! I'm not emotionally tied to him, I don't wanna be with him, this is not about me not being able to get over him, this is about him violating me," so I never went back for a follow up appointment for that. (Karla)

Another coping mechanism participants expressed was speaking out about their experiences and helping others. Anisha talked about how she believes revenge porn is wrong, and that victims should do everything they can to get the word out about how

horrendous it is for victims. She is now a victim outreach worker for End Revenge Porn, because she wants to help as many victims as she can. Other participants have become involved with policy and legal issues surrounding revenge porn. For example, AnnMarie testified in January 2014 to get a bill passed in Maryland to criminalize revenge porn, which came into effect on October 1, 2014 (Maryland Code, s. 3-809). Claire talked about how a representative in Georgia e-mailed her to ask if she would testify in support of a bill criminalizing revenge porn. She agreed to testify, though she has not heard back from the representative yet. Gloria talked about doing interviews with the press to publicize her story:

It's just kind of been, well just recently actually, just like speaking with press, doing interviews, which is nice, you get to advocate for a cause, and share your story and call attention to it. But... I have comforted people I know on a personal level, who have gone through a similar experience, and really tried to you know, give them advice and help them out in any way I could. That's always nice... It's really just a matter of telling your story and making yourself heard, and you know, showing that it does happen to people, we do exist, there are victims of revenge porn, and we're all around you and we're upset. It's really nice that legislature's starting to be made... On a major level of like shutting down these horrible websites I think it'll be really helpful. I'm really excited. (Gloria)

Since Regina lost her job after the sex video was sent to her colleagues, she had had to figure out a new career path. She decided to go to law school because after being victimized so horribly she wants to be able to defend people who have been wronged and help others as much as she can. She volunteers and does *pro bono* work at her law school to help women who are victims:

There's a legal advocacy group here where I go to law school and I volunteer my time there, I do pro-bono work, I'm assigned to an attorney who does family law, and so I'm her law clerk, and so she handles cases of women who are needing to get divorced and there's been domestic violence. So it's not, it's not necessarily revenge porn specifically, but we work with women who are victims of domestic violence. (Regina)

Relying on support systems was another common coping mechanism. Support systems helped participants feel safe and gave them someone they could count on. Participants expressed a huge gratitude for their friends and family being there to

support and help them out in their time of need. As Dawn mentioned, “just knowing I wasn't alone...helped. And talking to the couple people I felt safe to talk to.” Furthermore, attempting to live a “normal” life and not let revenge porn ruin their lives was another coping mechanism participants used. Regina mentioned how hard it was to begin dating after her ex-husband, but she did not want to live in fear and live differently because of the way she was treated in her marriage. She did not want her ex-husband to feel like he had “won”:

I really just forced myself to do it because there was that part of me of you know, gosh darn it he's not gonna win. You know, if I hide in my house scared to go out, scared to live my life, because I'm scared of being hurt again, then that's exactly what he wants to happen, you know, he's still controlling me. And I was just obstinate enough that I wasn't gonna let that happen. (Regina)

After some initial struggles with dating and trying to trust men again, Regina met a partner she could trust and feel safe with, and is still dating him despite many attempts from her ex-husband to break them up. Karla mentioned she initially refused to leave the house and go out in public after the revenge porn happened. She kept the curtains shut and the windows closed, retreating to her home to hide from the world. She eventually realized her behaviour was not healthy, so she began to try and live a normal life:

Just trying to keep a normal schedule, like I said, getting up in the morning and doing something normal like cleaning or laundry, having coffee and breakfast and getting on with my day... So there was that, and just like, talking about it with my boyfriend at the time when I needed to, but not like over-talking about it all the time, consciously trying to not let it be the only thing I talked about was good. (Karla)

Other positive coping mechanisms included seeking religion, writing, and smiling or laughing about the situation. Josephine became much more involved with her religion after everything happened with the revenge porn, which she found very helpful and therapeutic. Sarah has taken to writing fiction to help herself de-stress, and AnnMarie has written a manuscript of her experiences. Anisha tries to joke about what happened to her to help lighten the mood, by making jokes to her friends such as “oh my god, how does it feel to be friends with a porn star?”

Some of the negative coping mechanisms used by participants in this study are similar to what Cecil (2014) argues are common among revenge porn victims. Cecil (2014) explains that many revenge porn victims often “completely alter their lives” after being victimized. There are no studies examining positive coping mechanisms revenge porn victims engage in. However, mechanisms used by participants such as speaking out and doing advocacy work may be empowering because it gives participants a chance to show resistance against the institutions that continue to allow women to be victimized by revenge porn. When victims have no legal recourse, they may find that speaking out and testifying to get bills passed is the only legal power they have, which could provide a sense of agency when they are actively helping to protect future victims.

“You want your privacy back”: Security and Privacy

Though not necessarily positive or negative, increasing one’s security and privacy was another coping mechanism in which several participants engaged. In Claire’s situation, her fiancé’s ex-wife gained access to his tablet where the boudoir photos of Claire were stored, so Claire and her fiancé now have increased security on all of their electronic devices. They have put passcodes on their electronics, and changed existing passwords on the computers. She explained that after everything that happened to her, “you want your privacy back.” She also keeps the webcam on her computer covered so that people are not able to hack into it and see her. She acknowledged that even though nothing has happened to her involving webcam hacking, she still feels like she needs to increase the security of her electronics to reduce the chances of being victimized again.

Josephine now leads a much more private life, especially since she was an elected official and the media was constantly publishing stories about her and the “alleged nude photos.” Even in her social life she is not as open – she no longer socializes with coworkers so they do not have the chance to get to know her personally. Similarly, Regina has chosen not to discuss much about her personal life with her fellow law students. She did not go to law school until after the revenge porn happened, and now that she is there she does not want anybody to find out what happened or to open up to anyone:

I just, you know, when you come to a new situation like this everybody's getting to know each other like "oh where are you from?" and "oh what did you do before law school? What brings you to law school?" and it's all just part of getting to know each other but for me I just, I just keep it all very superficial. You know, I smile, say "hi," I'm friendly, but I give very little information about my background. I give just enough to answer their questions and then I divert the conversation to something else. Usually what I do is I turn the conversation around and put the focus on them, "Well, where are you from? Well, where did you go to school? Well, are you married?" you know, and I just get them talking about themselves and they usually forget to ask me about myself, but it means that I keep people at arm's length. They don't really know, they don't really know me. (Regina)

A few participants have disengaged from social media as a way to increase their sense of privacy. Piper deleted her *Facebook* account, partially to give herself more privacy, and also because the revenge porn website with her photo included a link to her Facebook profile, so deleting the *Facebook* profile also deleted the link. Nikki still has her Facebook account, but she is very careful about what she posts online about herself. She mentioned that she does not post anything personal, and she never allows herself to be "tagged" at any specific location.²⁰ This is because her ex-boyfriend is still stalking her, and she believes if she were to tag herself at a location, her ex might potentially come to that location to find her. While Gloria has not deleted Facebook, she said she does feel more "suspicious" of Facebook and social media and tries to avoid it as much as possible to "try to stay grounded in the real world" (Gloria).

Citron and Franks (2014) explain how it is common for revenge porn victims to shut down social media pages and avoid going online. Many revenge porn websites include screenshots of victims' social media profiles with the revenge porn posting (Franklin, 2014), which can contribute to offline stalking and harassment. Since social media profiles generally provide information about a person's geographical location, school, or place of employment, deleting these profiles and staying offline can help victims feel safer and protect themselves from being stalked.

²⁰ On *Facebook*, particularly with the mobile app, you are able to use your phone's location services (GPS) to tag yourself and others at nearby places, such as parks and restaurants.

Relationships

Revenge porn affected participants' relationships in all aspects of their lives. In this section I explore how revenge porn affected participants' family life, dating, and friendships.

“You can imagine what this did to them”: Family

Nearly all participants discussed how being a victim of revenge porn affected their family life. Most commonly, family support played a tremendous role in the healing process. Knowing that their family was “on their side” was a ray of light in such a dark time. Anisha discussed how her family came to every court date during the trial against her ex-boyfriend, while her ex-boyfriend barely had anybody show up to support him. Having so many people there to support her while her ex had only one person helped her realize that despite the horrendous situation she had been through, there were people who were always going to be there for her:

The final [court date] in January... I wanted as many people as I could have there, because I wanted to show my ex that you haven't brought me down. Like no matter what you do, you wanted to ruin me, you wanted to bring me down but you didn't. I went into that courtroom and I had... how many people did I have? I had maybe like 16 people sitting behind me. And he had one. And I felt so good. (Anisha)

Sarah also discussed how her parents made her feel better during such a hard time in her life, and told the story about telling her parents what happened:

I'm very close to my stepmom, and I told her right away because I didn't know what else to do, and I told her and she said you know, “we have to tell your dad, we have to let him know what's going on,” and my parents have been amazingly supportive. They came home from the store a few days later, I was living with them at the time, it was right after the divorce, and they came home with one of those little body scrubs, and it was a little duck, and it said “no matter what happens in life you'll still be our little girl.” (Sarah)

Tasha's parents did not understand the concept of revenge porn and the reasons for taking naked photos in the first place, but they offered their unconditional love and

support regardless of their lack of understanding. Her parents are not from this generation. Back when they were younger the concept of sending naked photos to a partner was unheard of. However, her parents felt the same way about her ex that she did, so they stood in solidarity with her when she was victimized by him. In Tasha's words, "they also knew that my ex was really just an asshole."

Revenge porn is often a form of intimate partner violence (IPV) (Citron & Franks, 2014), and Weiss (2013) explains that family support is incredibly important for women who have experienced IPV. It is important for families of victims to be good listeners and give victims the opportunity to speak about their experiences, and provide "words that heal" (Weiss, 2013, p. 243). Weiss (2013) provides examples of four phrases that families can use to show support when speaking to a victim about their experiences. Families can ask, "what is this like for you?" (p. 244) to allow victims to explain exactly how they feel and how they have personally been affected, and can provide statements of encouragement such as "you don't deserve this," "you're in a tough situation," and "you're a strong person" (p. 244).

A few participants did not receive family support. These participants were judged and blamed by their families. Karla was living with her aunt and uncle when the revenge porn happened, and they were unsupportive of her. This ultimately led to her moving out:

I was supposed to babysit later that evening for [aunt and uncle], and they called me and were like 'hey how are you?' and I started crying on the phone and my uncle came over [Karla was at her new boyfriend's house], and he was not supportive of my boyfriend and he was not supportive of me, and he came to the police station with me and the whole time he was just talking to the police officer about this dinner thing he was going to. It was like some fundraising thing, and they were just talking about that the whole time I was trying to write my statement and I was super pissed off about it actually. And then they made me babysit that night, and I was like "okay, sure I guess, whatever." And then they came home and the ex, the ex boyfriend of mine... had actually been texting me, and he was texting me threatening things, as he had been, like at different points throughout the year, and so it was really upsetting me, and I started crying again, and my aunt was just like "well you brought this on yourself," and so I called my new boyfriend... and said "you need to come get me, I'm leaving," and... I never went back to their house again that summer, and I moved in with my boyfriend. (Karla)

Sacha's relationship with her mother became estranged after she was victimized by revenge porn. Her mother was especially angry that some of the naked photos had been taken in their family home, and that the man she had been sending the photos to was a married man. She also blamed Sacha for "embarrassing" their family after a neighbour found out. Sacha and her mother did not speak for five months after her mother found out about the photos:

My mom didn't talk to me for a while, and then she started calling me asking if I was going out to bars during the day and sleeping with people, and yeah she was pretty upset because some of the pictures I took from her house, and other stuff too that he was married, and even taking the pictures she was just like "why, why would you do that?" But now she's better. (Sacha)

Sacha did mention that despite the initial hardships with her family, their relationship has been repaired. There were a few other participants who chose not to tell their families (or select people in their family) about the revenge porn. Gloria was very worried that her family was going to discover the photos of her since her sister-in-law found them only 12 hours after they had been posted. Gloria commented on how she was very happy to have her sister-in-law's support, but that she would like to keep it secret from the rest of her family. Anisha has told a lot of her family about the revenge porn, and as mentioned above many of her family members showed up to the court dates. However, she did mention that she is worried about younger members of her family finding out and would like to keep them sheltered from it. She told a story about her younger cousin and how she is worried about him finding naked photos of her online:

My little cousin... must have been like 11 at the time, and he was like "I'm Google searching everyone, I wanna see what comes up" and I... my chest just dropped. I was like, "you have got to be kidding me, what do you mean you're Google searching?" And I was like "you can't do that, don't do that, it's not a nice thing to do to people"... I didn't know what to say. I didn't want him to Google search me, I didn't know what was going to come up. He was like Google searching images, Google searching everything. I was so scared. And it's like, this is an 11-year old that looks up to me. Could you just imagine, like what they would say? (Anisha)

Jessica has also refrained from telling her family about her ex-boyfriend sharing naked photos of her, and has not mentioned that naked photos of her exist. She believes

that her family would judge her if they found out that she had taken and sent naked photos of herself to anyone. She mentioned that she was talking about SnapChat²¹ with her mother one day. Her mother became very judgmental about the app saying “people send naked pictures on that.” With these little comments here and there from her family, she believes they would not be very sympathetic to her if she told them what happened with the naked photos of her:

Just from what I’ve experienced with my family, so like my older sister has a boyfriend and they do long distance, she’s like super against sending naked pictures. I always really avoid that topic with her because I know she’ll know if I’m lying or not when I say I haven’t done it. She and my parents, and even some of my other friends are all wary... It’s like you’re stupid or, what’s the word I’m looking for? Not slutty, but like, flashy if you’re sending those off, like you set yourself up for this kind of thing. (Jessica)

There have been many recent news stories in the media focusing on families being angry at or disowning other family members for “moral” issues that are often not their fault. For example, the *Mirror* reports that a 27-year-old woman was forced to appear on a television show and take a lie detector test to prove she was still a virgin, otherwise her mother would disown her (Corner, 2015). *The Gaily Grind*, a LGBT news website, reported on a woman who was disowned by her parents because she came out as a lesbian (Garcia, 2013). Fortunately no participants in this study were disowned by their parents for taking naked photos, however it is troubling that there were participants whose parents were even upset with them at all after discovering they had been victimized by revenge porn. Some participants’ parents viewed taking naked photos as reprehensible behaviour, and this appears to be a common view toward sexting (Gong & Hoffman, 2012).

Another way in which revenge porn affected the family lives of participants was through the amount of shame and embarrassment they often felt. While many of them

²¹ Snapchat is a photo-sharing smartphone app. Users can send a photo or video that appears to the recipient for 10 seconds or less, which then automatically deletes itself after being viewed (Poltash, 2013). It has gained popularity in the media as a “sexting app” because the protocol of photos disappearing after 10 seconds gives the illusion of safety. Although photos are deleted from the recipient’s device, the photos are still retrievable from an online server (Murray, 2014).

knew their families supported them, they were still embarrassed about the situation. Emma mentioned that she does not usually care about what others think about her, but she does care about what people close to her think, so the revenge porn was “embarrassing and humiliating.” Nikki also discussed how the humiliation caused her to withdraw from her family life because she was too embarrassed to face them:

So I guess what I’m trying to say is it created kind of a void and a divide between me and my family for a while, but I divided and quarantined myself from pretty much society at that point. Friends, family, enemies, anybody, I just hid, and I was not open like I usually am with anybody that was close to me, including my family, and now that’s starting to change, and it’s beautiful. But the main thing between me and my family was just that I secluded myself from everyone ‘cause I was just so humiliated and I didn’t know what to do.
(Nikki)

Regina talked about how the humiliation was especially poignant in her situation because she came from such a religious, conservative family. She said that the video of her being released was “really hard,” and that “you can imagine what this did to them.” Dawn was also quite embarrassed because of how her parents found out. Her father had been watching a news report on revenge porn, so he checked online to see if Dawn was there: “But [the news report] was in reference to revenge porn sites. So my dad checked and there I was. Awkward.” Her parents were aware of how bad her relationship with her ex had been though, so they were supportive of her despite the initial embarrassment.

The four participants who have children discussed how revenge porn has affected their family life with regard to their children. AnnMarie’s two children are young (six and nine years old), and she has tried to keep them sheltered about the specific details of what happened to her. She did say that since her son is getting older, he is slowly finding out more and more about what happened to her, but for now “he knows that [she] was the victim of a crime, that somebody was really mean to [her], someone did something very mean” (AnnMarie). She also believes that her victimization has made her stronger and that her children will be very proud of her since she chose to stand up for others and take action:

As they get older and they start to learn more of the story I feel as though this is going to be wonderful for them. They will ultimately benefit from me and my experiences and the work that I've done because I didn't let it stop me, you know? And I did fight for the rights of others. My case is closed. Any work that I do now, anything that I do with the law is not gonna help me, my case is done, it's over, my perpetrator walked away with no charges filed, nothing, got off scot free. That's fine because it's closed and I... it's in the past. But now I'm looking towards the future, and my daughter and her safety and my daughter's friends and their safety. (AnnMarie)

Regina discussed how her love for her two daughters contributed to her ultimate decision not to commit suicide. She explained through tears how she wanted to take her own life and had not told anybody about her suicidal thoughts because she knew they would try and stop her. She explained how she could not do that to her family:

I'd say the only thing that kept me from actually going through with it was my parents and my two daughters. Because I knew how devastated, that if I committed suicide how devastating that would be to them. And so ultimately I couldn't do that to them. (Regina)

Two participants were going through custody "battles" at the time, and were worried that the revenge porn would hinder their chances of gaining full custody of their children. AnnMarie tried to keep the revenge porn a secret from her ex-husband²² so that he could not try to use it against her in court:

I know that had my ex-husband caught wind of what was really going on, or if he had any idea what was going on, I'm sure that he would have attempted to take me to court, and you know, attempt to take custody, to get full custody of the children. It was not necessarily a legal thing, like this would have happened, but I know my ex-husband and I know what he would have done, and I also know how crimes of a sexual nature are perceived. (AnnMarie)

Emma's husband was going through a custody battle for custody of her stepdaughter at the time of the revenge porn incident. She was "terrified" that her husband would not win custody because he was now married to someone with naked photos on the internet,

²² Note: AnnMarie's ex-husband is not the ex who posted the revenge porn; the photos were posted by a different man who she had dated.

and “his daughter means everything to him.” She was relieved when he was finally awarded full custody of their stepdaughter, who is thirteen years old and lives with the two of them. Emma also commented on how being a victim of revenge porn has prompted her to try even harder to protect her stepdaughter from ever being victimized in the same way:

My stepdaughter’s amazing, and I think going through this experience has informed me, and now that she’s turned 13 this year she’s going into her teen years, I want to do everything possible to protect her from going through something like this. She asked me for Snapchat the other day and the only thing I could think of was “oh god no.” She’s like “but I’m not gonna do stupid things, I’m not gonna send naked pictures or anything” and I was like “yeah but you don’t understand how stupid you get when you fall in love, sometimes all reason goes out the window and you really shouldn’t have the tools for your own destruction in your possession.” (Emma)

Emma’s statement of “you shouldn’t have the tools for your own destruction in your position” provides an interesting look at the line between agency of the woman and blaming the victim. On the one hand, one can argue that having the ability to take/send naked photos may be setting oneself up for victimization, but on the other hand, at what point does this statement shift to blaming the victim? In any case, Emma’s stepdaughter is only thirteen years old, meaning that if she were to take naked photos of herself with Snapchat, it would legally be child pornography because she is under eighteen years of age.

Claire and her fiancé have kept her experience hidden from his ten-year-old son. Part of the reason for this is because his son’s mother (her fiancé’s ex-wife) is the one who accessed the photos of Claire on her fiancé’s tablet and attempted to post them on a revenge porn website and did send them to Claire’s abusive ex-boyfriend. She is worried that if her soon-to-be stepson were to find out, it would impact his relationship with his father (her fiancé).

“I come with baggage now”: Dating and Romantic Relationships

Participants expressed that revenge porn has also affected their dating and romantic relationships. Their romantic lives were either affected negatively in many

different ways, or positively, primarily through having someone to make them feel safe or who was unconditionally supportive. Some participants experienced both positive and negative effects in their romantic lives.

Emma met her current husband while she was going through the revenge porn experience, and said that because he made her feel very safe and supported, their relationship became serious more quickly than it otherwise would have:

It may have been a more casual relationship for a longer period of time if it were not for those initial fears and pressures that made me feel very safe and comfortable with my husband. (Emma)

Nikki has been physically threatened by her ex-boyfriend, so she now feels “so blessed” that her current boyfriend steps up to protect her. For example, with all of the physical threats, including death threats, that Nikki’s ex made, her current boyfriend bought a gun and “stepped up to the plate” to take her ex’s threats seriously. Felson and Pare (2010) argue that there is a “gun culture” in the Southern United States (where Nikki and her boyfriend live), whereby it is common for men to own a gun for protection after being victims of a violent crime. Although Nikki’s boyfriend was not a victim of a violent crime himself, Nikki and her family have received death threats from her ex-boyfriend, hence her new boyfriend’s need for a gun.

Anisha has been with her current boyfriend for roughly one year, and she commented on how she really appreciates how supportive he is of her. She mentioned how he attended as many of her court dates as he could to show his support. Gloria also mentioned that her boyfriend is supportive and tries to offer as much help as he can. He researches what is going on with revenge porn laws so they remain up to date, and he was the one who found End Revenge Porn, and put her in contact with the victim advocates there. Maria’s boyfriend actually discovered the revenge porn blog her ex-boyfriend had set up, shortly after they began dating. It did not hinder the relationship, and he has been supportive of every decision or legal step Maria has decided or decided not to take.

Revenge porn also had negative effects on participants’ romantic lives. The first of these is the damaged trust that participants now have in romantic partners. After

being victimized so horribly by someone they had loved and trusted, it became very hard for many participants to open up to somebody again. Anisha mentioned that after being victimized by revenge porn, “you’re really skeptical of who you trust” and AnnMarie said that initially after the revenge porn happened, becoming intimate with someone again “was just out of the question.” She tried online dating but then had to stop because she “couldn’t tell [her] story” and “couldn’t open up emotionally.”

Franklin (2014) states that revenge porn victims have “greater difficulty in maintaining or securing future romantic relationships” (pp. 1309-1310). It is understandable that after being betrayed so horribly by someone they had trusted, participants are now wary of opening up to another person. Bloom (2014) argues that victims “feel a fundamental violation of their trust... which damages their future relationships” (p. 245).

Hannah has not dated anybody since she found out about the naked photos of her online. She mentioned, “I haven’t dated since. I’m terrified to get close to anybody because I trusted him and he completely broke that so I would just rather not date. And also I’m not emotionally able to.” Sarah had similar thoughts about dating. She has attempted to date since the revenge porn incident, but has found that she’s been unable to get into a serious romantic relationship because of her ongoing trust issues:

I’m gonna say that between [revenge porn] and my divorce, it has definitely done a number on my ability to trust guys. I have not been in a serious relationship since the one I was in when it happened. So I dated a guy for a couple of months but we were friends beforehand and kind of already knew about it. So I don’t know, I am a bit wary to trust people. (Sarah)

Tasha has also not dated since she discovered the photos of herself online, partially because the photos are still online and she is worried about a new partner seeing them. She believes that if she were to begin dating someone and they saw the photos of her, they would only be interested in a sexual relationship with her, rather than a romantic one:

I haven’t really dated anybody seriously since I broke up with this boyfriend. I’m not really trying to date right now. Given the nature of the pictures, and if somebody were to have seen them, I’m pretty sure

all they would be looking for is a blow job, because there are pictures of me giving oral sex to my ex, and you know like, I'm not gonna do that, I'm not gonna try to date somebody who's seen my pictures because... I'm not trying to have a sexual relationship. If I do have a relationship it's gonna be a serious, committed relationship, and so I haven't really tried to date since those pictures have gone up. (Tasha)

Another negative effect of revenge porn on dating is that victims bring "baggage" to the relationship. Karla talked about how she is hesitant to disclose what happened to her because it is "baggage," but since it is such a big part of her life she feels she should disclose it. Anisha also discussed this notion of carrying baggage, but she does not want to waste time by hiding it. She feels that if someone were to think less of her because of what happened, they were not worth her time to begin with:

It's like baggage. I come with baggage now, and that's something I have to explain. And I have to hope that they understand but it's something that I do bring up the first time, because if you're not interested in dealing with that, and it's a huge deal, you're not interested in dealing with it, then just leave. There's no point in me sticking around. (Anisha)

A few participants commented on how they will no longer take and send nude photos to partners anymore, to protect themselves from being victimized again. While on the one hand they are happy to know they are protecting themselves from a future revenge porn incident, on the other hand they are upset that they can no longer express themselves sexually through sexting. AnnMarie is currently in a long-distance relationship with her fiancé who is heading overseas with the military. She discussed how she really wishes she could exchange "spicy photos" with him while they are apart for so long to help keep the romance alive:

It breaks my heart because I feel that intimate relationships are now permanently damaged; there is certainly a level of trust that will never exist within intimate relationships again. I mean, I'm experiencing that right now with my partner in our relationship during his deployment. This aspect of our sexuality that we both probably would love to explore, we would love to enjoy while he's gone 'cause it's the only way that we're gonna get through this horrible year, we can't. So that's unfortunate but I definitely do like to make it clear that I am an advocate for protecting yourself and for accepting that there is a risk and making wise choices now that we know. (AnnMarie)

Similarly, Jessica is also in a long distance relationship with a new boyfriend, and is now more hesitant to take naked photos. Her previous relationship was long distance, and sexting was how they maintained a sexual relationship while apart; she no longer does this with her current boyfriend. She also mentioned that her new boyfriend does not ask her to send nude photos, while her ex-boyfriend insisted on it.

Another way that revenge porn has undermined participants' dating relationships is that the ex-partner who uploaded the revenge porn has in some cases attempted to contact or "mess with" the participant's new partner. For example, Nikki talked about how she and her boyfriend cannot and do not associate with each other on social media, because she knows that her ex-boyfriend is always stalking her online. When she began dating her current boyfriend, they interacted with each other on Facebook, which alerted her ex-boyfriend that she was now dating someone else. He then began to harass Nikki's new boyfriend to the point where he had to shut down his Facebook page, and now has a new one where he does not associate with Nikki. He does not "like" her posts, "tag" her, or otherwise interact with her on social media. Regina's ex-husband also tried to harass her new boyfriend when she began dating him, attempting to break them up. Her ex sent an anonymous²³ e-mail to her new boyfriend saying "hey, I hear you're dating Regina, and you need to know about her background," and so the e-mail went on to badmouth [her] and say bad things about [her]" (Regina). Her ex-husband also hacked into her new boyfriend's online banking account, and did some hacking with cell phones so he could text her new boyfriend while making it appear that Regina was texting him:

I did start dating a man, and so this man started [receiving text messages] that were very sexually explicit, and so it got to the point where it was so explicit that it was beyond flirting or any of that kind of stuff, and so he called me 'cause he didn't think it sounded like me and I said "no that's not from me, I haven't been texting you," and so I had to tell him about what had happened. (Regina)

²³ The e-mail was anonymous, as her ex-husband's name was not attached to it. However, Regina believes her ex-husband was the sender because the e-mail contained details only he would know, including references to the sex tape that Regina did not know existed at this point.

Emma talked about how she was worried about her relationship with her husband because once her ex-boyfriend found out his name, he began writing about him on the blog where he had the photos of Emma as well as sexually graphic stories about her. Sacha was worried that her ex-boyfriend was going to show up on her wedding day after the wedding registry was posted, but thankfully he did not.

It is common for abusive and controlling men to harass, stalk, or threaten their former partners after they attempt to leave the relationship (Stark, 2007). They attempt to “win” their partner back with these behaviours to show how much they love and care about them. It is likely that participants’ ex-partners “messing with” their new relationships were attempts to prompt the new partner to leave, which may make the abusive/controlling ex-partner believe they still have a chance. Harassing and stalking someone can send the message “it isn’t over unless I say so,” and a victim’s new partner could become fed up or annoyed with constant harassment from their partner’s ex. Fortunately in this study, participants’ new partners were not deterred from the relationship because of behaviour from victims’ ex-partners.

“Caught in the crossfire”: Friendships

Being a victim of revenge porn affected many participants’ friendships, either positively or negatively. In terms of positive outcomes, some participants expressed how their friends were a great source of support during such a rough time. Others talked about how they found out who their “real” friends were, which has both positive and negative connotations. While they did find out who their true friends were, others were not there for them in their time of need. Anisha commented on this; she said she would “rather have like five good friends than to have 20 friends that don’t really care.” Regina also experienced this, where some of the people she thought were her friends were not there for her when she needed them:

I’ve learned going through this... that you really find out who your friends are. There are people who would be supportive of me, and so in my time of need... in my darkest hour, they were not there for me. And then there is other people who were more on the peripheral of my life, who I didn’t necessarily know real [sic] well, and actually some people who were even strangers to me, and those people stepped up and were really there for me. (Regina)

Piper talked about how one of her close friends discovered the naked photo of her online, and called her to tell her she needed to get to a computer immediately. She also had a friend who helped her get the photo taken down, which made her realize how much these friends cared about her. She talked about other people she was not as close to who judged her for the photo, so she realized that they were not people she wanted to keep in her life:

Well, first it showed me about the friends I really do have because... with my best friend calling me saying "you need to get to a computer, take care of this," having my friend in [city] saying "hey my dad's a lawyer maybe he can help you out," people that did defend me when there were posts on *Facebook* about it saying "hey there's this girl from [city] with this picture up," so they went to that for me before I knew anything was happening, like "you need to remove this post, please don't talk about it, we're trying to get it removed from the lawyers and stuff," so at first it gave me a chance to see who really did care about me and who went to that [or "went to bat" – wording unclear in recording] for me. At the same time there were people who thought ill of me because just seeing it up there they thought I posted it myself, so they thought, you know, ill of me, and that really sucked, and some people I just completely cut off with deleting my Facebook. They were more acquaintances than they were friends. (Piper)

Karla's friends were surprised when she told them what happened, but they were there for her: "They felt bad for me, they felt sympathy for me. They didn't think it was my fault at all. They were great, they were really supportive." Tasha also discussed how her core group of friends were there for her throughout the entire ordeal. They knew what she went through with her ex, so it did not surprise them when he posted the photos of her online. She mentioned they have done what they can to help, including signing petitions to criminalize revenge porn.

Because of all of the physical threats to Anisha's safety, her friends are there both emotionally and physically to protect her. Strangers have shown up at Anisha's house and assaulted her. There was one instance when a stranger got inside her house:

I went to turn my car on to let it warm up... I came back into my house, so I was getting ready, and when I left I walked downstairs. Somebody was in my house and grabbed me by my throat, choked me... I was able to like kick him in the balls pretty much, to get him down and then I left, I abandoned my house, I literally left the guy in my house and I ran. (Anisha)

With these safety issues, she always tells her friends when she is going anywhere or if she is on her way home. If she does not text her friends to let them know she is safe, they know where she lives so they can check on her:

I have a really good support system, so like between my friends, family and boyfriend, everyone takes really good care of me and makes sure that I'm okay. If I don't text them, like right away... they'll make me text them when I get home, and if they don't hear from me they freak out. I've sent a group text out to all of my friends, 'cause like I'm someone who's attached to my phone, so I'm constantly answering everything, and I get back to people within like a minute. And if I'm not answering you... I've sent them like my house address like come find me. (Anisha)

Other participants experienced negative effects on their friendships after being a victim of revenge porn. One of the more prominent themes regarding this was the awkwardness that came along with having naked photos online. Josephine commented on this and how the "sheer awkwardness" of the subject makes it difficult for her to go and see her friends:

It definitely affected some friendships that I had, and I don't know if it was because they were judging me or just the sheer awkwardness of the topic and thinking "oh she probably doesn't want to see me, she'll be embarrassed," or me being all "I don't want to see them, I'll be embarrassed." I still to this day, I think about seeing certain someone being like "no," you know, I have that embarrassment. I still have it, I carry that with me. (Josephine)

Maria has also experienced awkwardness with her friends. None of her friends know about the photos or any of the things her ex-boyfriend did (such as breaking into her house to get secret footage of Maria and her family). These are all friends she met in high school, and her ex-boyfriend is still friends with them as well. She described the situation between her and her friends as "very tense":

It's because he's my high school boyfriend. We haven't told any of our school friends because he's too... he's still in the area. And we're still near the school, so we haven't said anything yet, but it's been very, very tense for us for our friends, because... when they bring him up in conversation, like "oh have you seen [ex-boyfriend]?" Or like "have you heard from [ex-boyfriend]?" It's like a really sore subject and they can't tell why because it's been so long since we broke up so they're like "why are you so bitter about that, like why are you so weird about

this break up?” So we just don’t tell anybody about it, it’s just too embarrassing and weird. (Maria)

In addition to awkwardness with friends, a couple of participants withdrew from their friendships because their ex-partner began contacting their friends. In Sacha’s case, her ex-boyfriend contacted some of her friends and spread rumours about her, saying things like their boyfriends had cheated on them with her. Nikki’s case was more extreme – her ex-boyfriend started targeting her friends in the way that he had targeted Nikki. For example, he took photos from her friend’s Facebook profile, and photoshopped them to alter her appearance. Nikki has not told her friend about this because she knows there is nothing that can be done to get them removed. He has not mentioned her friend by name on the website and there is nothing sexually explicit. This left Nikki with a lot of guilt and resulted in her withdrawing from that friendship a lot:

Now, one of my best friends from high school who lives out here, she’s caught in the crossfire... He’s trying to get to me through her, through posting pictures that she posts online publicly... and altering them digitally... he’ll put whore makeup on her, just totally caked on, and then puts some dumb caption like, “oh, going for a night on the town with all my pimps,” something. Basically just trying to get some sort of action to be taken, so I feel horribly, it’s affecting my relationship with her because it hasn’t gotten to the point where she can do anything about it because there’s nothing sexually explicit about these things and he’s not including her full name or any other personally identifiable information that could be specifically traced to her with this action, so I haven’t told her that he’s doing this yet, even though I know she would be livid... I feel like I absolutely should let her know, but at the same time there’s nothing, nothing that she could get anybody to do about it...

Nothing that law enforcement or [the website] can do yet to take anything down or change anything in the state that it is. So I haven’t contacted her and told her this is happening yet because I don’t want it to consume her when there is nothing she can do about it. But that has affected my ability to feel okay about engaging in regular conversation. (Nikki)

Overall, revenge porn often affected participants’ friendships in one way or another – because revenge porn became such a huge part of participants’ lives, there was no way to avoid the effects of revenge porn spilling out into friendships. Some

participants had friends who reacted positively and gave encouragement and support, while others had friendships that were negatively affected.

Dealing with the Law

This section explains the various legal hurdles participants faced. There are ongoing efforts across the United States, Canada, and globally to enact legislation regarding revenge porn. However, nearly all of the participants in this study lived in an area where revenge porn was not illegal at the time they became victims. The following subsections discuss participants' (primarily negative) experiences with the police, issues with getting photos removed, as well as participant input for legal changes.

“There’s nothing I can do for you, this is your problem”: Issues with the police

Participants who interacted with law enforcement officials generally had more negative than positive experiences. Only one participant expressed that all of her interactions with the police were positive. Anisha explained that from the moment she reported the naked photos of her appearing online, the police took her seriously and immediately arrested her ex-boyfriend, the only other known person who had access to the photos. Being a victim outreach worker for revenge porn victims, she has seen many victims receive no help or support from the police after making a report, and believes she was very fortunate:

I, on the other hand, was extremely lucky with law enforcement. They took my case seriously from day one and they stuck by me for two years. They helped me out and it’s because of them that my ex is sitting in jail. I really don’t know what else to say, like I got really lucky, and it might be because I’m in the state of New Jersey where there is a law in place against revenge porn or it’s because I live in a small town where the cops have nothing else to do. (Anisha)

Anisha mentioned that at the time of the interview, New Jersey was one of the only US states that had criminalized revenge porn, so it was very easy for the police to arrest her ex-boyfriend and charge him with a crime. Other participants in different locations were

not as lucky, and many of them reported that their experiences with the police were primarily negative. Of the participants who reported negative experiences with the police, the issues were primarily due to the participant feeling like the police did not take them seriously, or cases when the police said there was nothing they could do for them.

AnnMarie went to the police station as soon as she discovered that her ex had posted an eBay auction for a CD containing naked photos of her. She felt the police were very dismissive of her and treated her inappropriately. One police officer even laughed at her when she tried to make a report:

I had printed out the auction, the printouts of the auction, the screenshots and took them to the police station and was frantic... I said, look, look this is happening, this is happening, you know, how can I stop this? And the one officer took the file that I had, two other officers came over and they were all standing around looking at the pictures that were posted on ... the auction, and they were laughing... He came over with a smirk and he's like "yeah there's nothing I can do for you, this is your problem." (AnnMarie)

Karla also felt the police dismissed her and did not take her case seriously. Her uncle took her to the police station the day after her ex-boyfriend sent multiple nude photos of her to her university professors. While she was writing up the report at the station, she said the police officer and her uncle just stood around laughing and talking about other various things. She felt the officer could have been more sympathetic and sensitive given that she was going through such a traumatic experience. Her struggle with being taken seriously continued as the months went by and she had continued contact with the police. Although revenge porn is not illegal in Canada where she lives, her ex-boyfriend had been harassing and threatening her, so she was trying to get him charged for those behaviours. However, the police told her that she could not prove she was being harassed or threatened, so they were unable to help her.

AnnMarie and Karla's experiences with law enforcement are similar to what previous research reports is typical of interactions with the police when crimes of a sexual nature are involved. The police blamed AnnMarie, telling her she was a "stupid girl," presumably for taking the photos in the first place. When women make a sexual assault report, they are treated similarly – they are asked what they were wearing, were

they drinking alcohol, did they “lead the guy on,” and other similar questions that assume the woman was partially responsible for the sexual assault. Campbell et al. (2001) have discussed this phenomenon, known as the “second rape” – reporting a sexual assault can be just as traumatic to the victim as the sexual assault itself:

When rape victims’ needs are not addressed by the very organizations they turn to for assistance, the effects can be quite devastating. Secondary victimization has been defined as the victim-blaming attitudes, behaviours, and practices engaged in by community service providers, which further the rape event, resulting in additional trauma for rape survivors. (p. 1240)

Cecil (2014) described a very similar police reaction with a revenge porn report. Hollie Touns, a victim of revenge porn, made a report to the police asking for assistance and what she could do about the situation. Unfortunately, “she found little aid in the police officers and attorneys who told her that there was nothing she could do and often scolded her for taking the pictures.” (Cecil, 2014, p. 2516)

AnnMarie and Karla, as well as many other participants in this study, experienced this same reaction from the police, when they were either blamed, not taken seriously, or did not receive any help from the people who are supposed to be there for victims in a time of need. Nikki’s experience with the police was also extremely negative. She did manage to get a restraining order against her ex-boyfriend, who had made death threats against her and her family. However, that was the extent of the legal protection she received. The restraining order was very specific and included very fine details about what her ex could not do. She was instructed to call the police anytime he broke one of the conditions of the restraining order, which meant she was calling multiple times a day for two and a half weeks due to her ex continually breaching those conditions. The police began to get very annoyed with her, and told her that if she contacted them again they would charge her for abusing the 911 system:

The police came for a couple [of] weeks, took the reports, although not effectively or efficiently. And then finally one time I called and very, very quickly the girl officer who had been showing up, she shows up, knocks on my door, bam bam bam! I open my door and I’m like “hi,” and she goes, “can I come in?” Sure, thank you. And she walks in, walks past me, shuts the door behind her, she turns around, and says “Nikki this has got to stop. You are not to ever call us again about

this. Until he has shed blood or done something that we can do something about, you are not welcome to abuse the system as you have been abusing it.” (Nikki)

Despite the fact that her ex was continually breaching conditions of the restraining order and sending her threats, the police told her they would not do anything unless he attempted to harm her physically.

Another problem participants described was how the police were dismissive because no crime was occurring and they did not know how to respond to the issue. As revenge porn is not criminalized in all locations, many participants were left with no legal protection after being victimized. Hannah went to the police but they could not get the photos removed from the internet, because they were not illegal. She needed to be under the age of 18 for the police to get the photos removed as it would have been classified as child pornography. She said the police were sympathetic to her, but ultimately they told her they could not help her. She ended up finding a computer hacker to hack the revenge porn website and remove her photos. Regina had similar problems with the police when attempting to get the video of her rape taken down. Her case is still open with the police, but she mentioned they have not contacted her in months due to their lack of knowledge in cybercrimes:

I was going to the police, begging for help... The investigation is still open, they're supposedly still investigating him, but you know, I don't think they really know how to trace this stuff. And like my e-mail was through Gmail and what the police had to try to do was just mind-boggling. Like they had to fill out all kinds of... subpoenas to the internet companies to try and get their cooperation to... track who was doing this and where this was coming from... they were having to use old world tactics... to try to fight a cyber attack, and it doesn't work, so I think they kind of tried to help but at the same time they didn't know what to do or how to do it and I don't think the internet companies were very helpful... [The police] couldn't even figure out what country the website was coming from, much less to try to find out, to make some kind of contact, to subpoena them or whatever, to try to trace who did this video, so it's just been very hopeless... I felt very hopeless and very helpless. (Regina)

Regina's comment on the police using "old world tactics" to try and combat a new crime echoes the findings of previous research reports about laws not keeping up with the

ever-changing technology. Moses (2011) discusses this phenomenon, comparing it to the tale of the tortoise and the hare. This “race” between law reform and changing technology results in a problem where the technology is the hare and the law is the tortoise – the law just cannot keep up with the technology: “As technology gives rise to new possibilities, and people engage in new forms of conduct, the law continues to be directed to solving old problems and is unable to ‘keep up’ with the modern world” (p. 763). With revenge porn, a more appropriate metaphor may be the cat and mouse – the sneaky revenge porn perpetrators victimize and torment their victims. It seems like the police in Regina’s case just did not know how to deal with such a modern and technologically savvy crime. It also speaks to the systemic legal failure to protect women from IPV, stalking, and harassment.

Sacha believes that her case fits the description of computer harassment, but the police would not charge her ex with a crime even though he was the only person she ever sent naked photos to. Her ex had been very unstable and she was worried that he would find other women to stalk and harass after she had cut off contact with him, but the police did not believe that she had really been threatened by him:

I just don’t understand why they don’t see that it’s a problem, that’s what I kept saying. I mean he’s out there, probably finding someone else to harass, he’s unstable, he’s got a family and kids and is trying to harass me, follow me around, and keep spreadsheets of pictures of me and spend all his time on websites posting things... I don’t know why they can’t just do something. I even tried to get a restraining order and they said “no, he hasn’t threatened you,” and I don’t know. I mean, the computer harassment thing, because the code [the description of computer harassment] was just “to use a computer to embarrass another person,” and he did that. (Sacha)

Another legal issue participants faced was the statute of limitations on certain crimes. Maria’s photos were posted in 2008/2009, but she did not discover them online until 2013, which meant the statute of limitations for charging her ex had passed. Although revenge porn was not criminalized in her state (California), the nature of the online postings about her were defamatory and she could have pursued a civil suit for defamation of character and libel had the statute of limitations of one year not passed. Maria felt the police were sympathetic, but that their hands were tied by the law. The police felt his behaviours were only going to keep escalating against other women, and

wished she had caught him sooner. AnnMarie also experienced the frustration of not being able to charge her ex due to the statute of limitations:

I finally got in touch with a state trooper here in Maryland from... the computer crimes division and he let me know that in 2010 if the county police and the state police and the New Jersey police had been doing their jobs, he [ex-boyfriend] would have been charged with at least five misdemeanors. So, unfortunately the statute of limitations ran out and this time there was nothing that they could do and that's when I just got so frustrated that I said "fine, then, I'm gonna change the laws here in Maryland." (AnnMarie)

Since then, AnnMarie testified in support of a bill criminalizing revenge porn in Maryland, which was passed in 2014.

Three participants did not report their case to the police because they believed that the police would have been unsympathetic. Claire mentioned that she has "done a lot of Google searching" to figure out her legal options, but decided it would be best if she did not make a police report. She felt reporting it would make things worse in her family. Her fiancé's ex-wife tried to post the photos of Claire online, but the ex-wife is not aware that Claire knows this. Claire feels if she went to the police, her fiancé's ex-wife would realize that Claire knows what she tried to do, which might result in family tension. Gloria said she would "absolutely not" report anything to the police because "the police just aren't really that helpful, and would probably just make me feel like more of an asshole."

These negative perceptions of the police may stem from previous media attention regarding how revenge porn is perceived by the public. Police have also traditionally been unsympathetic to victims of sexual assault as well, which may contribute to participants' hesitation to report the revenge porn to the police. Maier's (2008) study on sexual assault victim advocates' perceptions of police interactions with victims indicates that victims are still receiving unsympathetic treatment from police. In her 47 interviews with rape victim advocates who have had direct experience with police in rape cases, Maier (2008) found that "rape victims may experience revictimization by police through officers' invasive questioning, victim-blaming attitudes, general insensitivity, and refusal to proceed with criminal investigation" (p. 793). Other problems

with police that Maier (2008) noted include not having proper training to work with rape victims, police acting “cold” to remove themselves from the case, and police having their own ideas regarding how a rape victim should act. Wentz and Archbold’s (2012) survey of 100 police officers provides similar findings. They found that 35% of police officers questioned the credibility of rape victims, believing that many make up false claims of rape. Furthermore, the longer officers had been in the police force contributed to a higher likelihood of believing rape myth stereotypes and blaming the victim.

One final issue participants reported when dealing with the police was the problem of jurisdiction. In the United States, when a crime happens in one place, the local police have jurisdiction. This means they are the only ones able to investigate unless it becomes an FBI issue. Emma ran into some problems with the police because she was living in Georgia when the revenge porn, stalking, and harassment happened, whereas her ex-boyfriend lived in Pennsylvania. When she tried to make a report in Georgia, she was told she had to make a report to the jurisdiction in Pennsylvania where her ex-boyfriend lived. However, when she tried to file charges in Pennsylvania the police did not believe they had jurisdiction. All of the harassment and unwanted behaviour occurred online or through the phone, so neither jurisdiction believed they could help Emma. She then tried to make a report to the FBI because of the online stalking, but the FBI told her she did not have a strong enough case to pursue anything. Regina also experienced a similar problem because two different states were involved:

Well, so the rape occurred over in Missouri, so again this is where we get into the jurisdictions. I had been working with the police where I was living [Illinois], but then this rape occurred in a different state, in a different jurisdiction, and so I reported to the police where I was living what was going on... Well, down the road what I found out was the policeman I was working with... finally said to me “well you know I’m not the one you should tell, I can’t do anything about it, this is a separate incident, you have to go and talk to the police in the jurisdiction where this happened.” So first of all it took me a while to even figure out who it was I was supposed to go talk to. (Regina)

Overall, most participants in this study had negative experiences with law enforcement, which is consistent with previous research findings regarding victims of sexual crimes and police interaction. When the people who are “supposed to be there” to help victims are dismissive that a crime is even occurring, it can leave victims feeling like

the police do not care about their suffering, or that it was their own fault they were victimized. Furthermore, general issues with the police also need to be understood within the context of living in a white, hetero-patriarchal society. Razack (2000) discusses gendered racial violence and the case of Pamela George, a female Aboriginal sex worker who was murdered in Regina in 1995 by two white university athletes who were convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to six years in prison. Razack (2000) is very critical of how the legal system handled this case, explaining how the “‘naturalness’ of white innocence and of Aboriginal degeneracy remained firmly in place as the conceptual framework through which this incident of gendered racial violence could be understood” (p. 95). Even if revenge porn were illegal, it is important to note that institutionalized racism would likely affect victims in a similar way to Pamela George – i.e. “pure” white women may receive more help from the police than racial minorities.

Legal Issues: Getting Photos Removed & Current Laws

Part of the problem with revenge porn is that it is not illegal in most places. Some American states have enacted legislation criminalizing revenge porn, but the majority of states have not.²⁴ Canada has not enacted any federal legislation criminalizing revenge porn. Participants discussed their unhappiness with current legislation, as nearly all of them lived in an area where revenge porn was not criminalized at the time they were victimized. Dawn discussed how frustrating it was attempting to get photos of her removed from the website on which they were posted. She also mentioned she could not afford to have them removed. Many revenge porn websites attempt to extort victims whose photos appear on the website by charging a removal fee. She could not afford a lawyer to send a DMCA (Digital Millennium Copyright Act) takedown notice either. A DMCA takedown notice is part of the United States copyright laws, which gives a person copyright ownership over any photos they have taken. With revenge porn, if a victim has taken the photo herself, she can claim copyright infringement and send a DMCA

²⁴ As of June 2015, 23 states have laws against revenge porn in place: Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida (effective Oct. 1, 2015), Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, New Mexico, New Jersey, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas (effective Sept. 1, 2015), Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin (Goldberg, 2015).

takedown notice if it appears on a revenge porn website. However, a lawyer is usually required to do this, which can be expensive and not a real option for those without money. Piper mentioned how she was lucky her friend's father was a lawyer. He sent a DMCA takedown notice to the website her photos were on free of charge, and the photos were removed shortly after he sent it. Sarah had the same luck – one of her acquaintances was a lawyer. He sent a DMCA takedown notice to the website, and a month later Sarah's photos were removed. Other participants who did not have access to a lawyer attempted, without success, to get their photos taken down by contacting the website administrators themselves. Gloria contacted the website where her photos were posted and said she was under the age of 18 when the photos were taken. She hoped the threat of being in possession of child pornography would prompt the website to take down the photos,²⁵ but without an official letter from a lawyer or the police the website administrator did not respond to her.

A handful of American states have specifically criminalized revenge porn. In states where revenge porn is criminalized, perpetrators can face fines and jail time. Anisha was the only participant in this study who was fortunate enough to see her ex-boyfriend go to prison under New Jersey's revenge porn law. No other participants lived in a state where revenge porn was illegal at the time they reported it to the police. Regina lives in Illinois, which had a strong revenge porn law come into effect on June 1, 2015 (endrevengeporn.org, 2014). Under this law, her ex-husband would have faced up to three years in prison and a \$25,000 fine. Unfortunately, the law was not in effect in 2012 when her ex posted the revenge porn video online.

“It should be a criminal offence”: Participant Input for Legal Change

When asked what they would like to see happen with regard to legal reform with revenge porn, participants had many ideas for what they thought would be appropriate. Claire discussed how she would like to see some sort of international law with revenge porn. Many websites are hosted in countries other than the US, so oftentimes it is

²⁵ As a note, Gloria was not actually a minor when the photos were taken, but she claimed she was in an attempt to scare the website administrator into thinking the photos were child pornography.

difficult to get the administrators to comply with US laws regarding copyright and online content. Claire gave her input on this situation:

I think there absolutely should be legislation regarding this, and I would not want to see someone get away with this because there happens to be a national border involved somewhere either, I know that gets in the way of a lot of legislation. There needs to be some sort of international protocol I guess, and there doesn't have to be necessarily prosecution involved, but the whole thing needs to be, I don't know... I don't know how to effectively deal with it. (Claire)

Participants also said that revenge porn websites should be taken down and declared illegal. Revenge porn websites profit from victimizing people – former website administrator Hunter Moore earned up to \$30,000 a month from ads placed on his revenge porn website (Stroud, 2014). Piper talked about how disgusting it is to make money off another person's misery: "I want there to be more done to the websites. I don't think anybody should be making money off of someone else's... mistakes on who [sic] they trusted and didn't trust." Sarah also talked about how the websites need to be shut down and criminalized, because when intimate photos are involved, consent should be required from the individual in the photo before posting it in a public domain:

I think that the website should be required to get consent from the person who's in the photos as opposed to the person who took the photos. But I understand that when photos are taken they're actually the property of the photographer, but it shouldn't be legal that way. To have basically own your body for the rest of your life, it shouldn't be allowed. And it should be a criminal offence. (Sarah)

Aside from laws addressing the websites, participants also believed that the action of uploading the content should also be an offence so those engaging in such activities "think twice about doing it to another person" (Piper). Josephine also believes the person responsible for uploading the photos should be charged because of the invasion of privacy and because the person uploading the photos generally has malicious intent. Karla, who is currently a law student, wanted to see the perpetrators charged with a crime. She felt that revenge porn should be classified as a form of sexual assault:

I think they should fall under sexual assault, because an assault is an attack on someone, and I feel like even though not a physical attack, it was still an attack on me as a person. It damaged my personality, my ability to cope with things, left me feeling a lot of the same ways that I researched people who suffer assaults feel generally, helpless and things like that. So I think it's an assault for sure, and I think it should be under sexual assault, it's of a sexual nature. It affects your sexuality. It might not be explicitly a pornographic picture, but even if it is a naked or nude picture, that's a reflection of someone's sexuality, when you're naked like that. So it does affect them like that, so I think it should fall under sexual assault. Honestly I don't even know if it should be a new crime created, or if it should just be included in sexual assault? Because it feels very much the same, I think. (Karla)

While AnnMarie did not comment on whether she thought revenge porn should be considered as a sexual assault, she did mention that in her experience, the men on revenge porn websites and revenge porn uploaders have minds very similar to those of rapists. She mentioned that since she has started speaking out against revenge porn she has received rape and death threats from men saying she got what she deserved. She commented:

The mind of someone who commits the crime of revenge porn is very, very, very similar to the mind of rapists... it's that issue of... "if I can't have you no one will. I will destroy you"... the crimes are emotionally and psychologically very, very similar. (AnnMarie)

It is common for men to feel threatened by women who "speak out" against gendered injustices. Many men fear women's voices – if a woman's voice becomes just as valuable as a man's, it inherently is taking away some of the power men as a group enjoy:

When a woman does speak up, she runs the risk of being shouted down by a society that is still so scared of a woman's voice, it must silence it by any means necessary - including the threat of rape, of death. (Criado-Perez, as cited in Edwards 2014, p. 1)

While legal reform is an important tool that would afford some victims protection, it is important to note that legal reform is not a perfect solution to the revenge porn problem. Institutional racism within the legal system typically results in racial minorities not receiving adequate help from the police compared to their white counterparts, especially when the offender is white (Razack, 2000). Racial minorities and those of a

lower socioeconomic status report being unsatisfied with law enforcement after being victims of any type of crime (Dowler & Sparks, 2008). Furthermore, even if revenge porn were illegal, it is likely that sexist stereotypes about women would play a part in a police officer's decision on whether or not to pursue a case, which currently happens in sexual assault cases (Page, 2008).

In order for legal changes to be more successful in protecting revenge porn victims, social changes regarding dominant views toward female bodies and sexuality need to occur. Feminists have been trying to change social perceptions of female sexuality through various movements, one of which is the SlutWalk movement that began in 2011 in Toronto:

Heather Jarvis and Sonya Barnett co-founded SlutWalk Toronto in April 2011 as a reaction to Toronto police constable Michael Sanguinetti's comment that "women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized," a statement in which women are forced to inherit the blame of two social judgments: one, that it is socially permissible to judge, objectify, and morally categorize women based on their appearances and, two, that women, rather than the rapists, attackers, assailants, bullies, and aggressors, are responsible for sexual violence committed against them. (Nguyen, 2013, p. 159)

Since April 2011, SlutWalk demonstrations have been done across the globe to help raise awareness of rape culture, sexual assault, and to challenge dominant views regarding the characteristics of sexual assault. While some feminists have contested its effectiveness in promoting social change (Nguyen, 2013), it has sparked a wider discussion of rape culture as SlutWalk demonstrations are generally covered by local news stations. A complete change in social perceptions of revenge porn is understandably necessary, as many people still believe that revenge porn is a consequence of women acting out of line sexually, and that victims get what they deserve (Barajas, 2013).

Revenge Porn as a Gendered Issue

Participants acknowledged that there are gendered aspects of revenge porn. They discussed how victims are treated by the society they live in, and the prominence

of viewpoints reducing victims to “sluts” who got what they deserved. Participants also discussed how sexual shaming is a powerful tool for all genders, and how issues with employment manifest after becoming a victim of revenge porn.

“You’re a slut, you’re a skank”: Social Perceptions of Revenge Porn and Victims

Many participants acknowledged the gendered nature of revenge porn. Typically revenge porn happens to females with male perpetrators.²⁶ Participants discussed the struggle of being victimized in a sexual nature and how society perceives those types of crimes. AnnMarie talked about how the culture we live in allows victims of revenge porn to be decried as lacking good judgment:

I also know how crimes of a sexual nature are perceived. Especially one where there’s a question of whether or not the victim exercised good judgment. In all cases of revenge porn the judgment of the victim is always called into question. The first thing is “why would you let someone do that in the first place?” So I knew that I was in a situation where I was being blamed, you know. I had to defend myself... Just like the rape victims can very rarely... justify some of her behaviours, whether she was drinking that night, whether she was dressed a certain way or whether she went to a certain place. Because we’re supposed to be psychic. Victims are supposed to know that this was going to happen... And because we didn’t know better, we were wrong. So I knew that I was in that position, and so many of these concerns that I had were very real, because of the culture that we live in. (AnnMarie)

AnnMarie connects revenge porn to sexual assault, which is similar to the literature on the subject. As previously mentioned, rape myths are “arguments that tend to attribute responsibility to the victims, exonerate the perpetrators of rape and trivialize the severity of a rape experience, but which are not supported by empirical evidence” (Anderson & Doherty, 2008, p. 9). Brownmiller (1975) argues that rape myths serve to keep women away from the public sphere and complacent with traditional gender values. If a woman is too afraid to go out because of the potential to be sexually assaulted, then she is staying away from public life like traditional gender roles dictate women should do. When

²⁶ Though revenge porn is not limited to heterosexual relationships.

women break societal expectations and engage in activities their male counterparts are “allowed” to do, such as consuming alcohol, it gives society a reason to blame the woman for any victimization she experiences. The same occurs with revenge porn. Many of the arguments AnnMarie and other participants discussed about revenge porn victims “deserving it” are similar to the rape myths that assign blame to women who are raped. Some of these “revenge porn myths,” one could say, are arguments such as “women should not take naked photos if they don’t want them to end up online,” or “women who take naked photos are sluts.” After the famous celebrity photoleak of August 31st 2014, a broader discussion of societal perceptions of revenge porn started to appear in the media and in an everyday context. One particularly accurate comment on these victim-blaming comments from a TV celebrity/author sums up the comparison to rape myths very precisely: “The ‘don’t take naked pics if you don’t want them online’ argument is the ‘she was wearing a short skirt’ of the web” (Dunham, 2014).

Karla was also aware of how anything of a sexual nature is perceived and treated in society: “I think it really reflects society’s general view towards sexuality right now, as something bad and dirty, and private, and something that shouldn’t be talked about, rather than something that’s natural and human and normal (Karla).” She believed that Western society in general is very sex-negative, so when people – particularly women – are victimized by revenge porn, a very public display of sexuality, they are seen as “bad and dirty.” Valenti (2009) discusses this society-wide belief, calling it the “purity myth.” The purity myth is the myth that in order to be good, successful, and moral people, women must remain “pure,” behaving in only socially approved ways. However, men do not receive as many negative messages about their sexuality. Valenti (2009) argues that girls are raised to believe that marriage should be their main aspiration in life, and should make all of their decisions keeping in mind that their ultimate goal is marriage (to a man). When women act in ways that deviate from this expectation, such as by engaging in “deviant” sexual activities (e.g. sex before marriage, taking naked photos), they are no longer proper, moral women. This belief allows anti-sex views to persist, which contributes to victims of revenge porn being treated harshly. Maria’s opinion on this included her belief that there is a sexual double standard between men and women:

It’s our society, they look at women as sexual objects and things, and it’s not okay for us to be sexual or to have like these sexual feelings

and stuff, so when someone puts this [revenge porn] on the internet as like a sexual object, people think of us as sluts and whores and stuff. Like if a girl sends a boob pic to someone, it's her being a slut; if a guy sends a dick pic to a girl everyone thinks it's funny. They don't think of it as something like, "oh this shouldn't be fair," or something, or like they don't call him a slut, they just think it's hilarious. But for women, it's stigma... you're a slut, you're a skank, you know? And like that's how you get marked for life and it's not fair. (Maria)

Valenti (2009) comments on this sexual double standard of how women are often held to a higher moral standard than men are regarding sex. As previously mentioned, the purity myth dictates that women live their lives always keeping in mind that marriage should be their ultimate goal. However, men are not held to this same standard – they are “allowed” to be sexual and behave in ways that women are not. This is why men can send “dick pics” and it is seen as “men being men,” while women cannot send naked photos without being called a slut. Dawn was very critical of how society views victims of revenge porn:

People often seem to assume victims of this stuff are just “sluts who cheated on their boyfriend” or something, but it seems to me more common that the pictures are women who have already been hurt by these guys... who are just trying to continue the abuse. (Dawn)

Judith believes there is a dichotomy of two conflicting views of how revenge porn is perceived. She believes that on the one hand, society blames victims and says it is their own fault, but on the other hand, revenge porn is “not a big deal” because “there's [sic] naked pictures of everyone on the internet.”

I think that it is diminished in a huge way. I think a lot of people, there's like, “it's not a big deal”... Well I think it breaks down two lines. I see adults be like “my god you shouldn't have done such a thing”... Like the older generation believes it's all your fault, you should have known better, why did you let the pictures be taken, shame on you. And the younger people... go more in a sort of direction of like “oh whatever, there's naked pictures of everyone on the internet, you shouldn't be so upset, it's not a big deal, calm down,” which is really stupid 'cause it is a big deal. It absolutely is a big deal to have your consent violated in that way. (Judith)

Bloom (2014) discusses how revenge porn provides the latest example of sexual double standards between men and women. Women are shamed for appearing in naked photos

to an extent that men are not. Much like sexual harassment, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence, revenge porn is part of “the class of activities overwhelmingly (though of course not solely) perpetrated by men and directly overwhelmingly (again, not solely) at women” (p. 251). There are indeed male victims of revenge porn, but the majority of victims are female. Furthermore,

Like those activities [sexual harassment, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence], one major effect of revenge porn is to limit women’s freedom to live their lives: it punishes women and girls for engaging in activities that their male counterparts regularly undertake with minimal negative (and often positive) consequences. (Bloom, 2014, p. 251)

“You’re just a slut, you deserve it”: Victim Blaming

Many victims of revenge porn are blamed for their own victimization. As previously mentioned, victim blaming is very common with sexual assaults and sexual harassment (Anderson & Doherty, 2008; Ward, 1995), so it should not come as a surprise that victims of revenge porn experience this phenomenon as well. Claire expressed her frustration regarding victim blaming:

The woman still gets blamed a little bit and even... like my situation where there’s an ex-spouse involved. It doesn’t matter where they get the photos. I think people see the woman as sort of deserving it, because “why do those photos exist?” kind of thing... The same person... who would be horrified if it happened to them is not in the least bit bothered if it happens to someone else. Because there’s just that whole seeing someone else embarrassed kind of thing. Too many people get off on that kind of thing. (Claire)

Sacha talked about some of the things she has read online about revenge porn. Online news articles often have comments sections where the public can write their opinions about the content of the article. These comments sections are available for anyone to view. Sacha was upset that so many people seem to believe revenge porn is a victim’s own fault:

I’ve definitely read about people who aren’t very nice about it, saying they deserve it, yeah just bad things. I mean I’ve read comments like that, like “if you don’t want anyone to see it don’t do it, you’re just a slut, you deserve it,” so I don’t know... I know a lot of people don’t

think that the men should be punished or anything, and I don't understand that. (Sacha)

Dawn commented on the victim blaming that occurs with revenge porn victimization as well:

They seem to think it's our fault... That we should just "never have/send nude photos" and that simple act means that when they end up somewhere it's our fault... We are pressured to do it and then shamed when we do. (Dawn)

Victim-blaming attitudes were also present in some participants as well, even though they had been victimized by revenge porn themselves. Sarah felt that women who take nude photos of themselves are partially to blame when they are victimized. When she had nude photos taken of her, it was 1999, when revenge porn was basically nonexistent and the risk of revenge porn was unheard of:

I can still kind of cling to the fact that I did it during a time when nude photos were just not a thing. I feel bad saying it, but I would still place some of the blame on women for allowing those pictures to be taken. (Sarah)

She acknowledged that it was fairly hypocritical to believe that after being victimized by revenge porn, but that that was her belief on victimization.

Bloom (2014) discusses victim blaming and revenge porn, arguing that victims often do not receive sympathy because they could have prevented their victimization by not taking naked photos. Similar to other sexual crimes, the onus is primarily on women to protect themselves.

“Sexual shaming is the most powerful weapon a man has”: Revenge Porn More Severe for Women

While men are occasionally victimized by revenge porn, many participants commented on how revenge porn is often much more severe for female victims due to the sexual double standard in Western society and the treatment of female sexuality. AnnMarie and Anisha are both victim outreach workers for End Revenge Porn, and they

both said that around 95% of victims they deal with are female while around 5% are male. They both mentioned that women are more bothered by it than men are because the consequences are more severe. They have seen the worst of what can happen to victims and the consequences they can face. AnnMarie commented on some of her observations as a victim outreach worker:

I do think that it's definitely gendered... Another reason why I think it's gendered is the level of anger and the viciousness of the behaviour when it comes to posting. The men who post these pictures, they are very specifically out to destroy... this woman's life... They are very aware that nudity and sexual shaming is the most powerful weapon a man has when it comes to damaging a woman in society, within her family, within the workplace, within her school. You know, women have lost jobs over this, women have gotten kicked out of schools, out of graduate programs, out of law schools. Women have been ostracized from friends and family... Families have turned their backs on women. (AnnMarie)

Out of curiosity, AnnMarie asked her current partner how he would feel if he sent her a nude photo and she posted it online. She was shocked when he told her that it probably would not bother him, and that he would not be worried about losing his job even though he is a respected military official in the government. She said men are more of the opinion, "what guy's gonna fire another guy over having his dick splashed over the internet?" Sarah also commented on how male nudity does not affect them in the same way nudity affects females because men are allowed to be more sexual than females are:

I think it's more acceptable for male nudity to be out there, and I think when it comes to a guy being naked, I don't think it's taking away his masculinity. It's more like propping up his masculinity. Like it's the exact opposite of us. And I'm sure a guy could disprove me on that but I don't think it takes away his self-respect the way it does a woman's. (Sarah)

Gloria talked about how naked photos can tarnish a woman's reputation. When a woman's value and reputation is based on how sexually conservative she is, revenge porn is the ultimate way to destroy a woman's public reputation. Karla commented, "none of us would be in this situation if people could just accept women's sexuality." This is similar to what Citron and Franks (2014) argue with regard to revenge porn being

more severe for women than for men. They argue that female sexuality is seen as something negative, hence why naked photos are so harmful to them, whereas male sexuality is something men take pride in:

Women would more likely suffer harm as a result of the posting of their naked images than their male counterparts. Gender stereotypes help explain why—women would be seen as immoral sluts for engaging in sexual activity, whereas men's sexual activity is generally a point of pride. (p. 353)

Ringrose et al. (2013) made a similar argument regarding female sexuality and naked photos. In their interviews with teenage sexters, they found that even though males actively sought out naked photos from their female acquaintances, once they received naked photos they did not see the females as respectable or worthy of romantic relationships. However, the more naked photos of various girls these teenage boys had, the more respected they were by their male peers. This parallels with the common double standard that men having multiple sexual partners are “studs,” while females with multiple partners are “sluts.”

“We don’t want someone like that here”: Employment Issues

Nearly all participants talked about how revenge porn affected their professional life in some way, ranging from their concentration on work-related tasks being affected, to being fired from their job. Sacha discussed how the dynamic at work changed because her coworkers started taking sides. Her ex-boyfriend was in a supervisory position, so her coworkers either sided with him or with Sacha. Sarah was a substitute teacher, and she never gave out her last name to any of her students because she was worried they would Google her and find naked photos of her. Tasha talked about how she had to go on anti-anxiety medication because she could not concentrate at work due to all the stress from the revenge porn.

Judith and her ex-boyfriend work in the same department at a university. She told the story of how she was worried that some of their mutual students might see the naked photos of her. He had his phone set up so that whenever she texted or called him, a

naked photo of her would pop up along with her name. Because they were still in contact for a few months after the breakup, she worried that his students would see the photos:

The point for me is that I don't want strangers to see those photos. They were personal, and here he is displaying them casually to people, to students, 'cause he teaches in the department, right? If his phone rings and he answers it in office hours, then that kid is gonna see that photo of me, and I might have that student later, and that's a huge problem. (Judith)

Since they both teach in the same department, Judith worried that if her future students saw her naked images it would affect how they saw and respected her as an authority figure. Piper ended up leaving her job because the person who posted her nude photo online also worked in the store where she worked. Similarly, Josephine stepped down from her position as an elected official, especially due to the media coverage of the alleged nude photos. Although the media never got hold of any actual nude photos, the reporting on "alleged" nude photos was enough to destroy her reputation as an elected official.

AnnMarie discussed how she was very stressed out about potentially losing her job as a college professor. She was not aware of it at the time, but the college she worked at conducted an investigation into what happened without telling her. She believes they conducted this investigation to see if they had grounds to fire her. The administration has not said anything to her about conducting an investigation on her (she found out from a third party). Regina lost her job after her ex-husband sent the video of her being raped to her colleagues at the school board where she was a superintendent. After 25 years of employment she was fired immediately after the video was released. This is another unfortunate example of how sexuality is still seen as a taboo subject in society. If a woman can be fired from her job because she has been naked in photos or videos before, it shows how much progress still needs to be made. In the media, it is typical to hear about women losing jobs over naked photos rather than men. Gong and Hoffman (2012) wrote about sexting and sexual double standards between females who sext and males who sex arguing that these discrepancies perpetuate a culture of slut-shaming. This culture makes it acceptable to have a lower opinion of a woman once she has been seen naked. This sexual double standard is harmful to women, and women will

not truly be equal to men until it is eradicated, along with other issues feminists have brought forward, such as unequal pay between men and women.

Some participants discussed being unable to find a job due to revenge porn, and their worries that revenge porn could have an effect on finding employment in the future. Nikki mentioned that she normally does not have trouble finding work because of a lot of experience and a good resume, but she had a very hard time finding employment:

And so this went on for three years. I was stuck in dead-end jobs, I had three serving jobs, well, two serving jobs and a bartending job, all of which didn't even render me a thousand dollars a month. I'd been living in squalor and poverty because I couldn't get a real job even though I'm a very intelligent and very employable, very driven, and hard-working individual. So whether it was situationally the case, or whether there was just me and my mind keeping me from being able to present myself in a manner that suggested that somebody should hire me for a real job, it kept me from being able to live like any typical, normal 30-something year old American could. (Nikki)

Nikki acknowledged that she did not know if her employment troubles were because potential employers were "Googling" her and finding pages her ex put up, or if she was just unable to do well in an interview with so much on her mind. She said it is possible both were factors in her struggle to find employment. Piper had a similar problem; although she normally does not have any trouble finding a job, she was unable to find one after the revenge porn happened. She also lived in a relatively small city, so it is possible that word traveled fast about naked photos of her being posted online:

I was trying... to find other work... and during that 6 month period where I put out about 20 different applications... I didn't get any calls back, and that's a little unusual for me just for the fact that I have a lot of work experience and once I'm able to get an interview I'm able to get a job, so I do believe in a sense it may have affected, if they searched my Facebook they could have found a link through that way, so it [revenge porn] very well could have affected me professionally. I haven't had anybody come right out and say that, but since everybody in my hometown knew, the neighboring town I was working in could have known as well. (Piper)

Many participants feared that the naked photos would affect their chances of gaining employment. Anisha said that while the naked photos of her online have not

affected her current job, they could affect her ability to find a job in the future. Karla is currently a law student, and is quite worried about how the naked photos will affect her chances of being able to practice as a lawyer in the future, due to the professional comportment and standards expected of the legal profession:

I'm nervous that as a lawyer it'll come up... at some point in the future. Or also, when you join the law society, they ask you if there's anything from your past that would be a mark on your character, and I'm nervous that like, I don't know whether I should tell them about that, or if I do tell them about that, if it's something that they would hold against me... Last year at the beginning of the year they [law professors] talked to you a lot about how important your reputation is as a lawyer, how it's a really social profession, and how you have to be really careful about what's online, and stuff like that, so I felt a lot of anxiety about that. I didn't tell anyone in law school about [the photos], I didn't tell them when I applied about it... I'm really nervous about it, that when I do join the law society they'll be like "oh, we don't want someone like that here." (Karla)

Maria is in the final year of her undergraduate degree, so she is looking to find a career in the near future. Although the website her ex-boyfriend created has been shut down, the link still shows up in the Google results. She said that if someone were to Google her name, a result would pop up for a fetish website, but clicking on the link would bring them to an error page since the content has been taken down. She is worried that even her name on a fetish link would be enough to negate her chances at finding a job. Franklin (2014) talks about how this potential to ruin a woman's employability is part of the "fun" of revenge porn, and that revenge porn website administrators find it amusing that women's lives can be destroyed by revenge porn:

The [revenge porn] site even expressed amusement regarding potential harms it caused, dedicating a page to sharing critical responses, including cease and desist letters. The site's operator boasted that "the more embarrassing and destructive the material, the more money he made." (p. 1307)

Citron and Franks (2014) discuss how employers often screen applicants by doing a search of their name online and will not hire victims of revenge porn:

Common reasons for not interviewing and hiring applicants include concerns about their "lifestyle," "inappropriate" online comments, and "unsuitable" photographs, videos, and information about them. Recruiters

do not contact victims to see if they posted the nude photos of themselves or if someone else did in violation of their trust. The “simple but regrettable truth is that after consulting search results, employers don't call revenge porn victims to schedule” interviews or to extend offers. Employers do not want to hire individuals whose search results might reflect poorly on the employer. (p. 352)

Bloom (2014) explains that a woman's professional reputation can be hindered so severely by revenge porn that victims may be forced to change their name to find a new job. Bloom (2014) gives the example of Holly Jacobs, who after being victimized, quit her job at a university and changed her name. Unfortunately, once the person who posted the photos became aware of her name change, he re-posted them with her new name. After her experiences with revenge porn, Holly Jacobs became an anti-revenge porn activist.

Intimate Partner Violence

Several participants discussed their relationship with their ex-partner who posted or shared the naked photos. Although many did not directly say the relationship was abusive, the characteristics of the relationship would fit the parameters of intimate partner violence such as stalking, harassment, and coercive control (Stark, 2007). It would seem that men who would be willing to share such intimate photos are also men who are emotionally abusive in relationships, exercising control and manipulation over their partners.

“He constantly belittled me and verbally abused me”: Emotional and Physical Abuse during the Relationship

A few participants described physical abuse that occurred during their relationship with their ex. Those who discussed issues of physical abuse did so in passing comments when talking about their past relationship in a more general sense. Dawn mentioned that her ex would “occasionally turn violent,” and that when the violence increased, she left the relationship. Karla briefly mentioned an episode where her ex dragged her off the couch by her hair:

There was a time when he got mad at me and wouldn't let me sleep there and I was like "no I'm not walking home right now, it's late, I don't want to, I've been drinking, I just want to stay here," and I was on the couch, and he dragged me off the couch by my hair and pushed me around, and stuff like that and I was screaming, and he was like, "stop screaming, someone's gonna call the cops." But I eventually got out and left. (Karla)

When she tried to take legal action against him by reporting the revenge porn to the police, the police were unable to do much for her because revenge porn is not illegal in Canada where she lives. However, they did mention another one of his ex-girlfriends had made a report against him for physical abuse, so her report of physical abuse with him was recorded and put on file to assist with that case. Stark (2007) discusses how intimate partner violence is an incident-specific model in legal terms, because law enforcement officials can take action against someone who physically hits their partner, but have a harder time taking action against abusers who use psychological intimidation, emotional abuse, or coercive control. Karla's case exemplifies this – the police were unable to help her with the revenge porn incident, but they became interested in her case after learning there were instances of physical abuse.

Regina was drugged and raped by her ex-husband and another man she did not know. This event was the catalyst to her filing for divorce, which was finalized a few months after the rape. She later found out that her ex-husband recorded the rape and sent this video to several members of the school board where she worked. He used it as "revenge" against her for divorcing him and to continue his power over her. Sexual assault is a common practice among abusers – Stark (2012) explains how many women who are in emotionally abusive or coercive relationships experience sexual assault from their partner. Stark (2007) discusses how men who assert coercive control over their partners often use sex and sexual assault as a way to keep the woman "in her place," so to speak.

Emotionally abusive behaviours were present in the relationships many participants had with their ex who posted the revenge porn. Dawn mentioned,

He was manipulative and a liar; I suffer from depression which he would yell at me for; he would blame everything on me, he made me

do things I was uncomfortable with, he constantly belittled me and verbally abused me.

As previously mentioned, when the abuse continued and he increasingly became more violent, she left the relationship. Hannah and Sacha both experienced their exes purposely isolating them from their friends and family, making them more dependent on the relationship. Hannah's ex-boyfriend convinced her to move to a different province with him after dating for only two months, where he initially did not allow her to work. She knew early on that she wanted to leave the relationship, but was "too terrified to leave" with all the threats he made against her if she did leave. One of the threats he made against her was that he would share the naked photos he had of her if she ever left him. The photos were part of his control over her. Threats and intimidation are strategies that abusive men use to keep a woman in the relationship and afraid to leave (Stark, 2012). These women believe that if they attempt to leave the relationship it will only exasperate the abuser and give him more reason to stalk, harass, or hurt them.

Many participants reported that their ex-partner was very possessive over them. Karla discussed her ex-boyfriend's possessiveness and how he threatened suicide if she stopped talking to him. Emma mentioned that as the relationship started to progress, her ex-boyfriend started wanting more and more control over her. He wanted her to remain faithful to him even though he was still living with his ex-wife, who Emma was never sure was really an ex. When a job opportunity in another state was presented to her, she took it partially because "it seemed to be an easy way to disentangle [her]self from that relationship." However, once she left the state, the possessiveness from her ex increased. In Sacha's case, her then-boyfriend was one of her superiors at work, and he sent several e-mails to their co-workers to make sure they all knew she "belonged" to him, sending them naked photos of her "proving" that she was with him and was off limits:

He started going around work telling people that he knew I was sleeping around at work and that he just wanted to let everybody know that he was with me. But I wasn't doing that [sleeping with anybody else] ... It turned out one day that the boss went in and walked him out of the lab and he saw that he had all these pictures of me on his work computer and was sending them around at work, but

no one told me about that, so at that point he was fired and I quit, because everyone had seen me naked at work. (Sacha)

AnnMarie's ex-boyfriend was also extremely jealous and controlling. Part of the reason she broke up with him was because of his controlling behaviour, which she did not initially realize was happening. After dating him for a few months, some of the behaviours he was exhibiting became red flags to her:

As time went on... three months later, he steadily... became increasingly possessive and increasingly manipulative, and very controlling. And I started to realize these red flags, and it took me time, but I realized then, and finally in February of 2010, we had a huge fight over a skirt I was wearing. I'd come home from work and he felt that the skirt was too short, and you know, he's calling me a slut and a hooker and you know, "why are you walking out of the house like that," and I was shocked because I'd worn the skirt to work many times, I had tights on, it was like... not a big deal. (AnnMarie)

Possessiveness and stalking go hand-in-hand with each other in coercive and emotionally manipulative relationships. Cupach and Spitzberg (2004) discuss stalking during and after a relationship, and how possessiveness and jealousy of other men are related to stalking behaviours. In Sacha's case, her ex-boyfriend was jealous and believed that she was having sex with other coworkers, so he had to "prove" that she was with him by sending them naked photos of her.

"Never contact me again:" Harassment, Stalking, and Threats after the Relationship Ended

As is typical with abusers before and after a relationship has ended (Cook, Murray, Hart, & Amat, 2014; Edwards & Gidycz, 2014; Ferreira & Matos, 2013; Stark, 2007), participants in this study experienced harassment, stalking, and threats after they ended their relationship with their ex-partner. Many abusive men harass their ex-girlfriends/wives with text messages, phone calls, or e-mails, to try and "win" them back. These men try to convince their ex-partner they still love them, or try to annoy, hurt, or upset them for ending the relationship (Alexy et al., 2005; Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Stark, 2012). Many participants experienced this same phenomenon. Hannah mentioned that her ex still constantly tries to get in contact with her, and she has had to change her

phone number and block him on all forms of social media. Emma received several harassing phone calls from her ex trying to convince her to continue dating him, and had to change her phone number and all of her contact information:

I called off our relationship. He actually still lived up North, I was living down here [South]. He started stalking me, and you know, because of the distance it was primarily electronically through persistent e-mail, text, phone calls. I had to change my e-mail address, phone number, block him on any social media, and had to do all of those things. (Emma)

Every day there was some form of contact, and then after that it started dwindling, but within the first year it was still at least every couple of days. (Emma)

Karla also discussed receiving rude and harassing text messages from her ex-boyfriend, such as “you’re a herpes-infested cunt,” and many other insulting messages. Regina mentioned that she does not want to confront her ex about the revenge porn because “that’s just opening the door for him to harass me some more.”

Stalking is another common behaviour from abusers after their partner ends the relationship (Ferreira & Matos, 2013), which many participants in this study experienced post-relationship. Participants experienced both physical stalking and cyber-stalking through the use of social media and electronic devices. Nikki discussed how her ex-boyfriend somehow found out that she had applied to work at a bar, even though she had not told anyone about it or posted about it online:

So I went and applied there, but they didn’t even call me back for a second interview, and yet my stalker had found out that I had applied there somehow. Don’t know how. That was one of the scariest things. Like damn dude, he must have been following me. (Nikki)

Nikki’s ex-boyfriend also stalked her friends and her parents, which prompted her get a restraining order against him:

I was home in Arizona and I get a text from him one night when I’m at my parents’ house, he’s like “oh I just saw that you’re at your parents’ house, so I’m gonna finish up what I’m doing here and I’ll be back in a half hour and you and I can talk and you can own up to what you’ve

been doing, you piece of shit." I was like "you just saw I was at my parents' house? First off, how do you even know where my parents live unless you had followed me there or had been patrolling the area regularly over the course of the past two years just to see if my truck was parked out there? Gross. And second off, goin' to the police. Fuck that. You involved my parents in your stalking bullshit? No." That's where I drew the line and that's where I first went to the police and where I first took action that would actually reach him. (Nikki)

With the prominence of electronics and social media in today's society, it is no surprise that abusive men are now using cell phones, Facebook, Twitter, e-mail, and other forms of social media to stalk their exes. Judith mentioned that her ex-boyfriend started sending her lengthy e-mails every day and would not respect that she did not want any contact with him for a couple of weeks after the breakup:

I said "I need a couple weeks where we don't talk," and then he just bombarded me with e-mails, like really, really failing to respect that boundary, and so the amount of time I needed just escalated and escalated, and his franticness to get in touch with me just escalated and escalated. And I would get once a day five pages in Microsoft word e-mails, like huge, long, rambling e-mails. And when that happened, and I said "never contact me again, I'm blocking your e-mail, I'm blocking your phone number, I'm blocking you on Facebook, you have no way to reach me," and he flipped out and I haven't spoken to him since. He's reached out to me a number of times but I just don't like him, don't respect him, don't really want to talk to him, so I completely kept that boundary up. (Judith)

Regina discussed how her ex-husband would hack into her and her daughters' cell phones to gain information about her. He obtained information about who she was socializing with on a regular basis from her phone company. Because they had been married, he had her social security number, her driver's license number, and all the information he would need to steal her identity. He used this information to convince her cell phone company to give up information about her cell phone account, including her most called and texted phone numbers:

At one point he actually had a woman who was impersonating me, and he'd have the woman call up the cell phone company and of course he had my social security number, he had my birthday, he had my driver's license number, all of that, my address, you know, all that stuff that all these companies use to verify your identification, to confirm you are who you say you are. He had all that stuff, and then if

they'd ask you for the password he'd say "oh well I don't remember it" so then that's where they'd ask for the identifying information and he'd get into my [online] account and open it back up. So that's how he knew who I was calling and stuff. (Regina)

After her ex obtained the phone numbers of people she was talking to on a regular basis, he began to harass them as well. Harassment and stalking send the message "it isn't over unless I say so," or the cliché "if I can't have her nobody can," which is similar to Albrecht's (2001) discussion of abusive men who try to get their ex-partners back by "using harassment, covert and overt threats, vandalism, battery, or even fatal violence. If the perpetrator in this event were ever posed with the question, 'Why?' the simple answer would probably refer back to a well-trodden cliché: 'If I can't have her, then nobody will'" (p. 81). These abusive men feel entitled to the woman they want, and believe harassment and stalking are justified actions after a woman has left them.

Threats were another common occurrence after the relationship ended. This is in keeping with Stark's (2012) article on coercive control. Nikki received death threats from her ex-boyfriend. He threatened to kill her as well as her friends and family. He crossed state lines to hand-deliver a four-page death threat note to her home address. Part of the note included a violent, graphic drawing of her: "He drew a dagger into my chest and the eyes, and the blood stuff, and he put 'fuck you whore, payback's a bitch,' and whatnot... I seriously thought he was gonna come do something." Karla discussed her ex's blog where he would write ambiguous comments she believed were about her. While he did not mention her by name, Karla believed he was making "abstract references" to getting back at her in the future, though the police did not take it seriously when she reported it because "he could be saying that about anybody."

Abusers Using Revenge Porn to Continue Abuse after the Relationship Ends

Several participants experienced emotionally abusive behaviours by their ex after they left the relationship, as was mentioned above. After talking with many participants who had been in abusive relationships, it would seem that revenge porn could be seen as a new behaviour that abusers use to continue abuse after the woman leaves the relationship. With some participants, the threat of revenge porn existed even before the

breakup, where their ex exerted threats that he would distribute naked photos if they were ever to leave them. Citron and Franks (2014) have made this same argument about revenge porn and intimate partner violence:

Revenge porn is often a form of domestic violence. Frequently, the intimate images are themselves the result of an abuser's coercion of a reluctant partner. In numerous cases, abusers have threatened to disclose intimate images of their partners when victims attempt to leave the relationship. Abusers use the threat of disclosure to keep their partners under their control, making good on the threat once their partners find the courage to leave. (p. 351)

Even the decision to take naked photos to begin with was often not the victim's choice – they felt forced or pressured into it. Hannah discussed how her ex would take naked photos of her while she slept, and Sacha mentioned feeling threatened to send naked photos to her ex. Regina and Nikki also were not aware that they were being recorded. Nikki recalled discovering that her ex had been secretly filming her for weeks:

After the first month of hanging out with him, dating, whatever, it dawned on me that I kept seeing little red dots everywhere, like little red LED dots...I noticed that these little red dots would just appear and disappear all the time in a lot of different places, even in my truck, in bathrooms, wherever. And one day... I saw a little laser pointer, a red dot over by his computer in his pen cup, and I was like "that is so freaking strange"... and then it dawned on me that he loved gadgets from China... I went over to the pens, and sure enough I saw the little red LED light again, and I was like "oh my god this is in a pen." I took the pen apart and there was a SIM card in it. And so I popped it into his computer and there were hours and hours and hours of footage of me. (Nikki)

When Nikki confronted her ex about the footage he told her that he felt entitled to it. Kimmel (2013) argues that male entitlement is a common feeling among a lot of men, who believe that if they have done everything "right," they deserve a relationship with a woman, and they are entitled to that woman loving and respecting them. Towns and Scott's (2013) study further confirms this theory. During a focus group with ten young women, they found that their participants' romantic partners exerted ownership entitlement over them, as they felt they were entitled to "own" the female they were dating. Nikki's relationship with her boyfriend did not last much longer after discovering he had been secretly recording her, but after they broke up he used these recordings to

post naked or unflattering photos of her online. He wanted her to “own up” to what she did, which he felt was purposely breaking his heart. This evolved into stalking, creating fake profiles of her online, and death threats against her and her friends/family.

Regina experienced a tragic outcome when her ex sent the recorded video of her rape to her colleagues in the school district. She became aware that there may have been a recording of the rape when her ex alluded to it months prior to the video actually being released. She waited anxiously in fear for months wondering if the video even existed, and if it did exist, wondered if he would release it to the public. She believes this was part of his intimidation. She got her answer seven months after the rape happened when he anonymously sent the video to her colleagues.

Karla let her ex take naked photos of her before they began dating. He was a photographer, and she had mentioned to him that she thought nude portraits were beautiful artistic expressions, so they set up an appointment for him to take nude portraits of her. They had a contract on how the photos would be used and that she would have final say on if they would be used or shown to others. They began dating after the photos were taken, and as the relationship grew increasingly abusive (both emotionally and physically), he began threatening her with sharing the photos if she were to ever leave him. Months after they broke up, he learned that she was dating another man, who happened to work at the university she attended. Hours later, he created an e-mail account with her name on it, and sent the photos to 25 faculty members at her university, including the university president and several of her professors, impersonating her:

I was... checking my e-mails on my phone, and I see an e-mail from myself, so it's like an e-mail to Karla from Karla, and I was like, "what? That's weird." I almost didn't even check it because I was like, I dunno... But I do open it... and it was basically along the lines of like, "now that I'm dating so-and-so... I'm free as a bird and I thought you'd like to see these pictures." That was the message. And then there were, I think 5 or 6 naked pictures of me. And I was like, "what the hell? What is going on?"... And then I check the recipient list and it was to 25 faculty members including the President of the University.
(Karla)

Karla's new boyfriend worked at the university, so it is likely this is why her ex decided to share the photos with 25 faculty members of the university. Perhaps he thought that sharing the photos with other professors at the school would prompt Karla's new boyfriend to break up with her. It is likely that this jealousy over a new boyfriend is what sparked his actions. Jealous exes often have the mentality of "if I can't have you, no one can," and attempt to sabotage their exes' lives through various means (Stark, 2007; Stark, 2012).

Several participants mentioned that they live in fear of their ex re-posting the photos online. Hannah is still afraid her ex will do something with the photos because she has no way of knowing if they still exist or if he still feels like "getting back" at her. Karla is very worried that the photos are going to hurt her again in the future. While they were never posted on an online website to her knowledge, she knows her ex is still in possession of them and could post them online in the future. As previously mentioned, she is currently in law school and knows that lawyers have to uphold a degree of professionalism and integrity online, and that sexual issues can be seen as a mark on someone's character.

Given the outcome of Regina's situation – being fired from her career in education²⁷ – Karla's fear is a very real, legitimate fear given the prominent view of female sexuality in Western culture (Valenti, 2009). Women who are perceived to be overtly sexual or sexually available are seen as unprofessional and "slutty" (Gong & Hoffman, 2012). Being labelled as a slut can have remarkably severe consequences for women, especially professional women, as sex and professionalism are often seen as mutually exclusive. Men know that the easiest way to put a mark on a woman's character is to show the world that she is a slut, which makes revenge porn such a simple way to "get back" at an ex. When discussing how society views women whose nude photos end up online, Dawn mentioned, "we are pressured to do it and then shamed when we do." These abusive ex-partners were clearly aware of this, and have

²⁷ Regina was fired from her position as a school superintendent after a video of her being raped by her ex-husband and another man was sent to her colleagues. Despite the fact that she was drugged and has no recollection of what happened, she was still fired because the video was public.

used revenge porn as a way to further their abuse and control after the relationship has ended.

Each section of this chapter has provided evidence that revenge porn results in devastating effects on victims' lives in many different aspects. Participants in this study experienced several negative emotional effects, such as anxiety, PTSD, and depression after being victimized, which even led some participants to contemplate suicide. Participants engaged in many negative coping mechanisms when they were first victimized, but have all moved on to more positive coping mechanisms such as relying on support from friends and family. Revenge porn affected participants' relationships in different areas of their lives. Their family lives, their friendships, and romantic lives were all affected by revenge porn, both positively and negatively. One recurring issue participants noted was problems with law enforcement, which was mostly due to a lack of legal guidance since revenge porn was not illegal when most participants were victimized. Another issue with revenge porn that participants commented on is the gendered nature of victimization – revenge porn is almost always done by men to women, and women face a lot of consequences due to a sexual double standard between men and women and widespread slut-shaming. Finally, many participants experienced revenge porn as continued intimate partner violence. These participants had been in physically or emotionally abusive relationships with an ex-partner, who used revenge porn as a way to further the pain and torment he could inflict after the participant left the relationship. The following chapter provides a conclusion to these findings, and provides a discussion on where to go from here.

Chapter 6.

Conclusion

"It completely turned my world upside down." (Claire)

Every woman in this study experienced a horrendous invasion of sexual privacy and personal space, usually at the hands of someone they loved and trusted. This study provides an analysis of the experiences of these victims and how revenge porn has forever changed and impacted them. The victims of revenge porn in this study faced negative mental health effects including PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), anxiety, and depression, as well as a variety of other mental health issues. Victims also expressed difficulties with romantic relationships and their sexuality after being victimized in such a devastating way. Another noteworthy finding of this study is the effect that revenge porn can have on employment and employability – some women in this study were fired from their jobs or had difficulties finding employment after being victimized by revenge porn. Many of the younger participants expressed anxiety over the fact that they may not be able to become professionals because of the naked photos of them on the internet. To say that the "real life" consequences of revenge porn victimization are trivial or ephemeral would be an ignorant and untrue statement.

These consequences are made possible by the widespread policing of female sexuality, and the prevalent views in Western culture regarding sexuality, made possible by compulsory heterosexuality as an institution. Part of the reason revenge porn affects women so severely is because female sexuality is often viewed as something to be kept private. While great progress has been made, women's sexuality is still seen by many as a source of shame, whereas men's sexual behaviour is a point of pride. Women have traditionally been seen as "pure" and nonsexual, and the only time women are

“supposed to” be sexual is when they are married (Valenti, 2009). Although feminists - and many others who subscribe to a sex-positive outlook on sexualities in general - have tried to eradicate this belief, it is still prevalent in Western society. This allows for victim-blaming when women are victimized – if a woman is a victim of a sexual crime, such as sexual assault or revenge porn, her actions are immediately called into question and society determines if she is a “genuine victim” or if she was “asking for it.” Building on feminist perspectives and Mills’ (1959) sociological imagination, the prevalent perspectives of revenge porn, ideal victims, and female sexuality are “public issues” that cannot be fixed by any one individual. When a woman loses her job because of revenge porn, it is not her “personal trouble;” such consequences need to be understood within the system of female oppression and the public policing of female sexuality. Some feminists have tried to shift the policing of female sexuality to a more “sex positive” system, where female sexuality is considered empowering and desirable (Valenti, 2009). However, sex-positivity is not a mainstream belief yet, as evidenced by the extreme hardships a woman faces once there are naked photos of her online.

This study provided an in-depth analysis of revenge porn victims’ experiences, and although the findings give a lot of insight into their lives, a few limitations of this study must be noted. The first is the issue of conducting interviews in a variety of ways – although the different communication styles (Skype, FaceTime, phone, and text-based interviews) did not seem to produce any real difference in the data collected, one consistent method may have provided more consistency with data collection. However, participant preferences were thought to be more important, and the quality of interview did not seem to suffer with different interviewing methods.

Another research limitation is how the term “revenge porn” was operationalized and the inclusion criteria for participants. Due to the exploratory nature of this project and the lack of previous studies on revenge porn victims, any woman who self-identified as a revenge porn victim and wanted to participate was included. This meant that there were different forms of revenge porn victimization, such as women who had their photos/videos posted online, women who were threatened/blackmailed with naked photos but were not posted online, and women whose naked photos were shared with others but not posted online to their knowledge. A more focused definition of revenge

porn might have resulted in more concentrated findings in certain areas. A study focusing solely on victims whose naked photos were widely released on the internet would possibly produce different findings than a study focusing on victims who had been blackmailed with revenge porn but whose photos were never posted. However, the varied revenge porn experiences do provide a broader understanding that regardless of the details, revenge porn in any form has similar effects among victims. Victims who were threatened with revenge porn but had no photos shared online were just as traumatized as some of the victims who had their photos posted online and shared with their friends/family. A final limitation to be noted is that participants were not asked for certain demographic information such as race, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. As mentioned previously, not obtaining this information undermined the opportunity for a more intersectional approach and a discussion of multiple oppressions. In hindsight, I would have explicitly asked participants about this demographic information. Future research on the impact of revenge porn should further examine these factors by covering a larger range of sexual relationships, including LGBTQ relationships.

Revenge porn has not been explored significantly in academia, though the news media have been active in publishing articles about revenge porn victims and are responsible for much of society's current awareness of revenge porn. Some of the women who participated in this study have done media interviews to get their story out in the open and to help reduce the stigma of revenge porn victimization. The media are doing its part in tackling the issue of revenge porn, and lawmakers and academics need to do the same. Revenge porn is something that can affect anyone, especially given the prevalence of sexting in relationships (Samimi & Alderson, 2014). The current situation with revenge porn provides a rich ground for data collection for feminists who seek to end injustices against women, criminologists and legal experts who seek to understand the legal implications of revenge porn, sociologists who want to understand the social context in which revenge porn occurs, and any academic who wants to explore an emerging phenomenon. This study provides undeniable evidence that future study of revenge porn is needed given the current lack of academic literature on the subject and the absence of laws on revenge porn.

Looking to the Future

While it is evident that more research in this area is needed, the results of this study also provide evidence that more legal recourse for victims is necessary. The two participants who work for End Revenge Porn explained that when they are responding to victims, they often give a bit of legal advice, though there is often not much legal advice to give. They recommend sending a DMCA takedown notice to the website with the victim's photo, but if the state/province the victim lives in has not criminalized revenge porn, there is little else the victim can do. Given the results of this study, it is apparent that police need to take sexual crimes more seriously, as many participants felt the police were not helpful. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that this will happen in the near future, given the prevalence of the "second rape" (Campbell et al., 2001) and the sexist attitudes that many police officers have when crimes of a sexual nature occur (Page, 2008). An obvious conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that existing laws need to be changed to provide more protection for some victims. While many states have begun to criminalize revenge porn, it would be ideal to implement a federal law criminalizing revenge porn so victims in all states would have equal protection. In Canada, there are no laws specifically criminalizing revenge porn. It would be ideal for Canada to implement federal laws criminalizing revenge porn, as the two Canadian victims in this study who had contact with the police both had negative experiences with law enforcement. As mentioned previously, although having these laws in place is a tool some victims could use, legal reform would likely be more helpful for affluent, white victims rather than victims of lower socioeconomic status/racial minorities, who often do not receive adequate protection by the police (Dowler & Sparks, 2008). Furthermore, because of social perceptions regarding female sexuality, social movements may be more beneficial for victims, as social movements could help change dominant views toward revenge porn. Social movements such as SlutWalk have been used by feminists in attempt to spark discussions about sexual assault and rape culture, and to end victim blaming in rape cases. Although its effectiveness has been contested by some feminists, similar movements focusing on promoting female sexuality as a positive thing, celebrating female bodies, and condemning victim blaming of revenge porn victims may assist in the fight against revenge porn.

As mentioned in the literature review section in Chapter two, the revenge porn law in Illinois has been praised by End Revenge Porn as one of the best revenge porn laws in the country. In brief, the main points of this law include: the motive of the offender does not matter; “selfies” can be considered revenge porn; photos do not need to contain nudity to be considered revenge porn; the law has very strong penalties and fines; those who redistribute revenge porn are held liable; doxing is taken seriously; and finally, the law upholds the first amendment and right to free speech (endrevengeporn.org, 2014). Other states and countries should take note of this law and use it as a basis for creating their own laws to criminalize revenge porn.

Many revenge porn victims in this study worried that the naked photos might affect their future employment. The European Union (EU) has a “right to be forgotten” law, which allows a person to request search engines to remove links with personal or damaging information about them (European Commission, 2014). The website hosting the content will not be deleted, but without a search engine to link to the website, it is much harder to find. Participants in this study reported that when they typed their name into the Google search engine, the revenge porn website with their photo(s) was the first page to appear in the results. This also meant that any prospective employer could Google search their name and find the revenge porn website with their photo(s) as well. This severely hinders victims’ chances at employment, as “common reasons for not interviewing and hiring applicants include concerns about their ‘lifestyle,’ and ‘unsuitable’ photographs, videos, and information about them” (Citron & Franks, 2014, p. 352).

On June 19, 2015, Google announced that it would effectively ban revenge porn from its search results. In Google’s Public Policy blog, Senior Vice President Amit Singhal wrote:

Our philosophy has always been that Search should reflect the whole web. But revenge porn images are intensely personal and emotionally damaging, and serve only to degrade the victims—predominantly women. So going forward, we’ll honour requests from people to remove nude or sexually explicit images shared without their consent from Google Search results. This is a narrow and limited policy, similar to how we treat removal requests for other highly sensitive personal information, such as bank account numbers and signatures, [sic] that may surface in our search results. (Singhal, 2015)

In the coming weeks, victims will be able to submit a form to request the removal of revenge porn links from appearing in search results. This will provide victims with a bit more protection – if the revenge porn does not show up through Google, it will be difficult to find without a direct link to the website.

A more pressing issue, however, is the way that revenge porn, nudity, and female sexuality is often regarded in Western culture. Revenge porn is particularly harmful for women due to the stigma attached to naked photos, which comes from patriarchal values of purity, modesty, and conservatism. Revenge porn would not be such a significant problem if a woman's value was not lowered once she has been seen naked. The reason revenge porn victims are fired from their jobs is not because naked photos suddenly make a woman incapable of performing work-related tasks; it is because society is uncomfortable with female sexuality, and slut-shaming still exists on a widespread level. In the ongoing fight for equality between men and women, and for revenge porn to stop harming women, the prevailing responses of slut-shaming and systemic disdain for female sexuality need to be addressed and eradicated.

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R. v. W., (2014) BCPC 197

Student safety: sexual assault, SB 697, chapter 748 (2014)

Appendix A. Interview Schedule

Date	Interview progress
February 2014	Contacted End Revenge Porn for CRIM 862 project interviews; interviewed AnnMarie and Anisha. Anisha put me in contact with other victims.
February 2014	Interviewed Tasha, Gloria, Maria, who Anisha put me in contact with.
August 2014	Received ethics approval from Simon Fraser University to begin conducting interviews for the thesis.
September 2014	Interviewed an acquaintance, Karla.
September-October 2014	Contacted the 30 people Anisha put me in contact with; 10 of these people responded and were interviewed: Claire, Dawn, Emma, Hannah, Josephine, Nikki, Piper, Regina, Sacha, Sarah.
January 2015	Contacted Judith and Jessica for interviews; both are acquaintances of mine.

Appendix B. Detailed List of Codes

Code	Subcodes
Emotional effects of revenge porn	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Trust 2. PTSD, Anxiety, & Depression 3. Fear for the future 4. Self-Esteem, Confidence, and Loss Of Control
Coping mechanisms	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Negative coping mechanisms <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Substance use b. Avoidance c. Obsessing over ex's motivation 2. Positive coping mechanisms <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Counselling/therapy b. Speaking out c. Helping others 3. Support systems 4. Issues with privacy <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Living a more private life b. Social media use
Relationships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Supportive b. Unsupportive c. Judgment/blame d. Embarrassment e. Children 2. Friendships <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Positive <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Friends helping when/how they can ii. Supportive/there for them b. Negative <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Found out who 'real' friends were ii. Awkwardness iii. Revenge porn perpetrator contacting them 3. Dating/Relationships <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Partner is supportive b. Loss of trust in men c. Not wanting to date anymore d. No longer takes naked photos for partners e. Revenge porn perpetrator contacting new partners

Code	Subcodes
Dealing with the law	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Police <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Positive experience (Anisha only) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Helped right away, took her seriously b. Negative <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Judgement/didn't help ii. Didn't take it seriously iii. Dismissive iv. Statute of limitations v. Didn't report because of fears of how police would treat them vi. Jurisdiction issues 2. Getting photos removed <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. DMCA notices + lawyers needed b. Issue of revenge porn not being illegal 3. Participant input for legal change
Revenge porn as a gendered issue	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Society perceptions of revenge porn 2. Victim blaming 3. Revenge porn more severe for women – double standard between men and women 4. Employment
Abuse/intimate partner violence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Emotional and physical abuse during the relationship 2. Harassment, stalking, and threats after relationship 3. Revenge porn continuing control/abuse after relationship ends

Appendix C. Interview Guide

Interviews were semi-structured. This list of questions was used as a way to guide the interview, with room for additional probing questions and room to ignore certain questions if deemed unnecessary or already answered in a previous question.

1. Tell me a bit about yourself.
2. Tell me about your experience with revenge porn.
3. How has this affected you personally?
4. How has this affected you on the job market?
5. How has this affected you while at work?
6. How has this affected you in regards to your family life?
7. How has this affected your friendships?
8. How has this affected you in terms of dating or romantic relationships?
9. How has this affected your ability to trust people?
10. Tell me about any experiences you've had with law enforcement in regards to being a victim of revenge porn.
11. Can you tell me about the laws on revenge porn where you live?
12. If you dealt with law enforcement, how did you feel about how the police handled your case?
13. What would you like to see happen with laws on revenge porn?
14. Tell me about any experiences you've had with victim advocacy groups.
15. Have you experienced any judgment through your photos being uploaded online?
16. How do you feel women are viewed when their nude photos end up online?
17. How do you feel men are viewed when their nude photos end up online?
18. What would your advice be to other people who've been victimized by revenge porn?
19. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Appendix D. Information Sheet and Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

My name is Samantha Bates and I am a Master's Student at the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University. I am being supervised by Dr. Brian Burtch at Simon Fraser University.

Thank you for your interest in this study. The purpose of this study is to understand the collective experiences of women who have been affected by revenge pornography, to establish that these aren't just "isolated" incidents, and that they are "real" problems that need to be addressed socially, academically, and by law enforcement. The study that I am doing will involve me conducting interviews with people who have been affected by revenge porn (generally victims). The information collected from this interview will be used my Master's Thesis, and potentially other publications or presentations.

Participation in this project is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw from it at any time with no fear of any sort of penalty. If at any time you decide to withdraw from this study, all data pertaining to you (audio recordings, transcripts, or notes) will be destroyed. Furthermore, if you have any complaints about your involvement with this project, you can bring these complaints to Dr. Jeff Toward [phone number and e-mail address were provided] of the Director of the Office of Research Ethics at Simon Fraser University.

I guarantee confidentiality to all participants who would like it. Some participants would like their name attached to their story and would like to be recognized in any papers or presentations for their contribution to this project – if this is the case, I will honour and respect your choice, and include your name in any papers, publications, or presentations that come as a result of the data collected from your interview. However, I also realize that some participants would rather not have their name included in any papers, publications, or presentations that come from this data. If this is the case, I will change your name to a pseudonym and will take out indirect identifiers such as names of cities or any other identifying information at your request, from any papers, publications or presentations of this data. When the interview takes place, I will ask you what your preference is in regards to confidentiality.

Prior to any sort of publication, you will be given opportunity to read over and provide feedback about any portions of the research results relating to your interview. All feedback will be taken seriously and will be addressed by the PI. The final MA thesis will be sent to all participants upon completion.

I live in British Columbia, Canada (Pacific time zone), so I would like to conduct interviews either through Skype or telephone, which will be roughly 45 minutes to 1.5 hours in length. A follow-up interview may be requested, but you are not required to participate in any follow up interviews if you do not want to. Although no interview other than meeting face-to-face in a private location can be completely confidential, it is unlikely that either a phone or Skype or telephone call would pose a great threat to the confidentiality of the interviews (more information on Skype security can be found at www.skype.com/en/security). Please let me know if you would prefer speaking on the telephone or if you would rather an interview through Skype.

Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. An audio-recorder will be turned on and

recording as soon as you answer the phone for the interview²⁸, but will be turned off at any time at your request, and audio-recordings will be deleted if you request. During the transcription process pseudonyms will be given (if requested) and indirect identifiers will be removed (if requested), meaning that transcriptions will not have any identifying information in them (if confidentiality is requested). Audio-recordings will be transcribed within four weeks of the interview taking place, and after Dr. Burtch has verified the transcriptions, audio recordings will be destroyed. Interview transcripts (both anonymized and non-anonymized ones) will be kept by the researcher to provide room for future projects with the data, unless you request the transcript be destroyed. If this is the case, it will be destroyed within 2 years of my MA thesis defense, to allow for time for publications and presentations. Transcripts of interviews will be stored on an encrypted USB, in a locked container within my home.

Before the interview begins, I will ask you if you have any questions about confidentiality or the study in general, and will ask again if you consent to take part in this study.

Questions about the study can be directed to myself, or to my supervisor, Dr. Brian Burtch [e-mail address provided to participants]

This project has been granted ethics approval through Simon Fraser University (more on the university ethical guidelines can be found at <http://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/research/r20-01.html>).

Thank you,

Samantha Bates

²⁸ Initially this was the plan, but after consideration, I decided not to start recording until specifically asking participants if it was okay to record the conversation. Once participants agreed, I turned on the recording device.

Appendix E. Participant Characteristics

This table provides information on participant characteristics including age, profession, their geographical location, the date the revenge porn happened, and the type of revenge porn experience.

Name	Age	Profession	Location	Date	Type of revenge porn
Anisha	24	Undergrad student/Desktop Manager at a gym	New Jersey	2011	Posted online
AnnMarie	43	College professor	Maryland	2010	Posted online
Claire	48	Business	United Kingdom	2013	Shared with others; attempted to post online but posting failed
Dawne	24	On disability	Oregon	2009-2010	Posted online
Emma	44	IT	South Carolina	2011	Posted online
Gloria	22	Tattoo artist	Arizona	2011	Posted online
Hannah	22	Bartender	Alberta/British Columbia	2013	Posted online
Jessica	22	Grad student	Ontario	2013	Shared with others; not posted online
Josephine	Early 40s	Former politician	United States	2012	Blackmailed/threatened; not posted online
Judith	25	Grad student	Quebec	2014	Blackmailed/threatened to share with her professors; not posted online
Karla	23	Law student	New Brunswick	2010	Sent to university professors; not posted online
Maria	25	Undergrad student	California	2008-2009	Posted online
Nikki	34	Paralegal	California	2010	Posted online
Piper	21	Waitress/retail	New York	2013	Posted online
Regina	54	Former school superintendent;	Illinois	2012	Posted online

Name	Age	Profession	Location	Date	Type of revenge porn
		current law student			
Sacha	26	Food sciences	Virginia	2012	Shared with co-workers and then posted online
Sarah	34	Mental health	Nevada	2009	Posted online
Tasha	33	Online retail company	Pennsylvania	2013	Posted online