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**Picture Perfect: An Analysis of Societal Attitudes Towards  
Victims of Image Based Sexual Abuse in Ireland and The  
United Kingdom**

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
MA Comparative Criminology and Criminal Justice

Maynooth University

Department of Law

## **Abstract**

Image based sexual abuse is an emerging form of sexual violence facilitated by the growth and rapid evolution of technology within the 21st century. There has been a wealth of academic literature focused on the exploration and social construction of this new form of sexual violence. Most of the current criminological research on image based sexual abuse is concerned with the prevalence and the harms caused by this form of abuse. However, there is a significant lacuna within both criminology and academia concerning research on societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse.

The current research attempts to bridge this gap through an exploratory study of societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse within Ireland and The United Kingdom. This study sought to investigate and analyse existing attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse through the conduct of a media content analysis of articles published on online news platforms situated in Ireland and The United Kingdom. Additionally, the researcher wanted to investigate whether there are significant differences between victims of image based sexual abuse and victims of traditional, interpersonal sexual violence. In order to achieve this traditional rape myths were analysed in order to compare attitudes towards the two aforementioned categories of victims. The analysed rape myths included in the present study were ‘she asked for it’, ‘she lied’, ‘it wasn’t really rape’ and ‘he didn’t mean to’.

This study found that there are significant similarities between attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse and victims of interpersonal sexual violence. For example, the present research revealed that Ireland and The United Kingdom favourably view victims of image based sexual abuse through public campaigning for victim rights and support services. Similarly, it was found that a paradigm shift is occurring in that the public is changing its focus

from the victim to the perpetrator in acknowledging the harms caused by sexual violence, whether online or in person.

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## **List of Legislation**

### **Ireland**

Criminal Law (Rape) Act, 1981

Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act, 2020

### **The United Kingdom**

Criminal Justice and Courts Bill, 2015

## **Chapter One – Introduction**

Since the introduction of the internet and the World Wide Web in 1991, technology has become an integral part of everyday life (Phillips et al., 2022; Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2020). Society's newfound reliance on technology has allowed for greater opportunities for borderless trade to occur through an increasingly interconnected, globalised world (Pakes, 2013). Whilst benefits such as the ease of global communication and the sharing of ideas and culture have arisen due to the internet, several new forms of technology dependent crimes have also emerged (Castells, 2000; Held, 2000; Rotman 2000). For example, Holt and Liggett (2020) note that the recent global dependency on technology as a form of communication, specifically regarding romantic relationships, has caused new forms of sexual violence to occur. One of the most prominent forms of technology based sexual violence is image based sexual abuse (McGlynn et al., 2019).

Image based sexual abuse is a relatively new criminological phenomenon, with the term only being officially coined by Clare McGlynn and Erika Rackley in 2017 (McGlynn and Rackley, 2017a). Within their foundational research, image based sexual abuse is defined as the “non-consensual creation and/or distribution of private sexual images” (McGlynn and Rackley, 2017a, p.3). Although image based sexual abuse has only recently entered the criminological zeitgeist, various forms of this form of technology based sexual violence had occurred prior to the introduction of this new terminology with the concept first gaining traction in 2010 (Henry and Flynn, 2019).

As image based sexual abuse is an emerging form of sexual violence, there is a paucity of research concerned with this type of crime. Much of the available research on image based sexual abuse is centred around legal perspectives such as copyright and privacy rather than societal attitudes (Davis Kempton, 2020). The contemporary nature of technology based sexual

violence has resulted in little to no research conducted in Ireland regarding the prevalence, perpetration and victimisation of image based sexual abuse. The current study aims to rectify the gap in the available academic literature through investigating societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse in Ireland and The United Kingdom.

As outlined, there is a paucity of literature discussing the societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse in Ireland and The United Kingdom. Therefore, the present research aims to bridge this gap through conducting an initial, exploratory study regarding attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse in Ireland and The United Kingdom. The main aim of this study is to investigate the current societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse within Ireland and The United Kingdom. The present study aims to overcome the current lacuna within criminology relating to the lack of British and Irish academic literature surrounding the attitudes perpetrated against victims of image based sexual violence. By employing qualitative modes of enquiry such as a desk-based media content analysis, the present study will determine the current attitudes towards these victims as represented through the media through addressing the following research questions:

1. 'What are the societal attitudes that currently exist towards victims of image based sexual abuse?' and
2. 'Do these attitudes differ from the attitudes perpetuated towards victims of traditional, interpersonal sexual abuse?'

The second chapter of this paper will examine the current available literature on image based sexual abuse. It will do so through analysing literature on the origins of image based sexual abuse and cybercrime. Following this, the chapter will discuss the current image based sexual abuse legislation in Ireland and The United Kingdom and key criminological concepts such as Nils Christie's (1986) ideal victimology. Chapter Three carefully outlines the method

utilised throughout the current study alongside the reasoning behind the selection of the chosen methodology. Chapter Four presents the results of the media content analysis through the discussion of four key themes ‘they asked for it’, ‘the victim lied’, ‘it wasn’t really abuse’ and ‘the perpetrator didn’t mean to’. The final chapter, Chapter Five, provides a critical analysis of the findings from the current research. Chapter Five will then conclude the present research by presenting future recommendations for policies regarding image based sexual abuse as well as suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter Two – Literature Review**

### **Introduction – The Development of Cybercrime**

This chapter will provide a comprehensive analysis of the available literature surrounding image based sexual abuse. It will do this through critically analysing what exactly image based sexual abuse is and the global criminalisation of image based sexual abuse. The chapter will begin with an analysis of the development of cybercrime as it is imperative to understand cybercrime prior to discussing image based sexual abuse. This chapter will then go on to discuss key criminological concepts such as ideal victimology and the prevalence of rape myths in society. Following this an analysis of the available criminological literature will highlight current societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse. The chapter will then conclude with an examination of Irish perspective concerning attitudes towards instances of interpersonal sexual abuse. It will do so as a means of attempting to explain the Irish response to this new form of sexual violence.

It is well documented that factors such as globalisation are constantly shaping modern society (Chan, 2000). The globalisation of the modern world has facilitated the growth in interconnectedness among people through institutional, social, symbolic, and material means (Chan, 2000). This increased interconnectivity of the world as a result of globalisation has been accelerated by a myriad of rapid developments and innovations in technology. In particular, the internet has caused a growth in international and borderless trade opportunities (Pakes, 2013). Whilst globalisation has developed new opportunities for the global sharing of culture, ideas, and trade, the modern, globalised world has additionally introduced new opportunities for technology centric crimes to occur (Castells, 2000; Held, 2000; Rotman 2000).

As noted by Phillips et al. (2022) “approximately 60% of the world’s population are internet users” (p.379). This observation from Phillips et al (2022) highlights the persuasiveness of technology and the internet in the everyday lives of the public, which further facilitates the creation of new forms of crime such as cybercrimes. The rapid change in technologies such as society’s growing dependency on the internet has fundamentally altered criminal justice and criminology through the new forms of crimes that have emerged (Rotman, 2000). The emerging nature of these new forms of crime are as a result of how within the 21st century the routine activities of people have changed and allow for an increased exposure to online opportunities for victimisation (Pratt, Holtfreter and Reisig, 2010; Pakes, 2013).

The foremost way in which cyber, and technology-based crimes occur is through the migration of traditional, interpersonal crimes into the online sector (Payne, 2020). This migration of traditionally interpersonal crimes to the online sphere are generally referred to as 'cyber enabled crimes' (Brady and Heintz, 2020; Wall, 2004; Grabosky, 2004). A report from the Congressional Research Service (Finklea and Theohary, 2015) highlights the ways in which cybercriminals use the expanse of the internet to conduct 'offline' crimes such as theft and furthering the drug trade. Cybercrimes can have a significant impact on the individual victims or institutions which are targeted in an attack which the Carbanak attacks are a prime example of (Hasham, Joshi and Mikkelsen, 2019). The Carbanak attacks were a series of targeted bank thefts conducted through the use of malware which resulted in the theft of over \$1 billion (Hasham, Joshi and Mikkelsen, 2019). Whilst these attacks are on a relatively large-scale, smaller scale attacks on individual people's private information and finances are significantly more rife in society. This is due to the lack of traditional barriers to criminality such as time and space online (Reep-van den Bergh and Junger, 2018; Yar, 2005).

However, the creation and provision of new technologies being exploited for criminal behaviour expands beyond the realm of the aforementioned financial and security-based crimes

(Brady and Heinl, 2020). This is due to the emergence of ‘cyber dependant crimes’ (Brady and Heinl, 2020). Cyber dependant crimes are crimes which could not have been committed without the use of a computer or another form of technology such as the internet (Furnell, Emm and Papadaki, 2015; McGuire and Dowling 2013).

Due to the ever-growing social dependency on technology new forms of sexual expression have arisen, such as the sending and receiving of sexually explicit photos, informally referred to as ‘sexting’ (Sparks, 2021). As noted by Sparks (2021) the act of sharing sexually explicit photos of oneself with a prospective or current intimate partner has become a routine part of the modern relationship and dating sphere among young adults. However, as previously mentioned, the development of new technologies and the associated new uses of these technologies provides ample opportunities for innovative forms of criminality and victimisation (Pratt, Holtfreter and Reising, 2010; Pakes, 2013). Therefore, modern technologies have created a new means and a new sphere for sexual violence to occur in, such as the focus of the current research; image based sexual abuse (McGlynn and Rackley, 2017a).

### **A Concept with Several Names – What is Image Based Sexual Abuse?**

Cybercrime remains a nebulous topic with little consensus among both the general public and academia on what constitutes as a cybercrime (Phillips et al., 2022; Brady and Heinl, 2020). Phillips et al. (2022) suggests that this lack of agreement emerges from the vast variations and lack of consistency in terminology regarding cybercrimes across jurisdictions. Additionally, a concern with attempting to construct a holistic definition of an amorphous concept such as cybercrime is the rapid pace of how the technology which facilitates crime develops and evolves (Payne, 2020; Brady and Heinl, 2020). Despite the aforementioned concerns and difficulties which arise when attempting to construct a wholly comprehensive

definition of cybercrime, this section of the chapter will attempt to define the concept of image based sexual abuse.

Whenever a new form of crime or social harm occurs and makes its way into the public consciousness the problem with attempting to define this new concept emerges (Maddocks, 2018). Several of the difficulties which arise when attempting to name a new criminological phenomenon include the tracing of the crime's origins, boundaries and ensuring that the new title fully encapsulates all aspects of the offence (Maddocks, 2018). Whilst this is the ideal means of naming a new phenomenon, the primary way in which naming conventions for new crimes emerge is organically through the media and the common usage among the public (Maddocks, 2018). This is especially true for the concept of image based sexual abuse, which is commonly referred to as 'revenge porn'. Whilst it is unclear where the term 'revenge porn' originates from it has been suggested that the term garnered traction from the media backlash to the website '*IsAnyoneUp.com*' which non-consensually shared intimate images of people alongside personal identifying information such as their address (Hayden, 2021; Eikren and Ingram-Waters, 2016).

The term 'image based sexual abuse' was originally coined by Clare McGlynn and Erika Rackley in 2016 (McGlynn and Rackley, 2016). On the website '*Everyday Victim Blaming*', which is concerned with the prevalence of victim blaming surrounding domestic abuse and sexual violence, McGlynn and Rackley (2016) published a blogpost in which they defined image based sexual abuse. Within this initial blogpost they acknowledge the success the term 'revenge pornography' had in grasping the attention of the public, media and legislators (McGlynn and Rackley, 2016). Regardless of the prevalence of the term 'revenge porn' in the collective consciousness of contemporary society, McGlynn and Rackley (2016) suggested replacing 'revenge porn' with 'image based sexual abuse'. Their advocacy for the shift in terminology is based upon the fact that image based sexual abuse better encapsulates the broad



range of forms of this type of abuse can take and the associated harms suffered by the victims (McGlynn and Rackley, 2016).

In an article published in 2017, McGlynn and Rackley (2017a) further developed the concept of image based sexual abuse and officially defined the term within academia and criminology. Within this cornerstone piece of work, they define image based sexual abuse as “non-consensual creation and/or distribution of private sexual images” (McGlynn and Rackley, 2017a, p.3). Although image based sexual abuse is often referring to the aforementioned definition provided by McGlynn and Rackley (2017a), this term also encapsulates a wider array of sexually deviant behaviours facilitated by advancements in technology (Powell et al., 2020). For example, one of the other forms of digitally facilitated sexual violence which falls under the term of image based sexual abuse are deepfakes (Powell et al., 2020). Deepfakes refer to digitally altered images of a person in which someone's face or body is superimposed onto a sexually explicit photo, either manually or through the use of artificial intelligence (Flynn et al., 2021).

Since its inception in 2016, image based sexual abuse has become a widespread phenomenon in criminological and legal literature as well as throughout the media (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2016). However, regardless of the prominence of the term image based sexual abuse this category of crime is still referred to by a myriad of other titles (Maddocks, 2018). For example, Maddocks (2018) notes how terms such as ‘non-consensual pornography’, ‘digital rape’, and the aforementioned ‘revenge porn’ remain prominent phrases used to refer to image based sexual abuse. Although these alternative terms are still regularly used in the common vernacular, they remain wholly problematic which is why image based sexual abuse is the preferable term (McGlynn and Rackley, 2017a).

While ‘revenge porn’ currently exists as the most prominent term to describe image based sexual abuse among the general public it is inherently contributing to ideals of victim blaming (Davis Kempton, 2020). The reasoning behind is that the use of the word ‘revenge’ implies that the victim in question had committed a wrong which is justifiably rectified through an act of ‘revenge’; the non-consensual sharing of the victim’s intimate images (McGlynn et al., 2019).

As with all crimes, image based sexual abuse can happen to any person regardless of their age, gender or sexual identity. However, image based sexual abuse is a predominantly gendered crime as the vast majority of victims identify as female (Lenhart, Ybarra and Price-Feeney, 2016). Thus, image based sexual abuse could be grounded within a feminist discourse. Nonetheless, within feminist criminological research, there remains a paucity of understanding in relation to this emerging form of abuse (McLoughlin and O'Brien, 2019). Nevertheless, image based sexual abuse is situated within a feminist legal and criminological discourse which is interested in how this form of abuse exists in a culture that normalises and sustains gendered, sexual violence (McLoughlin and O'Brien, 2019). As suggested by Fairbairn (2015, as cited in Eikren and Ingram-Waters, 2021) image based sexual abuse fits into a feminist criminological framework as this form of violence is reflective of systematic and cultural ideals of gendered, sexual violence. The prevalence of image based sexual abuse within the 21st century contributes to models of hegemonic masculinity<sup>1</sup> (Eikren and Ingram-Waters, 2021). This is

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<sup>1</sup> Hegemonic masculinity refers to ideals and practices in society which contribute to and legitimatises the dominant position of men in society (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Through the existence of hegemonic masculinity, the dynamics of society are organised in cultural patterns in which the power in society is granted to those who demonstrate the ideal form of masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

emphasised through the incorrect assumption that technology, and by extension the internet, are gender neutral spaces (Eikren and Ingram-Waters, 2021). A more accurate portrayal of the internet is evident in work from Nakamura (2002) and Phillips (2013) who demonstrate that the internet is a space dominated by masculinity which accentuates patterns of racism, sexism and heteronormativity.

## **The Criminalisation of Image Based Sexual Abuse**

Despite the prevalence of image based sexual abuse within criminological literature and academia, it remains neglected by law and policy (Sweeny, 2019). This section will discuss the difficulties in creating effective legislation surrounding both the perpetration of and victimisation caused by instances of image based sexual abuse. It will additionally discuss the current laws surrounding image based sexual abuse within jurisdictions such as Europe, The United Kingdom and Ireland.

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, the significant advances in technology which have occurred over the last 30 years have had a significant impact on the criminal landscape (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2016). However, the aforementioned exponential developments in technology have negative implications for both criminological research and the development of effective legislation (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2016). This is due to the fact that both academia and legislation are often relatively slow to respond to newly emerging crimes (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2016). Marchant (2011) discusses that the accelerated rate in which technologies are used to commit crimes evolve causes there to be a vast lacuna between the rate of technological development and the rate at which legal instruments can respond to these technologies. The growing gap between outdated laws and the pace of

technology may have severe consequences for victims of new technology centric crimes (Marchant, 2011).

There has been a myriad of laws enacted concerned with the perpetration of and associated victimisation due to child exploitative material, or child pornography as it is more commonly referred to as (Broadhurst, 2019). However, while they are both technology centric crimes, image based sexual abuse has not experienced the same level of attention within the legal sector (Nguyen, 2021). This is exemplified by the fact that the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime, Article 9 (Council of Europe, 2001) deems instances of child exploitative material as a criminal offence yet there is no reference to image based sexual abuse within this convention. Although Ireland signed this convention in 2002, at the time of writing, it has still not been ratified into Irish law (Council of Europe, 2022a). This highlights a reluctance among Irish legislators to acknowledge the harms caused by technology-based crimes.

Similarly, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Council of Europe, 2014) does not address the issue of image based sexual abuse, despite the inherently gendered nature of image based sexual abuse (Lenhart, Ybarra and Price-Feeney, 2016). It may be argued that image based sexual abuse could be applied to Article 33 and Article 40 of the aforementioned convention (Council of Europe, 2014). This is because it is extensively documented that image based sexual abuse can have significant psychological effects on the victims due to the harassment they experience (Huber, 2022). However, the lack of an explicit mention of image based sexual abuse in the aforementioned convention leaves the decision whether to criminalise the act or not up to the discretion of individual jurisdictions regardless of the convention's ratification status (Council of Europe, 2022b). This discretion may lead to greater problems such as the neglect of the harms caused by image based sexual abuse.

In spite of the recent global prevalence of image based sexual abuse, many jurisdictions are still attempting to determine the most effective way to implement laws concerned with image based sexual abuse (Kolisetty, 2021). This is evident in the case of laws surrounding image based sexual abuse within The United Kingdom, in particular within England and Wales. Image based sexual abuse was initially criminalised in England and Wales under the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill 2015. While there was a predominantly positive response to the implementation of the legislation, the act failed to acknowledge several aspects of image based sexual abuse (McGlynn et al., 2019). One aspect of this law which gained criticism was the lack of recognition of forms of image based sexual abuse beyond the non-consensual sharing of sexually explicit images. McGlynn et al. (2019) note that this law in England and Wales does not recognise the creation and dissemination of deepfakes nor threats to non-consensually share intimate images as criminal acts. Additionally, the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill 2015 only acknowledges instances of image based sexual abuse as a criminal offence if "it can be proven that the perpetrator [non-consensually shared sexually explicit images] intending to cause distress to the victim" (McGlynn et al., 2019, p.12).

However, the Law Commission of England and Wales are proactively attempting to rectify these aforementioned shortcomings with the current image based sexual abuse law (Green et al., 2022). In July of this year, the Law Commission presented a report in which they addressed several aspects of image based sexual abuse which were not previously acknowledged in British law (Green et al., 2022; McGlynn et al., 2019). This included the motivation of the perpetrator, the nature of the image and the right to anonymity for victims (Green et al., 2022; McGlynn et al., 2019). Whilst these recommendations have not been enacted into British law at the time of writing, they demonstrate a step in the right direction to make the law within The United Kingdom more inclusive and effective at combating instances of image based sexual abuse.

Even though England and Wales criminalised image based sexual abuse in 2015, it took Ireland six years to enact similar legislation (England and Wales, 2015). In Ireland, the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 was commenced on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2021 and criminalised image based sexual abuse (Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, 2021). Unlike the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill 2015, the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 grants victims of image based sexual abuse anonymity and includes the threat to non-consensually share intimate images as an offence. Reflecting on this, it could be argued that Ireland has learnt from the shortcomings of neighbouring jurisdictions when drafting this imperative piece of legislation (McGlynn and Rackley, 2017b).

Although the aforementioned legislative approaches attempt to provide legal solutions for victims of image based sexual abuse, the reality of these laws differs (Sweeny, 2019). As noted by Sweeny (2019), the enactment of laws surrounding instances of image based sexual abuse are substantively undermined by the inherently gendered nature of this crime. The gendered nature of image based sexual abuse is undeniable as people who identify as women are twice as likely to be victims of image based sexual abuse than those who identify as men (Pina et al., 2021; Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2017). Sweeny (2019) suggests that this gendered nature of image based sexual abuse undermines the effectiveness of laws and legal instruments. They argue that this is due to the prevalence of male criminal justice actors such as legislators, prosecutors, and members of the police force (Sweeny, 2019). Additionally, they note that, primarily male, criminal justice actors tend to show a disregard for the serious nature of and the impact that image based sexual abuse can have on someone's life (Sweeny, 2019). Thus, highlighting the shortcomings of the current legislation to address the needs of victims of abuse (Sweeny, 2019).

## **Ideal Victimology – Who is a Victim?**

As the primary research questions of the present study are concerned with the societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse it is imperative to develop an understanding of who and what exactly constitutes as a victim. This section of the literature review will discuss what it means to be a victim as well as discussing the implications of Nils Christie's (1986) ideal victim framework for instances of image based sexual abuse.

The socially constructed nature of victimhood and victimisation causes there to be a plethora of definitions of these terms (McGarry and Walklate, 2015). Within current European law a victim is defined under the EU Directive 2012/29/EU (Directive 2012/29/EU). This directive refers to victims as anyone who suffers any form of harm, whether economic, emotional, mental, or physical as a result of a crime (Directive 2012/29/EU). Additionally, the definition of victims within European law also acknowledges the harm suffered by the family of a victim of crime. The European definition includes the family within the definition of a victim despite their indirect relationship to the criminal offence which caused the initial victimisation (Directive 2012/29/EU).

While the current definition of victims within Irish and European law is somewhat comprehensive in identifying victims of crime, whether they suffer as a result of direct or indirect victimisation, the definition of a victim constructed by Jacoby (2014) provides a more holistic account of what a victim is. Jacoby's (2014) definition of a victim is somewhat preferable. This definition is more inclusive in nature as it recognises victimhood caused by non-criminalised acts. Instead of looking solely at victimisation existing as a result of an act which breaks the law, Jacoby (2014) acknowledges that victimisation can arise from harm perpetrated against a person regardless of the act's legal status.

Christie (1986) defines the ideal victim as a person or category of people who society is most likely to give the 'victim' status and title to, without contention. Within the concept of ideal victimology, the status of a victim is determined via a hierarchy of who seems the most deserving of being a victim (Wijik, 2013; Schwöbel-Patel, 2018). This hierarchy is based on the socially constructed categories of vulnerability and perceived weakness (Wijik, 2013; Schwöbel-Patel, 2018). In his seminal work, Christie (1986) presents the classic example of an elderly woman who was physically assaulted by a man who is unknown to the victim. Christie (1986) acknowledges that if the victim in the previous example was a young man, he would be granted less sympathy from society and perceived as an illegitimate victim due to his inability to fit into the ideal victim framework.

Victims of image based sexual abuse are often not acknowledged as legitimate victims as they do not fit into Christie's (1986) 'ideal victim' framework. As noted by Fohring (2018), two key aspects which determines whether a victim is deemed 'ideal' are power and agency. If a victim of image based sexual abuse takes part in their own victimisation through the initial consensual sharing of sexually explicit images, this expression of sexual autonomy and agency may deny them the societal right to claim victim status (McGlynn and Rackley, 2017). This denial of a societally recognised victim status for those affected by instances of image based sexual abuse may present long term consequences (Fohring, 2018, McGlynn and Rackley, 2017a). An example of these consequences is the lack of provision of effective services and supports for unrecognised victims within society which may subsequently cause increased or secondary victimisation (Fohring, 2018). Furthermore, through withholding the title of victim for those victimised by image based sexual abuse, the harms suffered such as social rupture, anxiety, and trauma are advanced and sustained (McGlynn et al., 2021).

As Christie's (1986) initial theory of ideal victimisation was constructed over 35 years ago, there have been a myriad of criticisms since the theory's inception. In contemporary



academia scholars have attempted to modernise and adapt Christie's theory apply to crime within the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example, Schwöbel-Patel (2018) notes that the traditional ideal victim framework is inherently promoting an incorrect narrative which infantilises victimhood. Within the original ideal victim framework Christie (1986) suggests that victims are only valid if they are weak, respectable citizens, free from blame and are victimised by someone why do not know. This stereotype of victimhood presented by Christie (1986) may have serious consequences for the perception of victims in society through the 'othering' of certain categories of people and the neglect of other types of victims to whom the above traits do not apply to such as victims of image based sexual abuse (Schwöbel-Patel, 2018).

### **The Modern Mythos: Rape Myths**

Throughout their work, Edwards et al., (2011) acknowledge that rape myths contribute to the institutional and societal sustainment of sexual and attitudes towards victims of abuse violence throughout history. In line with the research aims of the present study, it is imperative to examine how rape myths currently perpetuate attitudes towards victims of sexual abuse throughout contemporary society. Prior to analysing how rape myths preserve patterns of abuse within contemporary society, one must first understand what rape myths are (Edwards et al., 2011). The concept of 'rape myths' entered the public zeitgeist after the foundational, feminist work 'Cultural Myths and Supports for Rape' by Martha Burt (1980) was published. Burt's (1980) formative work describes rape myths as "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists [which creates] a climate hostile to rape victims" (Burt, 1980, p.217). This definition of rape myths is further substantiated by more recent research such as that conducted by Venema (2018). Venema's (2018) work supports the initial definition of rape myths presented by Burt (1980). However, within her own work Venema (2018) expands upon

the concept of rape myths. She suggests that the societal prevalence of rape myths aids the justification of male violence against women (Venema, 2018). This is further emphasised by Edwards et al. (2011) who argue that rape myths functionally exist to trivialise, justify, and deny instances of interpersonal sexual violence perpetrated by men against women.

The prevalence of rape myths in contemporary society includes aspects such as the absolution of the perpetrator, victim blaming as well as the minimisation and rationalisation of interpersonal sexual violence (Payne et al., 1994). For example, Ryan (2011) notes that rape myths aid in fostering a culture in which rape is perpetrated and victims are blamed for being violated. Rape myths, and by extension rape culture, are sustained at both the individual and societal level through rape myth acceptance (Suarez and Gadalla, 2010). A meta-analysis conducted by Suarez and Gadalla (2010) found that rates of rape myth acceptance is higher among participants who identified as male than those who identified as female. Similarly, they found that rape myth acceptance was positively correlated with oppressive beliefs such as homophobia, sexism, classism, and racism (Suarez and Gadalla, 2010).

Within a study from Süßenbach and Bohner (2011) it was found that rape myth acceptance peaks at 57% of participants agreeing with some form of rape myth. While at the time of writing, the study by Süßenbach and Bohner (2011) is over a decade old, it is still relevant as it highlights the prominence of rape myth acceptance. However, a more recent study conducted by Thelan and Meadows (2021) suggests that there had been a decrease in reported rape myth acceptance. They propose that this may not be due to a shift in attitudes but rather because of the knowledge that it has become socially undesirable to agree with aspects of rape myths (Thelan and Meadows, 2021). The prevalence of rape myths undeniably shapes current societal perceptions of victims of interpersonal sexual violence (Suarez and Gadalla, 2010; Martini and De Piccoli, 2020). This subsequently affects secondary victimisation and support services available to victims (Suarez and Gadalla, 2010; Fohring, 2018).

The aforementioned features of traditional rape myths are further demonstrated through the rape myths which were selected for analysis within the current study. McMahon and Farmer (2011) critically analysed traditional rape myths within their work and created a modern adaptation of Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale in order to address “the subtleties involved with rape myths” (McMahon and Farmer, 2011, p. 71). Their research focused on the subtle nature of rape myths as this is how these myths primarily infiltrate societal ideals and attitudes towards abuse and victims of abuse (McMahon and Farmer, 2011).

A myriad of traditional rape myths exist and have been studied throughout academia, such as 'women enjoy rape' and 'husbands cannot rape their wives' (Edwards et al., 2011). However, these rape myths are not applicable to the concept of image based sexual abuse (McGlynn and Rackley, 2017a). Instead, it was determined that the subtle rape myths presented McMahon and Farmer (2011) were significantly more relevant to instances of image based sexual abuse. The subtle rape myths which were examined throughout the media content analysis and thematic analysis conducted in the present study are ‘she asked for it’, ‘she lied’, ‘it wasn’t really rape’ and ‘he didn’t mean to’ (McMahon and Farmer, 2011).

The majority of academia surrounding the discussion of rape myths and rape culture is grounded in ideals of heteronormativity with a focus on the female victim and the male perpetrator (Reling et al., 2021). Heteronormativity is recognised as a configuration of social norms and practices which suggest that heterosexuality is the only natural and acceptable sexual orientation (Robinson, 2016). Despite the fact that Burt's (1980) work on rape myths was inclusive of victims and sexual predators of all genders, subsequent research has predominately concerned itself with instances of abuse in which there is a female victim and a male perpetrator (Reling et al., 2021). Thus, there remains a gap within the literature on rape myths whereby there is an acknowledgement of instances of sexual abuse that expands beyond the traditional, heteronormative concept of 'real sex' (Hillyard et al., 2004; Javaid, 2018).

The concept of 'real sex' as presented by Hillyard et al. (2004) within queer criminological theory is defined as any sexual activity which involves the penetration of a female body by a male body. The conceptualisation of 'real sex' may be applicable in the disregard and lack of concern displayed towards victims of image based sexual abuse within society (Hillyard et al., 2004; Henry et al., 2022). As image based sexual abuse is a technology centric act of violence, the concept of 'real sex' cannot be applied to this type of abuse, unlike instances of heteronormative rape (Reling et al., 2021; McGlynn and Rackley, 2017a; Hillyard et al., 2004). Through the neglect of acknowledging forms of sexual violence such as instances of rape within the queer community or image based sexual abuse as they do not fit the mould of 'real sex' the harms suffered by these victims is further amplified (Hillyard et al., 2004; Javaid, 2018; McGlynn and Rackley, 2017a).

### **Existing Attitudes Towards Victims of Image Based Sexual Abuse**

Prior to discussing the current research on attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse, it is important to acknowledge the demographics of these victims. It has been noted earlier in this chapter that image based sexual abuse is a crime which predominantly affects people who identify as female (Lenhart, Ybarra and Price-Feeney, 2016). While this dissertation has adopted a feminist criminological approach towards the investigation of image based sexual abuse, it is imperative to note that heterosexual women are not the only demographic affected by this harm. For example, there has been an emerging wealth of

literature suggesting that members of the LGBTQIA+<sup>2</sup> community are disproportionality at risk of being victimised due to image based sexual abuse (Citron, 2014; Hamilton, 2018).

As noted by Serpe and Brown (2022) bisexual women are significantly more likely to experience negative consequences when victimised due to image based sexual abuse. These negative consequences include increased levels of victim blaming (Serpe and Brown, 2022). This may be due to the increased sexualisation, and objectification experienced by bisexual women compared to their heterosexual and lesbian counterparts (Worten, 2013; Serpe and Brown, 2022). Although bisexual women are more susceptible to victim blaming regarding instances of image based sexual abuse, gay men are the most commonly victimised group (Waldman, 2019). Gay men are more frequently victimised due to image based sexual abuse than the remainder of the LGBTQIA+ community as well as the wider population yet there is an absence of this acknowledgement throughout academia (Waldman, 2019).

There is a paucity of research that has investigated societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse in Ireland. Therefore, in order to create an understanding of the pervasive attitudes that exist in relation to this phenomenon, it is necessary to evaluate the emerging literature from jurisdictions beyond Ireland. For example, within a representative study in the United States of America it was revealed that significant gender differences exist concerning attitudes towards image based sexual abuse (Lageson, McElrath and Palmer, 2018).

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<sup>2</sup> LGBTQIA+ is an acronym which attempts to encompass all members of the queer community (Bazarsky et al., 2022). It stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual (Bazarsky et al., 2022). However, the plus symbol in the acronym represents members of the queer community who are not explicitly represented by the letters in the acronym such as those who identify as pansexual, nonbinary, genderfluid or aromantic (Bazarsky, Morrow and Javier, 2015).

In the United States of America, it was found that women were significantly more in favour of criminalising image based sexual abuse than men (Lageson, McElrath and Palmer, 2018). However, this support for criminalisation drastically decreased within both male and female participants in cases where the victim was responsible for the initial creation of the sexually explicit material (Lageson, McElrath and Palmer, 2018). Thus, furthering ideals of victim blaming within image based sexual abuse discourse (Payne et al., 1994; Davis Kempton, 2020).

Similarly, a study from New Zealand conducted in 2019 (Pacheco, Melhuish and Fiske, 2019) intended to investigate the prevalence of and societal attitudes towards the perpetration of image based sexual abuse. Within this study it was found that 56 percent of participants believed that the responsibility of image based sexual abuse falls onto the victim if they initially shared the image (Pacheco, Melhuish and Fiske, 2019). Once again highlighting the prevalence of negative perceptions of towards victims of image based sexual abuse and perpetuating the concept of victim blaming (Pacheco, Melhuish and Fiske, 2019).

## **The Historical Irish Perspective on Sexual Violence**

Ireland has historically ignored the discussion of sexual violence, perceived sexual deviancy and victims of abuse (Inglis, 2005; McGee et al., 2002). This is largely the result of the influence of the Catholic Church, and it's focus on sexual morality (McCarthy, 2010). This is evident through the existence of the Magdalene Laundries (Pembroke, 2013; O' Mahoney, Bowman Grieve and Torn, 2019). The implementation of and focus on these closed institutions which punished supposedly "sexually immoral" (O' Mahoney, Bowman Grieve and Torn, 2019, p. 188) women distracted from multiple instances of sexual violence perpetrated by the Catholic Church during this period (Inglis, 2005; Garrett, 2013). Whilst Ireland is slowly becoming a less religious nation and the influence of the Catholic Church is waning, sexuality,

sexual violence and abuse remain somewhat controversial and hidden topics within Irish society (Inglis, 2005; White, 2017). Perhaps due to the lingering influence of the Catholic Church's stance on the discussion of sexuality in Ireland, there is an absence of Irish research surrounding attitudes towards victims of sexual violence, including emerging forms of sexual violence such as image based sexual abuse (White, 2017; McGlynn and Rackley, 2017b).

The influential SAVI Report or the Report on Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland by McGee et al. (2002) was one of the first and only pieces of work which investigates attitudes towards victims of abuse in an Irish context. The SAVI Report found that the Irish public held inaccurate views regarding the prevalence of sexual violence in Ireland (McGee et al., 2002). For example, participants vastly overestimated the number of reported cases of abuse as well as underestimating the frequency of abuse (McGee et al., 2002). Despite the inaccurate beliefs concerning the reality of abuse in Ireland, 85 percent of all participants believed that victims of rape are usually innocent. However, male participants perpetuated ideals of victim-blaming (McGee et al., 2002).

Image based sexual abuse became a prominent topic within Ireland following an incident where tens of thousands of non-consensually shared sexually explicit images of Irish women were posted to the online messaging platform Discord in 2020 (Ryan, 2020). The server was deleted once a victim support group, The Victims Alliance, uncovered the leak, yet the pictures remained online (Ryan, 2020). Despite this large-scale instance of image based sexual abuse in Ireland, there is a significant lack of academic literature published on Irish attitudes towards victims of this form of abuse compared to other jurisdictions (Ryan, 2020; Pacheco, Melhuish and Fiske, 2019).

The SAVI Report (McGee et al., 2002) was conducted 20 years ago at the time of writing but there has not been a similarly comprehensive study concerning attitudes and

perceptions towards victims of interpersonal or image based sexual abuse in Ireland since. Thus, highlighting the significance of the current research which aims to investigate societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse in Ireland and The United Kingdom.

## **Conclusion**

It was decided that it was beyond the scope of the current research to conduct a systematic review of the current literature related to image based sexual abuse. Nevertheless, this chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the available literature on image based sexual abuse with a distinct focus on societal attitudes towards victims of sexual abuse within Ireland and The United Kingdom.

Throughout the research discussed in the current chapter it is evident that image based sexual abuse is an area within criminology that is rapidly gaining the academic recognition it deserves. However, there are still a myriad of gaps within the literature surrounding image based sexual abuse. One prominent gap that emerged was the focus of the current research, societal attitudes. In particular, there is a significant absence of research comparing societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse and interpersonal sexual violence.

Therefore, the current research will attempt to bridge this gap in academia through conducting a media content analysis focused on The United Kingdom and Ireland. It will do so in order to reveal and compare these societal attitudes. The methods used in order to analyse the aforementioned societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse will be outlined in detail within the following chapter, 'Methodology'.



## **Chapter Three – Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The primary focus and goal of the research conducted within the scope of this dissertation is to critically analyse and investigate societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse. In order to achieve this aim, the present research conducted a desk-analysis, qualitative study underpinned by inductive interpretivism (Gray, 2017). It seeks to explore the media representations of victims of image based sexual abuse and the attitudes perpetrated through these media representations. Additionally, this research will consider whether these identified attitudes are reflective of the ideals perpetrated through traditional rape myths, found in existing research surrounding this issue (McMahon and Farmer, 2011).

This research is guided by the following key questions:

1. 'What are the societal attitudes that currently exist towards victims of image based sexual abuse?' and
2. 'Do these attitudes differ from the attitudes perpetuated towards victims of traditional, interpersonal sexual abuse?'

The following chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of the methods used throughout the present research as well as denoting the process through in which the collected data was analysed. It will begin with a through discussion of the epistemological foundations of the research design, prior to the explanation of what a media content analysis and the subsequent thematic analysis consist of.

## **Research Design**

The research design used for the research project at hand is a qualitative, inductive and interpretivist approach. This section of the chapter will outline the reasoning for this research design being selected as the epistemology underpinned for the current study.

The interpretivist approach toward research design exists as a means of examining “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life world” (Crotty, 1998, p.67) Due to the prolific use of the interpretivist theoretical perspective in qualitative research methods such as documentary and media content analysis, it is appropriate for the desk-based study at hand (Gray, 2017). Gray (2017) further acknowledges that as interpretivism is concerned with the social reality, it is vital for the current research which is examining social attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abused to utilise this epistemological framework. Therefore, an interpretivist approach towards conducting research is essential for the current research which is centred around identifying and analysing societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse.

The qualitative nature of the present research is designed to facilitate a profound understanding of a deeply complex issue. Through the conduct of a media content analysis, this research sought to answer the following questions:

1. 'What are the societal attitudes that currently exist towards victims of image based sexual abuse?' and
2. 'Do these attitudes differ from the attitudes perpetuated towards victims of traditional, interpersonal sexual abuse?'

As noted by Frankel and Devers (2000) qualitative research methods are necessary to enact when the research questions aim to provide a new insight or direction concerning the human condition such as understanding people, groups, experiences and situations. This in turn

helps enforce the inductive nature of the research at hand as qualitative research is flexible and dynamic as data emerges and thus informs the theories or explanations needed to address the research questions (Frankel and Devers, 2000). Therefore, an inductive, qualitative research design is appropriate for the present research project as it is concerned with the attributes of human behaviour which influence the associated thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs towards victims of image based sexual abuse (Thomas, 2006).

Additionally, the current research has analysed the attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse in The United Kingdom and Ireland from a feminist theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998). Feminist criminology emerged within the second wave feminism of the 1960s and has remained a key aspect of the criminological imagination since (Heidensohn, 2012). As image based sexual abuse is an inherently gendered crime, with the majority of victims identifying as female, the feminist theoretical perspective is imperative for the current study (Lenhart, Ybarra and Price-Feeney, 2016).

## **Media Content Analysis**

The chosen research method for this dissertation is a media content analysis. This section of the chapter will discuss what a media content analysis is. The concept of media content analysis was first introduced by Lasswell (1927) who investigated the effects of propaganda on the public zeitgeist. Media content analysis has been defined as “a technique for gathering and analysing the content of a text” (Neuman, 1997, p. 272). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) expand on the concept of media content analysis through dividing the concept into two distinct categories: behaviourism and humanism. They define the behaviourist approach to media content analysis attempts to examine the future effects of attitudes portrayed in the media (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Conversely, the humanist tradition of media

content analysis attempts to address what the media says about society and how the media can reflect existing societal attitudes (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). As the humanistic approach tends to favour qualitative work, this is the approach utilised throughout the current study's media content analysis (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

Within the last 30 years the role of 'new media' has grown at an exponential rate (Herring, 2004). Herring (2004) notes at the outset of her work that 'new media' is a term that was coined within the 1990s to refer to any form of digital media which is distributed online. The rise of this 'new media' and the popularity of the means of communication such as the internet allows for new opportunities for research such as the focus of this section of the chapter, media content analysis (Herring, 2004). Macnamara (2005) describes media content analysis as a specialised sub-category of content analysis which is a well-established social research method.

Regarding media content analysis and criminology, this method has been used as a means to understand the ways in which crime, deviance and factors such as social control are portrayed in the media and the influence these portrayals subsequently have on the public (Kort-Butler, 2016). A criminology centric media content analysis is concerned with the appraisal of the variety of meanings and messages which are perpetrated and enforced through the media and popular culture (Kort-Butler, 2016). Kort-Butler (2016) defines the media as a repository for society's cultural knowledge whilst simultaneously shaping the public's past, present, and possibly future ideas about and understanding of crime. Thus, this is why it was decided that a media content analysis was deemed an effective research method for the analysis of societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse.

Although media content analysis is considered to be a research method that is both quantitative and qualitative in nature, for the purposes of this research, a qualitative approach

will be taken (Kort-Butler, 2016). Solely using media content analysis as a quantitative method may cause the researcher to neglect or ignore the context of the text in question which gives the text its meaning and social impact (Newbold et al., 2002). The goal of conducting a qualitative media content analysis such as the one conducted for the current research project is the analysis of the deeper meanings, social impact and interpretations by the media's audience of a piece of media such as analysing the societal attitudes towards a certain topic (Macnamara, 2005).

## **Sampling and Inclusion Criteria**

This section of the methodology chapter will discuss the sampling methods used for the current research project. It will do so through discussing how the articles for the media content analysis were chosen. This section will additionally disclose the inclusion criteria for the articles, how and where they were sourced as well as why these specific articles were deemed appropriate for the research undertaken for the completion of the present study.

In her work Herring (2004) acknowledges several complications which arise when attempting to get a representative sample of articles or webpages online when conducting a media content analysis. The main concern noted by Herring (2004) is when using the internet as the sampling pool for research not all relevant webpages or online articles can be analysed due to the vast nature of the online sphere. Thus, it is imperative that the researcher chooses a sampling method which results in a sample that is representative of the myriad of online content available (Herring, 2004).

When attempting to choose a sampling method for the purposes of the current research project, snowball sampling was almost immediately excluded as a method. This is due the reasons outlined by Herring et al. (2005). They discuss how when searching for articles and

websites online one may click on links between related webpages to view other articles (Herring et al., 2005). While this may allow for a large selection on articles and webpages to be found, snowball sampling in this manner neglects the websites on the internet which are wholly unrelated to one another (Herring et al., 2005). Thus, making snowball sampling an ineffective sampling method for the current research project.

Therefore, it was decided that a non-probability sampling method such as purposive sampling would be preferable for the current research (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016). This is because purposive sampling allows for the selection of information-rich participants or cases which are related to the researchers chosen topic (Palinkas et al., 2016). Within purposive sampling members of the population, or media articles in the current research, are chosen due to their ability to meet certain criteria (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016). For the current study these criteria included the article being easily accessible online, relevant to the topic of image based sexual abuse in Ireland and The United Kingdom and published within the allotted timeframe. In order to effectively get a sample for the current research, the researcher aimed to find the most information rich sources which would contribute to the project. It was determined that articles from The United Kingdom and Ireland would be analysed concerning instances of image based sexual abused due to the shared common law judicial systems in both jurisdictions (Higgins, 2014). Furthermore, The United Kingdom and Ireland were chosen for analysis in the present study as the researcher is based in Ireland and both Ireland and The United Kingdom are culturally similar due to Ireland's history of British colonisation (Cairns and Richards, 1988).

Additionally, within the scope of the current research purposive sampling was an ideal sampling method to choose as it is affordable and non-time consuming (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016). Despite the aforementioned benefits of purposive sampling, it is imperative to note that purposive sampling is an inherently biased method (Tongco, 2007). This is due to

the fact that the researcher seeks out information, sources and informants that they believe to best further their research (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016). This was combatted in the current research by the researcher purposely seeking out articles from liberal, conservative, and neutral perspectives in order to provide a holistic view of the current societal attitudes rather than only looking articles from one of these perspectives.

The articles selected were sourced online through a Google search of a myriad of terms including but not limited to 'image based sexual abuse' 'ibsa Ireland' 'revenge porn' 'revenge porn Ireland' 'ibsa victim' and more. The slight variations in search terms allowed for a wider array of articles from different publications, whether liberal or conservative, to appear in the search results. Thus this provided a more robust picture of the societal attitudes perpetrated through the media and avoided the biases associated with purposive sampling.

As the internet is a vast place which is increasingly becoming borderless due to factors such as information sharing becoming more accessible due to globalisation, it was important to limit the articles to those which were concerned with instances of image based sexual abuse in The United Kingdom and Ireland (Herring,2004). This is because it would be impossible to examine global attitudes towards image based sexual attitudes within this study, however this may be possible in further research.

Additionally, when selecting articles for inclusion within the current research the publication date of the article was important to consider. Due to the extremely recent criminalisation of image based sexual abuse within Ireland under the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020, it was determined that a date range of 3 years prior to the law being enacted on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and one year after the law being enacted, was an appropriate time frame (Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, 2021). This would

enable the researcher to assess if there was any difference in the societal attitudes evident prior, during and after image based sexual abuse's criminalisation in Ireland.

## **Thematic Analysis**

The previously described media content analysis is the research method which was used for the data collection process of the current research. However, the analysis and coding procedures that were utilised throughout the current study was a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This is due to the flexibility and accessibility of thematic analysis which makes it applicable to a wide array of research methods such as a media content analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The thematic analysis conducted throughout the research project will follow the six stages outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) throughout their work, beginning with familiarising oneself with and immersing oneself in the data. Once the researcher has become familiar with the data collected the second stage of completing a thematic analysis is the coding stage (Braun and Clarke, 2006). After the codes have been revealed the researcher must then sort the codes into themes (Brauna and Clarke, 2006). The overarching themes that the researcher observes through their analysis helps to find meaningful categories within the data set which will be used to answer the research questions. Whilst the researcher is determining the overarching themes, they are simultaneously tasked with defining and naming both the primary themes and any subthemes which may emerge (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The possible emergence of subthemes is beneficial as they aid the understanding of the more complex primary themes. Finally, a thematic analysis concludes with the final report, which will be in the following 'Findings' chapter of this research.



## **Conclusion**

To conclude this chapter, the research method that was used throughout the present research was a qualitative desk-based media content analysis. The data was subsequently coded in line with a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). This is in order to uncover what the prominent societal attitudes concerning victims of image based sexual abuse in comparison to the attitudes towards victims of traditional, interpersonal sexual abuse. The following chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of the results of the media content analysis and the subsequent thematic analysis.

## **Chapter Four – Findings**

### **Introduction**

As outlined in Chapter 3, the research method utilised in this study was a media content analysis. A media content analysis was conducted in order to examine the societal attitudes which exist towards victims of image based sexual abuse in The United Kingdom and Ireland. Prior to the media content analysis four initial themes were derived from traditional rape myths as outlined by McMahon and Farmer (2011). The four chosen rape myths are as follows ‘she asked for it’, ‘she lied’, ‘it wasn’t really rape’ and ‘he didn’t mean to’. Through conducting a thematic analysis of thirty-five media articles, the four previously mentioned rape myths became evident as themes which were then expanded upon throughout the coding process. These four themes which were based on the initial aforementioned rape myths are ‘they asked for it’, ‘the victim lied’, ‘it wasn’t really abuse’ and ‘the perpetrator didn’t mean to’. The coding frameworks for which are available at the end of this dissertation as Appendices A, B, C and D. This chapter will present the findings from the media content analysis through the careful examination of each theme and the subsequent codes supported by evidence from the thirty-five media articles.

### **They Asked For It**

As noted by Edwards et al. (2011) one of the most prominent rape myths that has prevailed in society throughout history is the idea that the victim was 'asking' to be raped or in other words they brought the abuse on themselves through provocative behaviour. The prominence of this rape myth was highlighted through a survey in The United Kingdom

(Walklate, 2008). Findings showed that 26% of people in The United Kingdom believed that a woman was responsible for her own rape if she was wearing revealing clothing (Walklate, 2008). Thus, this makes 'they asked for it' a strong candidate for a theme within the present research (Walklate, 2008). Throughout the thematic analysis of the media articles conducted within this study four codes highlighted the theme of 'they asked for it' and image based sexual abuse: victim blaming, normalisation, terminology, and consent.

### ***Victim Blaming***

Within public discourse regarding victims of sexual abuse, whether interpersonal or image based, victim blaming is a recurring component (Mandau, 2020; Stubbs-Richardson, Rader and Cosby, 2018).

*“Recent horrific cases of sexual violence have brought the topic of victim blaming back into the spotlight.”* (West 2021b).

This quote from Dr Caroline West (2011b) introduced a piece she wrote for The Journal, advocating for the end of victim blaming regarding incidents of interpersonal sexual violence due to the harm and secondary victimisation victim blaming can cause.

*“...Victims can face further re-traumatisation as they listen to family, friends, colleagues and the media making victim blaming comments. Rape and sexual violence are not just a once-off trauma – secondary trauma comes from victim blaming too.”* (West, 2011b).

Whilst it is clear that victim blaming is evident when referring to forms of interpersonal sexual abuse such as rape or sexual assault, the thematic analysis found that victim blaming is also an inherent part of the conversation concerning victims of image based sexual abuse.

*“‘I couldn’t date a girl who has nude images all over the internet,’ he said, dismissively. ‘You make decisions in the past, you have to live with them.’”* (Anonymous as quoted in Speed, 2021).

The above quote from the anonymous source interviewed by Speed (2021) effectively summarises the most prevalent form of victim blaming which was revealed throughout the thematic analysis; regardless of if the photos were shared online with or without consent, the victim is seen as the one at fault. This form of victim blaming can have serious consequences such as social exclusion. This was also evident in the case of former ‘Love Island’ star Zara McDermott, who had her sexually explicit images shared without her consent when she was 14 years old.

*“The reality star was also suspended from school and said she became known as the “slut” who sent the picture.”* (Christodoulou, 2021.)

Despite the prominence of victim blaming in the media discourse surrounding victims of image based sexual abuse, the present research found that a cultural and paradigm shift may be occurring. This shift can be seen through a refocused lens on what the true problem or wrong act in a case of image based sexual abuse is.

*“We ask why they took or sent images of themselves in the first place. But now, more than ever, it must be made clear that it is not the exchange of intimate images between consenting adults that is the problem. It is the non-consensual taking, sharing or threatening to share these images that is wrong.”* (Powell and Flynn, 2020)

As noted in the above quote by Powell and Flynn (2020) there is an ongoing change in attitudes towards image based sexual abuse. In particular, there appears to be a shift away from the conventional and prominent narrative of victim blaming and a new focus on the offender and the non-consensual sharing of the photos rather than the act of consensually sharing intimate photos in the first place.

### ***Normalised Feature of Modern Relationships***

When discussing the theme of ‘They Asked For It’ it is important to acknowledge that the sharing of intimate and sexually explicit images to one’s partner has become a normalised part of dating and relationships within the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Lee et al., 2015; Thorburn et al., 2021). Due to the prevalence and normality of sharing intimate images with one’s romantic partner or potential romantic partners, the code of normalisation emerged. This is because while sharing nude or sexually explicit pictures with a partner has become an integral part of modern relationships, it has consequently turned image based sexual abuse into a normalised form of harm and abuse in contemporary society (Lee et al., 2015; Thorburn et al., 2021).

*“.... Sharing such images has become an increasingly common part of romantic relationships, adding that 27 per cent of young men and 43 per cent of young women have done so.”* (Young, 2020).

The perceived normality of sending intimate images to a partner whilst in a relationship has potentially contributed to more instances of image based sexual abuse as young adults and teenagers “...feel pressured to do it” (O’Rourke, 2020a). Additionally, the thematic analysis found several instances of teenagers sending their peers sexually explicit images of themselves as a means to try to fit in. They did this as they believed this would gain them respect and admiration among their schoolmates and friends.

*“She said she was being savagely bullied at school in Essex at the time and hoped sending the picture to the boy would help her fit in.”* (Christodoulou, 2021).

A consequence of sharing intimate images whilst in relationships becoming a normalised “...part of dating” (O’Rourke, 2020a) is the subsequent increase in instances of image based sexual abuse. In particular, the thematic analysis revealed that after a relationship ends a commonly emerging way in which people cope with a breakup is through non-

consensually sharing intimate images of their former partner, either as a form of revenge or out of spite.

*“... one of the aspects of modern life is the increase in instances in which private images taken while in an intimate relationship are posted online when a relationship breaks down”* (Finn, 2019)

### ***Terminology; The Problem With ‘Revenge Porn’***

Although the previous code of ‘normalisation’ concluded with stating that several instances of image based sexual abuse may occur out of spite or as an act of revenge following a breakup, it is important to note that the terms ‘revenge’ and ‘revenge porn’ are wholly inappropriate when discussing image based sexual abuse. Thus, the code of ‘terminology’ arose due to the prominence of the term ‘revenge porn’ and inherent victim blaming through referring to image based sexual abuse as ‘revenge porn’ in the media.

*“And I would stress that our language matters around this issue. It's not revenge, it's not porn. It is abuse.”* (Margaret Martin, Former Director of Women's Aid, as quoted in RTÉ News, 2020)

The problem with the commonly used term ‘revenge porn’ is that it implies that the victim is initially at fault and that whatever fault or wrongdoing the victim allegedly did is worthy of having their sexually explicit images shared without their permission or consent. As mentioned by Hayden (2021) “[Revenge porn] implies that there was an action, for the which the victim was responsible. For you to seek revenge, it implies that somebody did something wrong...”.

*“Language is important here – “revenge porn” suggests that there is a justification for sharing these images. More fundamentally, it suggests that whatever the perceived wrong*

*committed by the victim can and should be righted by the exploitation of their intimate image”* (Costello, 2020).

The subliminal victim blaming which occurs when using the term ‘revenge porn’ implies that the victim was ‘asking for’ or deserving of the abuse that happened to them. Which is why ‘terminology’ was derived as an appropriate code for the theme of ‘They Asked For It’.

*“These images should not be spoken about as revenge porn but instead, they should be viewed as ‘image-based sexual abuse.’ This term captures the non-consensual exploitation involved and the seriousness of the harm which results when they are shared and a person’s sexual privacy is invaded.”* (Costello, 2020).

### ***Consent***

Similar to all forms of sexual violence and sexual assault, consent is at the forefront of the media discourse surrounding image based sexual abuse in Ireland and The United Kingdom (Short et al., 2017). The question of whether a victims consented to the sexually explicit images in a particular case being taken or shared is why the code of ‘consent’ fits into the theme of ‘They Asked For It’. As was noted throughout the literature review in Chapter Two of this study, if the victim consented to their pictures being taken the public tend to assume that the abuse is deserved or justified (Call, 2021).

However, “it is irrelevant, under the [Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020], if the victim originally consented to the image being taken if they did not consent to its subsequent publication or distribution” (Dunphy, 2021). The aforementioned section of the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 helps to alleviate some concerns of victim blaming within Ireland as the focus is shifting the non-consensual sharing of intimate images not the consensual taking of the photos. This is further highlighted in the following quote from O’Rourke (2020b) who discusses

consent and highlights the changing attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse not 'asking for it' even if they do initially consent to the taking of intimate images.

*"I think the very first thing we would say, in every case is that irrespective of how images were created, or whether they were consensually shared, is never your fault if somebody has taken, without consent, and shared them in a manner among other parties, who did not have your permission to see our view or engage with them,"* (O'Rourke, 2020b).

## **The Victim Lied**

The second theme which emerged throughout the thematic analysis was 'The Victim Lied'. This theme is primarily based upon perhaps the most common rape myth, which is that victims, in particular women, lie about being raped (Edwards et al., 2011; Burt, 1980). Despite being a prevalent rape myth, Patton and Snyder-Yuly's (2007) work notes that false allegations of rape occur with extreme infrequency. Throughout the current research four codes were determined which are related to the theme of 'The Victim Lied'. The codes which include 'legislation', 'responses', 'support' and 'they lied' are all centred around a common thread of belief in a victim of image based sexual abuse.

### ***Legislation***

*"Victim-survivors are being let down by current laws, which are inconsistent, outdated and confusing."* (Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019).

The above quote from Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson (2019) is referring to laws within The United Kingdom surrounding instances of image based sexual abuse such as section 33 of The Criminal Justice and Courts Bill, 2015. This act designated image based sexual abuse as a criminal offence in England and Wales in 2015. Despite the fact that Rackley, McGlynn



and Johnson (2019) are referring to inadequate laws in The United Kingdom, the aforementioned quote is also applicable to Ireland and Irish law.

*“Irish laws covering so-called revenge porn – the posting of sexually explicit images of a person online without their consent, generally by a former partner or date – are not adequate”* (MacNamee, 2019).

Prior to February 2021 when the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 was signed into Irish law, there was no law which protected, supported or looked after the interests of Irish victims of image based sexual abuse. It took Ireland almost six years after it’s neighbouring country, The United Kingdom, to enact this law. This shows a lack of care, belief and support for victims of image based sexual abuse within the Irish legal and criminal justice systems (Finn, 2019).

*“This is a profound violation of women and girls’ rights and demonstrates again the inadequacy of Irish law in protecting them against such abuse,”* (President of Sinn Féin, Mary Lou McDonald as quoted in Coyne, 2020b).

Despite the fact that there is currently Irish legislation which aims to protect the interests and needs of victims of image based sexual abuse it remains a concern how long it took the Irish government to enact these laws (RTÉ News, 2020). Especially given the rapid pace of developments in technologies which can be used to facilitate instances of image based sexual abuse such as deepfakes (Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019; Meskys et al., 2020).

*“We need to modernise and strengthen our laws to combat all forms of image-based sexual abuse and to protect all victims”* (McGlynn and Johnson, 2018).

### ***Responses From Criminal Justice Agencies***

As Ireland remains “...behind the times when it comes to dealing with the issue of ‘revenge porn’” (Finn, 2019), the responses from organisations and criminal justice actors such

as An Garda Síochána remain ineffective as “Irish law offers few remedies to victims of image-based sexual abuse” (Costello, 2020). Throughout the current research, it emerged that it is commonplace for victims of image based sexual abuse in Ireland and The United Kingdom to not report instances of image based sexual abuse out of fear that nothing will be done to help their plight. The below quote from Young (2020) is referring to a survey conducted by Tucker O’Sullivan (2020), on behalf of domestic abuse charity Refuge, which investigated instances of image based sexual abuse within a nationally representative sample of adults in England and Wales.

*“Just under two thirds of the women surveyed said they did not report the threats to the police. Refuge said those who do are commonly told nothing can be done ...”* (Tucker O’Sullivan, 2020; Young, 2020).

The responses by criminal justice agencies in Ireland, specifically An Garda Síochána, have been less than satisfactory when it comes to investigating instances of image based sexual abuse. When hundreds of sexually explicit photos of Irish women were non-consensually shared online the “gardaí investigating the online sharing of so-called “revenge porn” ... believe[d] criminal charges are highly unlikely.” (Gallagher, 2020).

Additionally, it did not matter to An Garda Síochána if sexually explicit material was initially consensually shared to online sex-work platforms such as OnlyFans. If intimate content was consensually posted to OnlyFans prior to being leaked, the Gardaí would not take action claiming that “at most it’s a civil matter under copyright law,” (Gallagher, 2020). The Gardaí also failed to have an appropriate response when repeat instances of image based sexual abuse occur to a single victim. For example, when “Jane’s ex-boyfriend continued to upload explicit footage of her to an adult site ... there was nothing Gardaí could do” (Fallon-Griffin, 2019). These failures to adequately respond to instances of image based sexual abuse in Ireland,

may contribute to the myth of victims lying about cases of abuse due to this inaction and lack of results.

### ***Support for Victims***

The third code applicable to the theme of ‘The Victim Lied’ is ‘support’. The inadequate responses to victim concerns and reporting mentioned throughout the previous section of this chapter may be rectified by increasing available supports for victims of image based sexual abuse.

*“...too often victim-survivors face the long and painful task of getting their pictures taken down alone. Few are able to access specialist emotional and psychological support, or assistance with navigating the complicated legal terrain.”* (Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019).

As mentioned above by Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson (2019), the lack of response in order to tackle instances of image based sexual is amplified by a serious lack of easily accessible supports for victims. A helpline designated for victims of image base sexual abuse to report cases of abuse received a 22 percent increase in reports from 2019 to 2020 (Petter, 2020). This may suggest that either more instances of image based sexual abuse occurred in 2020 or that the lack of available supports for victims drove people towards the available resources such as the aforementioned helpline (Petter, 2020).

*“While the perpetrators will be released in a few years, the impact of their actions on the victim will stay with them for life. Therefore, extensive and accessible support services are vital for victims”* (West, 2021b).

The thematic analysis revealed a paradigm shift towards providing more supports and resources for victims of image based sexual abuse. The narrative within the media has shifted towards a culture and society where the experiences and concerns of victims are given the

utmost importance in order to support them (BBC News, 2021a). However, in order for this emerging cultural shift to become the norm “a crucial first step is to start with believing victims” (West, 2021a). This newfound focus on believing victims is amplified by the fact that “...all victims should be able to access non-judgmental, inclusive services for as long as they need to” (West, 2021b) in this new culture of support.

### ***They Lied***

The final code relating to the theme of ‘The Victim Lied’ is ‘they lied’. Out of the prior three codes discussed relating to this theme, the code of ‘they lied’ best reflects the rape myth that the theme was based upon (Edwards et al., 2011; Burt, 1980). This is because the code of ‘they lied’ perfectly exemplifies the culmination of the previous three codes. For example, the code ‘they lied’ encapsulates the ineffective responses to image based sexual abuse, the outdated laws as well as the lack of available supports and belief of victims. Throughout the media content analysis, it was noted that when instances of image based sexual abuse are reported they are often minimised and noted as not being serious.

*“In December 2020, after he was first accused of sharing revenge porn, he reportedly described the allegations as “silly rumours””* (BBC News, 2021b).

The above quote from reality television star Stephen Bear come after he was accused by a previous partner of image based sexual abuse. Bear’s reaction to the accusation highlights the code of ‘they lied’ as he is minimising the accusation and passing off the act as meaningless and unharmed (BBC News, 2021b).

### **It Wasn’t Really Abuse**

The third theme which will be discussed within this chapter is the theme of ‘It Wasn’t Really Abuse’. This theme is based upon the rape myth of ‘it wasn’t really rape’ which attempts

to justify and minimising the harm caused by both interpersonal and image based sexual abuse (Martini and De Piccoli, 2020). The rape myth of ‘it wasn’t really rape’ inherently denies that the abuse occurred whilst simultaneously blaming the victim and excusing the perpetrator (Martini and De Piccoli, 2020). As image based sexual abuse is a growing form of harm with “more than 40% [of participants knowing] someone who had been a victim of revenge porn and 22% [of participants] knew someone who had been threatened with revenge porn” the theme of ‘it wasn’t really abuse’ is increasingly relevant (Sky News, 2021; Slater and Gordon, 2021). The four codes which are applicable to the current theme are ‘widespread harm’, ‘real harm’, ‘mental health’ and ‘diminishing the impact on the victim’.

### ***Widespread Harm***

The current research found a similarity between the widespread nature of interpersonal sexual abuse and image based sexual abuse. Regarding the widespread harm caused by interpersonal sexual abuse, research conducted by National Education Union and UK Feminista found that over a third of girls in schools within The United Kingdom had experienced some form of sexual violence or harassment (Ankel, 2018; National Education Union and UK Feminista, 2017). Additionally, “one in three women globally, around 736 million, have been subjected to physical or sexual violence in their lifetimes, according to new analysis by the World Health Organisation (WHO)” (Mohan, 2021; World Health Organisation, 2021).

Recent advancements in technologies such as the development of new social media platforms and the omnipresence of the smartphone have contributed to an increased number of instances of image based sexual abuse being reported (McGlynn and Rackley, 2017a). For example, “with Snapchat and Instagram ... it has become so much easier for things like [image

based sexual abuse] to be sent around” (O’ Rourke, 2020a). Which highlights how widespread and accessible image based sexual abuse is as a form of harm.

The widespread nature of image based sexual abuse as a form of harm and sexual violence is further demonstrated throughout the media content analysis denoted that victims of image based sexual abuse can be from any demographic.

*“It is also important to note that digital abuse can happen to anyone no matter their gender or sexual orientation.”* (RTÉ News, 2020).

The above quote from RTÉ News (2020) is further supported by several articles analysed within the current research such as the work of Young (2020). Young (2020) analysed findings from a survey conducted by United Kingdom based charity Refuge concerning victims of image based sexual abuse. They found that image based sexual abuse can happen to anyone matter their age.

*“... While 60 per cent of those who experienced threats were under 40, around one in eight were in their 60s, suggesting revenge porn takes place across age groups.”* (Young, 2020; Tucker O’Sullivan, 2020).

Despite the fact that it has been well documented that image based sexual abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of their age, gender or sexuality, the most commonly victimised group noted by the media are women between the ages of 18-34.

*“Domestic violence charity Refuge conducted a survey of 2,060 people, including 282 women aged 18-34, and found that this age range are twice as likely than the general population to have sexual photos of themselves used against them as revenge porn”* (Young, 2020; Tucker O’Sullivan, 2020).

## ***Real Harm***

The second code that is applicable to the theme of ‘It Wasn’t Really Abuse’ is the code of ‘real harm’. West (2021b) notes that interpersonal sexual violence can cause monumental levels of damage and harm to victims after the abuse has occurred such as “...PTSD, depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, or self-harm”. Other forms of harm caused by interpersonal sexual abuse may include “...difficulty sleeping, higher rates of the stress hormone cortisol, or using substance abuse as a coping mechanism” (West, 2021b). While the harm that is caused by interpersonal forms of sexual abuse such as rape is commonly acknowledged, the real and significant forms of harm caused by image based sexual abuse tends to not garner the same level of recognition (Laugerud, 2021).

*“While it seems widely recognised that image-based sexual abuse causes considerable harm, many of the victim-survivors we spoke to felt that the real extent and nature of this harm was not properly understood”* (Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019).

Costello (2020) address the “very real social and psychological distress which image-based sexual abuse causes”. However, she additionally notes that these harms are often minimised due to the abuse happening in the digital sphere rather than occurring interpersonally. Although the impact of image based sexual abuse on victims is often minimised there are real harms that can occur after suffering victimisation from this kind of abuse. For example, Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson (2019) discuss the concept of ‘social rupture’ in the below quote which can have a devastating impact on victims of image based sexual abuse.

*“Victims and survivors can experience profound “social rupture” – a major devastation that drastically alters all aspects of their lives, as well as the lives of those who love and support them”* (Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019)

Another aspect of the real harm caused by victimisation attributed to instances of image based sexual abuse is the long-lasting nature of the harm. An anonymous victim quoted within a media article by McGrath (2021) stated that “for six long years, this video was used against me. I was blackmailed, I was intimidated, and I was harassed online and in person”. Thus, demonstrating how the harms caused by image based sexual abuse are long lasting and continue to have an effect on the victim long after the initial instance of abuse. Anna, another victim of image based sexual abuse, spoke about the never-ending aspect of the harms caused by image based sexual abuse claiming that “... there is no end to it, there is no stop, there is no finale” (Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019).

### ***Mental Health***

Following on from the second code of ‘real harm’ is the associated code of ‘mental health’. Throughout the thematic analysis it was found that a vast majority of the impacts and harms caused by victimisation due to instances of image based sexual abuse are associated with negative mental health. Whilst the current research and media content analysis are primarily concerned with victims of image based sexual abuse in The United Kingdom and Ireland, one article analysed within this study presented findings from the United States of America which highlights the profound impact victimisation can have on someone’s mental health.

*“The backlash can be fatal: 51% of US revenge-porn victims have contemplated suicide, according to research carried out by the campaign End Revenge Porn”* (Ankel, 2018; Cyber Civil Rights Initiative, 2014).

Suicide and attempted suicide were recurring themes within the thirty-five articles analysed for the purposes of the current research. Several victims who were interviewed across a myriad of analysed articles mentioned their intention to or failed attempts to take their own lives following instances of image based sexual abuse.



*“It was really bad, all the hate. I suffered a very severe suicide attempt after it, because of it all”* (O’Rourke, 2020a).

The repeated references to suicide throughout the thematic analysis solidifies the fact that being victimised through having one’s sexually explicit pictures shared non-consensually can have real consequences for victims.

*“Thinking today is the day I would to take my own life because I couldn't bear to live with it anymore. I'm one of the lucky ones, because I'm still alive,”* (McGrath, 2021).

Victimisation caused by image based sexual abuse also was found to have a relationship to addiction. Over the course of the current analysis, it was revealed that victims suffering from overdoses after their intimate pictures were non-consensually shared was unfortunately commonplace.

*“In one case, a victim known only as Louise tells of how fears that her intimate photos would be shared drove her to take an overdose as her mental health deteriorated.”* (Walawalkar, 2019).

The final aspect relating to the code of ‘mental health’ is the shame felt by victims once they are made aware that their intimate photos were shared without their permission. A myriad of victims who were interviewed across the articles examined for the current research mentioned feelings of guilt, shame, and fear (O’Rourke, 2020b). It was made clear through the media content analysis that victims of image based sexual abuse often experience the aforementioned feelings of shame and guilt as they place the blame for being victimised on themselves rather than the perpetrator.

*“I was embarrassed and I was ashamed ... and I felt stupid”* (Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019).

### *Diminishing The Impact on The Victim*

While the previous three codes relevant to the theme of ‘It Wasn’t Really Abuse’ acknowledge the serious impact being a victim of image based sexual abuse can have on a person, the following code ‘diminishing the impact on the victim’ does not. The current code is concerned with disregarding the seriousness of the harm caused by image based sexual abuse. Whilst not entirely the same as victim blaming, a selection of the articles which this code applied displayed aspects such as authorities telling the victim to move on and ignore what happened to them.

*“One survivor known as Heather says that she felt police blamed her for her abuse, telling her: ‘Well I guess you’ve learned your lesson.’”* (Walawalkar, 2019).

Additionally, authorities and criminal justice actors such as members of the judiciary fail to recognise the seriousness and the harm caused by image based sexual abuse. A judge in Northern Ireland was quoted as saying the following when referring to a case of image based sexual abuse.

*“Obviously this is a very serious case but the images were at the lower end of the scale. They were relatively modest and didn’t feature — for example — full frontal nudity”* (District Judge Steven Keown as quoted in Fowles, 2021).

The above quote from District Judge Steven Keown is incredibly hypocritical. First, he acknowledges the seriousness of instances of image based sexual abuse directly before discrediting the harm caused as the images were “relatively modest” (Fowles, 2021). This example is unfortunately representative of the experiences faced by victims when they attempt to explain the impact of having their sexually explicit picture shared without their consent.

*“Too often, these abuses are dismissed as not really being that significant: ‘just turn your phone off’, or ‘just move on’, being common responses”* (McGlynn and Johnson, 2018).

## **The Perpetrator Didn't Mean To**

The final theme that was analysed throughout the current research is titled 'The Perpetrator Didn't Mean To'. This theme is based on the rape myth of 'he didn't mean to' (McMahon and Farmer, 2011). McMahon and Farmer (2011) note that this rape myth is reflective of the societal perception that whenever a perpetrator commits rape, it was unintentional. Additionally, this rape myth perpetuates ideals of heteronormativity and patriarchal gender roles through subtly suggesting that the male sexual desires are overwhelming and thus they cannot be blamed for acts of abuse such as rape (McMahon and Farmer, 2011; Martini and De Piccoli, 2020). In order to relate this rape myth and subsequent theme to instances of image based sexual abuse four codes were derived from the analysis of the thirty-five media articles. These codes are 'the relationship to the perpetrator', 'intent', 'changing attitudes' and 'normalised harm', which will be discussed within this section of the chapter.

### ***Relationship To Perpetrator***

There have been several large leaks consisting of the sexually explicit pictures of hundreds of women, such as the infamous leak in 2014 when hundreds of sexually explicit photos of mainstream celebrities such as Jennifer Lawrence were non-consensually shared online in an event colloquially known as 'The Fappening' (Marwick, 2017; McGlynn and Rackley, 2017a). Despite the fact that instances of image based sexual abuse such as 'The Fappening' grasp the attention of the mass media and the public, the majority of cases of image based sexual abuse come from people who are closely related to the victim (Marwick, 2017; McGlynn and Rackley, 2017a). Costello (2020) notes intimate photos "... are most frequently published not from hacks by a distant third party but as a result of voluntary sharing by current and former partners".

The current research found that the majority of victims of image based sexual abuse, in particular women, were threatened or victimised by a romantic partner. A survey from the domestic abuse charity Refuge found that “72 per cent [of female image based sexual abuse victims surveyed] were threatened by a current or former partner and of these 83 per cent experienced other forms of abuse” (Young, 2020; Tucker O’Sullivan, 2020). Additionally, a general survey of image based sexual abuse victims found that “about 40% of threats came from an ex-partner, 18% from a friend and 11% from a family member” (Sky News, 2021; Slater and Gordon, 2021).

The close relationship to the perpetrator that the majority of victims of image based sexual abuse have, can lead to other forms of abuse such as coercive control exemplified by a change in behaviour and fear of ending the relationship in case of future victimisation.

*“More than three quarters (78 per cent) also said they changed the way they acted, with one in 10 allowing the perpetrator contact with their children, and a slightly lower proportion saying they felt forced to continue or resume the relationship”* (Young, 2020; Tucker O’Sullivan, 2020).

### ***Intent – To Cause Harm or To Not Cause Harm?***

Perhaps the most important code to discuss under the theme of ‘The Perpetrator Didn’t Mean To’ is the code of ‘intent’. The intent of the perpetrator when non-consensually sharing an intimate image of someone else is imperative to understanding the theme of ‘The Perpetrator Didn’t Mean To’. This is because the intent, whether malicious or not, gives a strong indication of the societal attitudes towards image based sexual abuse and victims of this form of abuse.

Regarding the code of ‘intent’ the most prominent finding related through the current media content analysis was the intent for the perpetrator to cause harm to the person whose private photos were non-consensually shared. Within a majority of the analysed media articles

which discussed the intent of a perpetrator when committing acts of image based sexual abuse it was found that the sharing of intimate images was primarily done in order to “debase and demean and ridicule and isolate” the victim (Dunphy, 2021).

*“One in five said they ‘wanted to scare’ the victim, a quarter said it was ‘just a laugh’, and a similar number believed the image was ‘their property’ to share.”* (Sky News, 2021; Slater and Gordon, 2021)

The non-consensual sharing of sexually explicit images as a means to inflict harm and violence upon another person has been regarded as “... one of the deepest betrayals of trust by a partner or ex-partner...” (Hayden, 2021). Additionally, as noted by West (2021a) “the only cause of sexual violence is a person who makes the decision to commit sexual violence”. This is applicable to all forms of sexual violence and abuse, inclusive of image based sexual abuse. The previous quote from West (2021a) is representative of the changing attitudes towards image based sexual abuse. West’s (2021a) work clearly denotes the changing attitudes towards the criminalisation and the intent of acts image based sexual abuse. Within Ireland, the Justice Minister Helen McEntee wanted to put an emphasis on all forms of image based sexual abuse being a criminal offence whether the intent of the perpetrator was malicious or not.

*“On Friday, Minister for Justice Helen McEntee said she will bring proposals before Cabinet next week to make it illegal to share ‘intimate images’ without consent ‘regardless of the motivation of the person who passes them on’”* (Gallagher, 2020).

Another less prominent finding regarding the intent of perpetrators of image based sexual abuse was extortion. In particular, it was noted that due to the severe financial implications resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, people have turned towards threatening to non-consensually share intimate images in hopes of receiving an incentive from the victims in order to prevent the abuse.

*“COVID-19 has seen many people lose their jobs or income. So financial pressures could also be in play as more perpetrators look to exploit non-consensual nude or sexual images for financial or other material gain” (Powell and Flynn, 2020).*

### ***Changing Attitudes – A Focus on The Perpetrator and Punishment***

The third code that applies to the theme of ‘The Perpetrator Didn’t Mean To’ is the code of ‘changing attitudes’. This code is primarily concerned with the lack of punishment and leniency typically displayed towards perpetrators of image based sexual abuse. Leniency towards perpetrators of sexual violence was a recurring theme throughout the current research, particularly referring to instances of interpersonal sexual abuse. A report from The United Kingdom which investigated instances of child sexual abuse in the Anglican Church found that “the Church defended alleged perpetrators instead of protecting children and young people from sexual predators” (BBC News, 2020; Jay et al., 2020). Similarly, it was also revealed that in The United Kingdom there was an environment in which sexual violence was facilitated through a culture that allowed perpetrators to evade consequences while victims did not feel comfortable to come forward (BBC News, 2020; Jay et al., 2020).

Over the course of the thematic analysis, it was revealed that the leniency towards perpetrators of interpersonal sexual violence is also applicable to perpetrators of image based sexual abuse. Several articles in which the outcomes of cases of image based sexual abuse were discussed highlighted how offenders regularly “...got off ‘scot-free” (Christodoulou, 2021). When cases of image based sexual abuse did get prosecuted perpetrators often received sentences that were not proportional to the harm caused. For example, “earlier this year, a man who upskirted a woman on the Green Line Luas received a suspended sentence” (McKenna Barry, 2021).

*“Jane said ... she would like to see perpetrators names being placed on an offenders list. ‘If you get a fine that’s not going to follow you’, she said. ‘That’s not going to impact the perpetrator’s life going forward the way it impacts the victim’s life going forward’”* (Fallon-Griffin, 2019).

The above quote from a victim of image based sexual abuse, known only as Jane, reflects the change in attitudes and how a cultural shift is occurring through which a newfound focus on perpetrators is paramount (Fallon-Griffin, 2019).

*“‘The focus needs to be on the perpetrators,’ McGlynn added. ‘We need to start talking about why someone would send on photos without the other person’s consent.’”* (Clare McGlynn as quoted in Walawalkar, 2019).

The aforementioned paradigm and culture shift is evident when looking at the recent criminalisation of image based sexual abuse in Ireland and the associated punishments when a perpetrator is found guilty of an offence. For example, in Ireland “...the taking, distributing, publication or threatening to distribute intimate images without consent with the intent to cause harm to the victim. This offence will hold a maximum penalty of an unlimited fine and/or seven years imprisonment” (O’Loughlin and Coyne, 2020). This change in legislation represents a change in attitude towards image based sexual abuse and sufficiently highlight the recent focus on the perpetrator and how they much be held accountable for the harms they have committed.

### ***Normalised Harm – The Prevalence of Rape Culture***

The final code which will be discussed under the theme of ‘The Perpetrator Didn’t Mean’ is ‘normalised harm’. This code is referring to the prevalence of rape culture within contemporary society and how this can contribute to the rape myth that the perpetrator did not

intend or mean to commit the acts of sexual violence they did (McMahon and Farmer, 2011; Ryan, 2011).

*“Rape culture is not just the act of rape — it is the commonality of victim blaming, dismissal of trauma, rape jokes, a retraumatising justice system, and the lack of funding given to support services”* (West, 2021a).

The current research found that it was common for men to believe that “sharing [sexually explicit] images was ‘acceptable, laddish behaviour’” (Coyne, 2020b). Thus, further perpetuating and ingraining ideals of victim blaming and rape culture into society as image based sexual abuse and sexual violence is normalised (BBC News, 2021a).

*“We must focus on the behaviour and attitudes of perpetrators of violence in order to dismantle them and work with men as allies in order to model healthy, respectful behaviours”* (Sproule, 2021).

While a significant number of articles analysed throughout the current research found that rape culture and the normalisation of sexual violence, including image based sexual abuse, there appears to be a shift in attitudes. This shift is characterised by a change in attitudes in which the perpetrator is at the centre of the conversation in an attempt to combat the normalisation of sexual violence.

*“[In] rape culture ... the focus is on blaming the victim rather than laying the blame solely on the perpetrator – which is exactly where 100% of the blame lies”* (West, 2021b).

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, this chapter presented the findings from the media content analysis of thirty-five media articles relating to victims of image based sexual abuse in Ireland and The United Kingdom. Throughout the thematic analysis and this chapter, it was demonstrated that key four themes based on common rape myths are evident in image based sexual abuse



discourse. These themes being 'They Asked For It', 'The Victim Lied', 'It Wasn't Really Abuse', and 'The Perpetrator Didn't Mean To'. The following chapter, will further analysis the findings presented in this chapter and discuss the implications going forward for victims of image based sexual abuse.

## **Chapter Five – Discussion and Concluding Remarks**

### **Introduction**

The present study was designed to determine the current societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse within The United Kingdom and Ireland. The second aim of the present research was to investigate whether these societal attitudes differ from those regarding victims of interpersonal sexual abuse, such as rape. In order to identify and compare these societal attitudes towards victims of sexual violence, a qualitative, inductive, interpretivist approach was taken by the researcher (Gray, 2017; Frankel and Devers, 2000; Thomas, 2006). This was achieved by conducting a media content analysis of thirty-five articles published online on platforms situated in The United Kingdom and Ireland (Costello, 2020; Gallagher, 2020; Mohan 2021).

Throughout the qualitative methods utilised in the present research, four themes based on traditional rape myths emerged (McMahon and Farmer, 2011). The findings of the current study revealed that there are significant similarities between how the public, as represented through the media, view victims of image based sexual abuse and victims of interpersonal sexual violence. A more detailed account of these findings and similarities in attitudes will be outlined in the current chapter. This chapter will begin by discussing the findings of the present research. Following this a summary and discussion of the main findings will be provided. The chapter will then conclude by recommending changes for the criminal justice system in relation to victims of image based sexual abuse. Additionally, implications for future policy regarding image based sexual abuse will be discussed.

## **The Attribution of Blame and Image Based Sexual Abuse**

The most prevalent theme which emerged throughout the present research was the theme of 'they asked for it' which included victim blaming and the attribution of fault within cases of sexual abuse (Mandau, 2020; Stubbs-Richardson, Rader and Cosby, 2018). The media content analysis within the present study revealed that victim blaming is an inherent part of the public discourse surrounding instances of image based sexual abuse. This finding was supported through the repeated acknowledgement of victim blaming and subsequent societal shaming of victims of image based sexual abuse throughout the analysed media articles (Speed, 2021; Christodoulou, 2021.) The media within The United Kingdom and Ireland revealed that victim blaming is a significant aspect of shaping societal perceptions of victims of both interpersonal and image based sexual violence (West, 2021b; Adegoke, 2019). This is crucial in understanding how societal attitudes towards victims of sexual violence are perpetrated. The framing of victim blaming as harmful within British and Irish media eliminates the possibility of implicit victim blaming through engaging with media (Lumsden and Morgan, 2017; Thacker and Day, 2017). Within the present research it was found that the public, as represented through the media, view victim blaming as damaging to the mental health and reputation of victims (West, 2011b; Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019). Therefore, suggesting that the Irish and British public are receptive to the idea that the victim is not the one at fault when they are raped or when their sexually explicit images are non-consensually shared (Powell and Flynn, 2020; West, 2021b).

Language was a revealed to be another finding within the current research regarding the attribution of blame in cases of image based sexual abuse. Throughout the media content analysis, a large portion of the articles examined referred to image based sexual abuse by its correct title, as originally suggested by McGlynn and Rackley (2016). McGlynn and Rackley's

(2016) initial advocacy for the change in terminology from 'revenge porn' to 'image based sexual abuse' was partly due to the subliminal victim blaming caused by the term 'revenge porn' (McGlynn et al., 2019). This change in terminology was evident throughout the media content analysis with several articles similarly advocating for the end of the term 'revenge porn' (Hayden, 2021; Costello, 2020). The aforementioned replacement of the language used to describe the non-consensual sharing of intimate images observed throughout the British and Irish media suggests a cultural shift in which victims and victim narratives are viewed favourably.

Within the current study it was revealed that perceptions of victims of image based sexual abuse within The United Kingdom and Ireland, were not significantly altered if the victim was responsible for the initial creation of the sexually explicit material. This is in contradiction of the classic rape myth of 'they asked for it' (McMahon and Farmer, 2011). The aforementioned rape myth suggests that victims, particularly women, are responsible for their own victimisation due to sexual abuse if they act or dress provocatively (Buddie and Miller, 2002). In a relatively outdated study from Walklate (2008), it was noted that in The United Kingdom 26% of people believed that a woman was responsible for her own rape if she was dressed provocatively. However, the current research found that there was a distinct absence of victim blaming within the media regarding cases of both interpersonal and image based sexual abuse. The absence of victim blaming uncovered within the media content analysis was evident whether the victim initially created the sexually explicit images or not. Thus, suggesting a positive shift in public perception towards victims of image based sexual abuse in The United Kingdom and Ireland.

The positive perceptions of victims of image based sexual abuse in Ireland and The United Kingdom as highlighted through the current media content analysis, significantly differs from research findings in other jurisdictions. A recent study from The United States of America

intended to investigate attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse (Lageson, McElrath and Palmer, 2018). Within this study it was revealed that levels of victim blaming drastically increased when the victims were involved in the initial creation of the intimate images (Lageson, McElrath and Palmer, 2018). While, in New Zealand a study which investigated public perceptions and experiences of image based sexual abuse found similar results (Pacheco, Melhuish and Fiske, 2019). Among the New Zealand public, there were high levels of victim blaming regarding image based sexual abuse. In particular, high levels of victim blaming were found if the victim initially consensually shared the sexually explicit material (Pacheco, Melhuish and Fiske, 2019). Therefore, the findings from the current research suggests that the public in The United Kingdom and Ireland view victims of image based sexual abuse more favourably than other WEIRD<sup>3</sup> nations.

The newfound focus on the perpetrator was the final theme which emerged in relation to the attribution of blame regarding instances of image based sexual abuse. Historically there have been negative attitudes towards victims of sexual abuse as noted by the existence of rape myths such as ‘they asked for it’ which insinuates that the victim was responsible for their abuse (Ben-David and Schneider, 2005). However, a paradigm shift has occurred and marks a substantial change in attitudes toward victims of sexual violence as highlighted throughout the media analysis within the present study. In particular, the media article written by Dr Caroline West (2021a) in ‘*The Irish Examiner*’ succinctly highlights this paradigm shift. The paradigm shift causes the perpetrator of image based sexual abuse to be at the centre of the conversation regarding the question of ‘who is at fault?’ (West, 2021a). Whilst West’s (2021a) media article

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<sup>3</sup> WEIRD refers to Western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic nations such as the United States and The United Kingdom as well as jurisdictions such as Australia and New Zealand (Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan, 2010).

is primarily concerned with the attribution of blame in cases of traditional, interpersonal sexual assault she acknowledges that not all abuse is interpersonal, and the perpetrators are the ones at fault not the victim. West (2021a) notes that the blame or fault in a case of sexual abuse, whether interpersonal or image based, only occurs due to someone's decision to hurt, and cause another person harm. This acknowledgement of the intent behind the non-consensual taking or sharing of intimate images of another person was evident throughout the media content analysis (Dunphy, 2021). Thus, this further demonstrates the emerging paradigm shift in which society, as evident within the media, is placing a greater emphasis on the perpetrator and their decision to cause harm (Powell and Flynn, 2020; Walawalkar, 2019; Sproule, 2021). This marks an imperative change from the societal blaming of the victim for suffering the aforementioned harm (Powell and Flynn, 2020; Walawalkar, 2019; Sproule, 2021).

### **Responses From Key Criminal Justice Actors**

Another important finding revealed throughout the media content analysis within the present study was the impact of the actions taken by key criminal justice actors in cases of image based sexual abuse. This section of the chapter will discuss the responses, or lack thereof, from criminal justice actors in cases of image based sexual abuse and how these endeavours affect the societal attitudes towards victims of this form of sexual violence.

The findings from the media content analysis suggests that within the British and Irish criminal justice systems there is a disregard for the lived experiences and harm suffered by victims of image based sexual abuse (Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019). For example, several articles analysed throughout the current study discussed the amount of time it took for Ireland to implement laws concerning instances of image based sexual abuse (RTÉ News, 2020). While changing the law is a substantial task, the Irish government refused to acknowledge the harms caused by image based sexual abuse by waiting up to six years to enact

legislation similar to that of Ireland's closest neighbour, The United Kingdom (England and Wales, 2015; Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, 2021). Throughout this six-year period in which the Irish government did not legally recognise the impact of image based sexual abuse, it is estimated that approximately between 20 to 40 percent of all women aged between 18 to 45 had experienced some form of image based sexual abuse (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2017; Powell et al., 2020; Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2019).

However, as discussed by Sweeny (2019) in their research, legal and legislative responses to image based sexual abuse are affected by the gendered nature of the crime. As noted throughout the present research, image based sexual abuse is inherently a feminist issue as most victims identify as female (McLoughlin and O'Brien, 2019; Lenhart, Ybarra and Price-Feeney, 2016). While the majority of victims of image based sexual abuse are female, the majority of criminal justice actors identify as male (Sweeny, 2019). In 2019, The United Kingdom's police force consisted of 69% male police officers and only 31% female police officers (Ministry of Justice, 2020). A similar gender ratio can be observed when analysing the prevalence of female judges within the British court system as in 2019 only 32% of all judges identified as female (Ministry of Justice, 2020). As the majority of actors within the criminal justice system are male, this may reflect the gendered attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse (Lageson, McElrath and Palmer, 2018; Sweeny, 2019; Ministry of Justice, 2020). As it has been shown that men hold more prevalent negative perceptions of victims of image based sexual abuse than women, these attitudes may infiltrate the inadequate responses from the criminal justice system in addressing the needs of victims (Lageson, McElrath and Palmer, 2018; Sweeny, 2019).

The gendered nature of both the criminal justice system and image based sexual abuse greatly impact the implementation of laws and legislative measures related to image based sexual abuse (Lageson, McElrath and Palmer, 2018; Sweeny, 2019). However, it was not

found within the present research that these gender differences have had any great impact on the content of these laws. Intent is a fundamental part of the current law in England and Wales surrounding the criminalisation of image based sexual abuse as seen under the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill 2015. McGlynn et al. (2019) criticise how the aforementioned law in England and Wales exclusively classifies the act of non-consensually sharing of someone's intimate images as image based sexual abuse if the intent of the perpetrator was to cause the victim harm. The criticism of the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill 2015 presented by McGlynn et al. (2019) highlights a considerable flaw with the current law in England and Wales. Intent is a notoriously difficult aspect of criminal justice to determine as it solely lies within the mind of the perpetrator (Badar, 2013). Additionally, Crump (2010) notes that within both civil and criminal justice proceedings there are a myriad of definitions of intent. Namely, intent may be defined as the perpetrator purposely committing an act with the desire for a specific result such as causing harm to the victim (Crump, 2010). Similarly, intent could also be explained as a perpetrator having explicit knowledge of the presumed results of their actions (Crump, 2010). This further complicates how one would attempt to prove the intent of the perpetrator in cases of image based sexual abuse as required under the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill 2015 (Crump, 2010). Thus, this makes the law in England and Wales (2015) inaccessible and exceptionally difficult for victims to get justice when intent is the cornerstone of the legislation (McGlynn et al., 2019).

Intent is similarly a focus within the Irish legislation regarding image based sexual abuse as seen within the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020. It is explicitly stated within the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 that publishing, distributing or threatening to publish intimate images without consent is currently illegal in Ireland, only if the perpetrator intended to harm the victim. Despite this, it could be argued that the Irish criminal justice system treats victims of



image based sexual abuse more favourably than the justice system within The United Kingdom. As reflected through the media content analysis, societal attitudes in Ireland tend to be in favour of the criminalisation of image based sexual abuse and the punishment of the perpetrator, regardless of their intent (Costello, 2020; West, 2021b). These societal attitudes as seen throughout the media content analysis have extended to the Irish Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee. In her role as Minister for Justice McEntee has campaigned for change in which the laws should criminalise all acts of image based sexual abuse “regardless of the motivation of the person who passes them on” (McEntee as quoted in Gallagher, 2020).

While image based sexual abuse is an incredibly harmful offence which has long-lasting effects on the victims, it appears that the criminal justice systems in Ireland and The United Kingdom still view rape as a more serious offence (Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019; Ankel, 2018). In Ireland the Criminal Law (Rape) Act, 1981 briefly mentions intent, yet it is not the focus of the act unlike the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020. Rather, the Criminal Law (Rape) Act, 1981 is primarily concerned with consent instead of intent. Throughout both the media content analysis and the available academic literature on image based sexual abuse, consent is a recurring theme and is often regarded as the key aspect of this offence (McGlynn and Rackley, 2017a; O’Rourke, 2020b). Therefore, it is peculiar that consent is not at the forefront of current image based sexual abuse legislation in Ireland. This may suggest that the Irish criminal justice system is not as concerned with image based sexual abuse as it is with forms of interpersonal sexual violence such as rape.

Several Irish articles analysed throughout the current study have shown that the response from the Gardaí towards victims in cases of image based sexual abuse have been less than satisfactory (Fallon-Griffin, 2019; Gallagher, 2020). From not acknowledging the harms caused by image based sexual abuse to ignoring repeat and mass instances of image based sexual abuse, the Gardaí have consistently neglected the needs of victims and subsequently

disregarded the serious nature of this type of violence (Fallon-Griffin, 2019; Walawalkar, 2019). The police have long been recognised as a pillar of criminal justice, alongside the court and prison systems (Dammer and Albanese, 2013). Despite a myriad of contemporary and historical criticisms towards the police, the power and authority of the police in society maintains a significant level of societal influence (Levi and Askay, 2020; Bittner, 1970; Koslicki, 2022). Therefore, the reaction of the police to cases of image based sexual abuse is imperative to analyse as this may contribute to the present societal attitudes surrounding victims of this type of violence.

Consistent with the aforementioned findings regarding the criminal justice system's disregard for the experiences of victims of image based sexual abuse, this research found that there is also a lack of specialised supports for victims of image based sexual abuse in Ireland (Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019; West, 2021b). For example, the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre's website does not mention any supports or services which are specifically dedicated to victims of image based sexual abuse (Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, 2022). The media content analysis revealed that services which are purposely built for victims of image abuse sexual abuse are vital in creating an environment and society in which these victims feel safe, supported and recognised (West, 2021b; Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019).

The lack of support and adequate responses from the criminal justice system as indicated through the media content analysis differs from the aforementioned findings which suggests that the public tends to favour the side of the victims (Powell and Flynn, 2020; West, 2021b). Currently, the criminal justice systems in Ireland and The United Kingdom are not wholly accessible nor inclusive for the victims of image based sexual abuse (Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019). The absence of support and recognition from the criminal justice systems may aid in the perpetuation of negative attitudes towards victims and may decrease reports of instances of image based sexual abuse (McGlynn et al., 2019).

## **The Prevalence of The Harms Caused by Image Based Sexual Abuse**

The third and final significant finding which emerged from the present study was the way in which the public in The United Kingdom and Ireland view victims of image based sexual abuse and interpersonal sexual violence as well as the associated harms with the same level of brevity. This section of the chapter will discuss the societal attitudes presented through the media in relation to the types of harm and the subsequent effects of these harms caused by image based sexual abuse.

Throughout the media content analysis, it was revealed that positive attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse emerge when the harm caused by this type of violence and the impacts of these harms are discussed (O' Rourke, 2020a; Coyne 2020a). One of the most impactful aspects of victimisation due to image based sexual abuse is the long-lasting effects of the harm. Several victims who were interviewed throughout the articles analysis for the present study discussed how the impact of being victimised after having their intimate images shared without their consent followed them around for years after the initial act (McGrath, 2021; Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019). The long-lasting nature of the harms caused by image based sexual abuse are characterised by the persistency and the consistency of this harm (McGlynn and Johnson, 2018). McGlynn and Johnson (2018) further expand on this through their recognition that once an intimate image is non-consensually shared it often remains on the internet indefinitely. This is due to the fact that once an image is shared online it can be shared, downloaded and replicated numerous times, without the knowledge nor the consent of the victim (Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 2017). Additionally, a victim's intimate images existing beyond space and time on the internet may cause the victim anxiety surrounding the possible re-traumatisation if their non-consensually shared images reappear (Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 2017; Ní Aodha, 2020; Coyne, 2020a).

Another consistent finding regarding the positive societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse as portrayed in the media emerges when discussing the severity of the harm caused by image based sexual abuse. Across several of the articles examined within the current research there was a recurring recognition of the legitimate, grave consequences experienced by victims when they suffer due to image based sexual abuse (McGrath, 2021; Walawalkar, 2019). In particular, it was noted that whilst image based sexual abuse is an online offence, it cannot be separated from the offline consequences and harm it causes (Durham, 2011). The harm facilitated by the online sphere and cyberspace has real-life consequences and is noted by Durham (2011). For example, in their work Durham (2011), mentions that online sexual violence can cause widespread harm for the victims such as trauma, pain and illness. Durham's (2011) findings were replicated in the current study as it was identified that the public, as represented through the media, have a deep understanding of these offline harms caused by image based sexual abuse.

Notably, the present research found that the public particularly acknowledged the seriousness and the reality of harms caused by image based sexual abuse when the mental health of the victim was discussed (Fowles, 2021; McGrath, 2021; Powell and Flynn, 2020). Throughout the available academic literature surrounding the topic of image based sexual abuse there is a recognition of the negative mental health suffered by victims in the wake of their abuse which is reflected by the media (Huber, 2022; Davis Kempton, 2020).

This acknowledgement of the offline harms caused by image based sexual abuse within both the media and academic represents a cultural shift (Durham, 2011; McGrath, 2021; Walawalkar, 2019). This cultural shift highlights how contemporary society is more cognisant of the fact that that image based sexual abuse is just as harmful and impactful on a victim as interpersonal sexual violence (Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019). This is further demonstrated by the media content analysis conducted in the present study which suggests the

public is aware that image based sexual abuse is a real form of abuse with real, offline connotations (West, 2021a; O'Rourke, 2020a). Thus, this in turn may cause positive perceptions of victims of image based sexual abuse to arise.

The present study has highlighted that the media and by extension the public, tend to hold understanding and supportive views towards the prevalence and effects of the harm suffered by victims of image based sexual abuse (Ankel, 2018; O' Rourke, 2020a). However, the present research conversely found that both the media and the public tend to show a disregard for and lack of awareness of 'non-ideal' or 'non-typical' victims of image based sexual abuse. Despite the recognition that image based sexual abuse can happen to anyone, the media analysed in the present study was primarily concerned with the victimisation of cisgender women (RTÉ News, 2020). Significantly, throughout the media content analysis a singular article out of the thirty-five analysed mentioned male victims of image based sexual abuse (Walawalkar, 2019). While the media article from Walawalkar (2019) discussed the lived experience of a male victim of image based sexual abuse, known only as Stephen, no articles analysed within the current study acknowledge the impact of image based sexual abuse on queer victims nor the existence of queer victims.

The absence of queer victims being explicitly mentioned throughout the media content analysis conducted in the present study is somewhat concerning, especially due to the prevalence of image based sexual abuse within the LGBTQIA+ community (Waldman, 2019; (Serpe and Brown, 2022). As the media neglects the experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community, the categories of people most at risk of image based sexual abuse such as gay men and bisexual women are ignored (Ruvalcaba and Eaton, 2020). Hindes and Fileborn (2021) are critical of this tendency in the media to overlook the experiences of queer people in relation to interpersonal sexual violence. They suggest that this disregard for the perpetration or victimisation of sexual violence within the LGBTQIA+ community arises from a lack of

cultural awareness surrounding queer sex (Hindes and Fileborn, 2021). Whilst Hindes and Fileborn's (2021) critiques are concerned with interpersonal sexual violence, the lack of inclusion of queer sex within the public discourse may explain the absence of LGBTQIA+ victims mentioned in the current media content analysis (Javaid, 2018). Additionally, this phenomenon of ignoring the experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community and their subsequent victimisation within the media could be due to hegemonic gender norms which exclusively focus on the experiences of cisgender and heterosexual people (Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2019; Maas et al., 2021).

### **Concluding Remarks and Future Recommendations**

As an emerging criminological phenomenon, there is a scarcity of academic research concerning image based sexual abuse (Davis Kempton, 2020). The minimal academic literature which exists concerning image based sexual abuse is primarily concerned with either the lived experiences of the victim or the motivations of the perpetrator (Huber, 2022; Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2019). Despite this, there remains a dearth of empirical criminological research that investigates the current societal attitudes towards victims of this new form of sexual violence.

The present study aimed to bridge this gap within academia through conducting an initial desk-based study. The current research utilised qualitative methods such as a media content analysis in order to examine the media portrayals of victims of image based sexual abuse and ascertain the societal attitudes which may emerge from engaging with the media (Brosius and Engel, 1996; Chia, 2006).

Reflecting on the findings from the present research, several suggested courses of action for criminal justice reform emerged. There are a number of important changes which need to be made in order to make the current Irish criminal justice system more accessible and inclusive for victims of image based sexual abuse. Ensuring appropriate systems, services and supports

for victims of image based sexual abuse should be a priority for criminal justice reform going forward. As previously mentioned throughout this study, there is currently no specialised resources that are solely dedicated to victims of image based sexual abuse from organisations such as the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (2022) in Ireland. In their work McGlynn et al. (2019) make several suggestions which could be implemented into the Irish criminal justice system in order to improve the experiences of victims. The primary suggestion made by McGlynn et al. (2019) is the creation and provision of holistic, specialist services which address the harms suffered by all victims of image based sexual abuse, regardless of their gender, race or sexual identity. While The United Kingdom has a myriad of dedicated service and helplines for victims of image based sexual abuse such as Revenge Porn Helpline (2022) or Stop Revenge Porn Scotland (Scottish Aid, 2022), there is not currently an Irish equivalent. Perhaps Ireland could look at the services provided for victims of image based sexual abuse in The United Kingdom going forward.

Additionally, as noted throughout this study, victims of image based sexual abuse are often abandoned by criminal justice systems and criminal justice actors which do not support them (Rackley et al., 2021). It was extensively noted throughout the current research that victims of image based sexual abuse have negative experiences with the police through a disregard for the harm they suffered (Rackley et al., 2021; Walawalkar, 2019;). Similarly, it was revealed that victims of image based sexual abuse often do not report their abuse to the police for fear of secondary victimisation and increased victim blaming from the authorities (Rackley et al., 2021; Young, 2020). There is, therefore, a definite need for reform within the current criminal justice system in order to better address the needs and harm suffered by victims of image based sexual abuse (McGlynn et al., 2019). One way this could be rectified is through the implementation of specialised training programmes focused on image based sexual abuse which are based on rape sensitivity training. It has been shown that rape sensitivity training has

had positive impacts on members of law enforcement who undergo this training (McKee, Mueller-Johnson and Strang, 2020). Noticeably, police officers exhibit more positive attitudes towards victims of interpersonal sexual abuse post participating in the rape sensitivity training (McKee, Mueller-Johnson and Strang, 2020). Therefore, it is suggested that a comprehensive training programme which focuses on image based sexual abuse may help improve victim experiences with the criminal justice system.

It is also suggested that a necessary paradigm shift needs to occur within academia to include more diverse criminological perspectives such as a queer criminological lens (Meechan-Rogers, Jones and Ward, 2021). This new perspective would allow for the inclusion of the perspectives from wider range of victims rather than only focusing on the experiences of young, cisgender, heterosexual women (Meechan-Rogers, Jones and Ward, 2021; Coulter and Rankin, 2017; DeKeseredy, 2021). It is suggested that the media adopts a similar ideological shift. As a result of this suggested ideological shift, the media should include victim narratives from people other than young, cisgender women in order to be more inclusive and representative of all groups of victims of image based sexual abuse, especially those most often victimised (Waldman, 2019; (Serpe and Brown, 2022). While some articles analysed throughout the current research acknowledged victims of other ages and genders, most of the articles analysed were solely concerned with the lived experiences of young, white, female victims of image based sexual abuse (RTÉ News, 2020; Christodoulou, 2021; Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019). However, it is imperative to note that the researcher is not attempting to disregard the experiences of young, cisgender, heterosexual women who are victimised through image based sexual abuse. Yet, there is an urgent need to acknowledge other categories of victims if the criminal justice system and society is to evolve and become more supportive of all victims of this form of sexual violence.



Whilst several important findings regarding the current societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual were revealed throughout the present study, several limitations impact these findings. The most prevalent limitation of the current research is based on a relatively small sample of thirty-five media articles. The small sample size was necessary due to the time constraints associated with conducting research at a master's level. However, this sample size additionally causes concerns regarding the internal and external validity of the study (Faber and Fonseca, 2014). Furthermore, the use of purposive sampling to select these aforementioned media articles may lead to implicit bias from the researcher, which could possibly inhibit the generalisability of the findings (Tongco, 2007; Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016). Similarly, the media is inherently biased (Mullainathan and Shleifer, 2002). However, the researcher attempted to combat this through selecting media articles from a range of publications with various political ideologies whether neutral, liberal or conservative.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the current study has provided an initial, exploratory basis for future expanded research on the topic of attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse. As technologies continue to advance and evolve it is imperative for research covered with technology centric crimes to evolve at a similar rate (DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2016; Marchant, 2011). The researcher suggests using the present work as an impetus for a future quantitative study through which current societal attitudes towards victims of image based sexual abuse in The United Kingdom and Ireland can be examined in greater detail.

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## Appendix A – Theme 1, Coding Framework Table

Theme 1: They Asked For It			
Article No.	Reference	Codes	Quotes
1	Adegoke, 2019. <i>The Guardian</i> .	Victim Blaming	<p>The leaking of naked photographs of congresswoman Katie Hill has prompted a similar reaction to other acts of revenge porn – that it was somehow the woman’s fault</p> <p>The onus is almost entirely placed on the victim to avoid them by taking the “right” steps and conscientiously avoiding the “wrong” ones</p> <p>Her husband having access to naked images of her and choosing to leak them would be as “careless” on Hill’s part as him having access to her funds in a joint bank account and choosing to steal from her.</p> <p>There does, at times, appear to be a generational disconnect, with victim-blaming regarding nudes fast becoming the “How short was her skirt?” of the 2010s</p>
2	Walawalkar, 2019. <i>The Guardian</i>	-	-
3	Ankel, 2018. <i>The Guardian</i>	-	-
4	Sky News, 2021. <i>Sky News</i>	-	-
5	O’ Rourke, 2020a. <i>Irish Examiner</i>	Normalised Consent	As well, young people feel pressured to do it — like its part of dating. There needs to be more information and education available to young people who are making these decisions.
6	Dunphy, 2021. <i>Irish Examiner</i>	Consent Victim Blaming	<p>It is irrelevant, under the Act, if the victim originally consented to the image being taken if they did not consent to its subsequent publication or distribution.</p> <p>“This is the wilful gaming of girls. Boys are taught to game, girls are taught to be game.”</p>

7	West, 2021a. <i>Irish Examiner</i>	Victim Blaming	The fact that a victim's prior sexual history and therapy notes can be used in court is part of this culture; it implies that previous sexual activity is more important than a rapist's decision to rape someone.  Previous sexual activity, clothes, or alcohol are not to blame for someone choosing to hurt another person.
8	O'Rourke, 2020b. <i>Irish Examiner</i>	Consent	"I think the very first thing we would say, in every case is that irrespective of how images were created, or whether they were consensually shared, is never your fault if somebody has taken, without consent, and shared them in a manner among other parties, who did not have your permission to see our view or engage with them,"
9	Fowles, 2021. <i>Belfast Telegraph</i>	-	-
10	Mohan, 2021. <i>BBC News</i>	-	-
11	BBC News, 2021a. <i>BBC News</i>	-	-
12	Sproule, 2021. <i>BBC News NI</i>	-	-
13	BBC News, 2020. <i>BBC News</i>	-	-
14	BBC News, 2021b. <i>BBC News</i>	-	-
15	McGrath, 2021. <i>Irish Independent</i>	-	-
16	Coyne, 2020a. <i>Irish Independent</i>	-	-
17	O'Loughlin and Coyne, 2020.	-	-

	<i>Irish Independent</i>		
18	Young, 2020. <i>The Independent</i>	Normalised	The charity says this is vital given that sharing such images has become an increasingly common part of romantic relationships, adding that 27 per cent of young men and 43 per cent of young women have done so.
19	Petter, 2020. <i>The Independent</i>	-	-
20	Ní Aodha, 2020. <i>The Journal</i>	-	-
21	Finn, 2019. <i>The Journal</i>	Normalised	Howlin has previously said one of the aspects of modern life is the increase in instances in which private images taken while in an intimate relationship are posted online when a relationship breaks down
22	Costello, 2020. <i>The Journal</i>	Terminology	<p>Language is important here – “revenge porn” suggests that there is a justification for sharing these images. More fundamentally, it suggests that whatever the perceived wrong committed by the victim can and should be righted by the exploitation of their intimate image</p> <p>These images should not be spoken about as revenge porn but instead, they should be viewed as ‘image-based sexual abuse.’ This term captures the non-consensual exploitation involved and the seriousness of the harm which results when they are shared and a person’s sexual privacy is invaded.</p>
23	MacNamee, 2019. <i>The Journal</i>	Victim Blaming	“Mine had a few comments on it, calling me a slut and a whore and that I’d like anal sex and that I’m from [the area that she is from].”
24	West, 2021b. <i>The Journal</i>	Consent Victim Blaming Normalised	<p>Recent horrific cases of sexual violence have brought the topic of victim blaming back into the spotlight. In some commentaries, the level of intoxication of a victim has been discussed.</p> <p>Sexual violence has nothing to do with the substances consumed by a victim, and</p>

			<p>everything to do with a perpetrator who decided to inflict violence on their target</p> <p>Part of the reason people engage in victim blaming is the ‘just world’ theory. This is a belief that the world is just and fair, and that bad things only happen to ‘bad’ people. If bad things only happen to bad people or people who make the ‘wrong’ choices, we can pretend that we, as ‘good’ people, are safe.</p> <p>If we acknowledge that the world is not fair, then we have to accept that sexual violence can happen to us, our children, or our loved ones. This can be overwhelming to accept- that no matter what we do, who we are, or how we behave, someone may choose to violate us.</p> <p>Hindsight bias also leads people to make statements about a victim’s dress, behaviour, state of mind or intoxication. This occurs when people say things like ‘they shouldn’t have walked down that street’.</p> <p>Gender differences showed that men significantly blamed the victim more than women and women were more afraid of being a victim of IBSA than men were.</p>
25	McKenna Barry, 2021. <i>Her.ie</i>	-	-
26	Hayden, 2021. <i>Her.ie</i>	Terminology	<p>But irrespective of its history, the phrase has long been criticised for being insensitive to victims of abuse. Ireland's own Dublin Rape Crisis Centre has long opted for the use of "image based sexual abuse" to describe the act instead.</p> <p>“These incidents,” they say, “are often referred to as ‘revenge porn’ but given our work in the area of sexual violence, we don’t consider it so much as revenge or porn, we see it as abuse.”</p>

			<p>“It implies that there was an action, for the which the victim was responsible. For you to seek revenge, it implies that somebody did something wrong,” she said.</p> <p>Such is the issue with the word "revenge." Although this does more accurately represent the maliciousness that can often accompany image based sexual violence, a lot of the time this kind of abuse is not an act of revenge</p>
27	Gallagher, 2020. <i>The Irish Times</i>	Consent	A large number of the images were initially shared consensually by women on subscription services such as OnlyFans before being copied on to forums. Others were images women shared with their partners which were later uploaded online without their permission.
28	Coyne, 2020b. <i>Sunday World</i>	-	-
29	RTÉ News, 2020. <i>RTÉ News</i>	Terminology	<p>“And I would stress that our language matters around this issue. It's not revenge, it's not porn. It is abuse.”</p> <p>First things first, 'revenge porn' is the commonly used but inappropriate term for image-based sexual abuse.</p>
30	Christodoulou, 2021. <i>The Irish Sun</i>	Victim Blaming Normalised	<p>But she revealed she was sent into a shame cycle after girls hurled insults at her in the street and police accused her of creating child pornography.</p> <p>The reality star was also suspended from school and said she became known as the “s**t” who sent the picture.</p> <p>“My teachers just washed their hands of me. Drilling it into me, constantly blaming me. Do you know what that does to a young girl?”</p> <p>She said she was being savagely bullied at school in Essex at the time and hoped sending the picture to the boy would help her fit in.</p>

31	Fallon-Griffin, 2019. <i>Irish Mirror</i>	-	-
32	Powell and Flynn, 2020. <i>The Conversation</i>	Terminology Victim Blaming Consent	<p>Though it is known colloquially as “revenge porn”, researchers and policymakers have rightly rejected that term. They use “image-based abuse” to better capture the harms of the non-consensual taking, sharing, or threat to share, nude or sexual images.</p> <p>We ask why they took or sent images of themselves in the first place. But now, more than ever, it must be made clear that it is <i>not</i> the exchange of intimate images between consenting adults that is the problem. It is the non-consensual taking, sharing or threatening to share these images that is wrong.</p>
33	Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019. <i>The Conversation</i>	-	-
34	Speed, 2021. <i>INews.co.uk</i>	Victim Blaming	<p>“I couldn’t date a girl who has nude images all over the internet,” he said, dismissively. “You make decisions in the past, you have to live with them.”</p> <p>This grim double standard, in which women are devalued in society’s eyes by the crimes committed against them, cut to the heart of the murky, complicated issue of image-based sexual abuse.</p>
35	McGlynn and Johnson, 2018. <i>Huffington Post</i>	-	-

## Appendix B – Theme 2, Coding Framework Table

<b>Theme 2: The Victim Lied</b>			
<i>Article No.</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Quotes</i>
<b>1</b>	Adegoke, 2019. <i>The Guardian</i> .	-	-
<b>2</b>	Walawalkar, 2019. <i>The Guardian</i>	-	-
<b>3</b>	Ankel, 2018. <i>The Guardian</i>	They Lied	“I didn’t know that it was even possible to take any action, to be honest. But I do regret it because I suppressed so much. It wasn’t until the last few years that I realised that it is the cause of a lot of bad emotions and anxieties.”
<b>4</b>	Sky News, 2021. <i>Sky News</i>	-	-
<b>5</b>	O’ Rourke, 2020a. <i>Irish Examiner</i>	-	-
<b>6</b>	Dunphy, 2021. <i>Irish Examiner</i>	-	-
<b>7</b>	West, 2021a. <i>Irish Examiner</i>	Support	A crucial first step is to start with believing victims.”  ‘I believe you’ has the power to change — and save — a survivor’s life
<b>8</b>	O’Rourke, 2020b. <i>Irish Examiner</i>	Support	“We just want to say we acknowledge and understand an incredibly traumatising impact that this has. We are there to listen, we are not there to judge.”
<b>9</b>	Fowles, 2021. <i>Belfast Telegraph</i>	-	-
<b>10</b>	Mohan, 2021. <i>BBC News</i>	They Lied	The number could be much larger as fear of stigma could be a barrier to many women reporting sexual violence.
<b>11</b>	BBC News, 2021a. <i>BBC News</i>	They Lied  Support  Response	The website Everyone's Invited has recorded 8,000 testimonies of sexual abuse from pupils. It was set up last year as a place where victims can post anonymous accounts of abuse they have suffered.  We are meeting with victims to listen to their experiences and their concerns, and we will act on them
<b>12</b>	Sproule, 2021. <i>BBC News NI</i> .	-	-



13	BBC News, 2020. <i>BBC News</i>	Response	The Independent Inquiry into Child Sex Abuse's report says the Church's failure to respond consistently to abuse victims added to their trauma.
14	BBC News, 2021b. <i>BBC News</i>	They Lied	In December 2020, after he was first accused of sharing revenge porn, he reportedly described the allegations as "silly rumours".
15	McGrath, 2021. <i>Irish Independent</i>	Support Legislation	We need to change our attitudes to this form of sexual abuse" she said. She said it was the Government's "priority" to improve the justice system for victims.
16	Coyne, 2020a. <i>Irish Independent</i>	-	-
17	O'Loughlin and Coyne, 2020. <i>Irish Independent</i>	-	-
18	Young, 2020. <i>The Independent</i>	Response Legislation	Just under two thirds of the women surveyed said they did not report the threats to the police. Refuge said those who do are commonly told nothing can be done unless the image is shared because a threat is not illegal.
19	Petter, 2020. <i>The Independent</i>	Support	A government-funded helpline has seen a 22 per cent increase in reported cases compared to last year, meaning there have been more reports of revenge porn so far this year than there were for the whole of 2019.
20	Ni Aodha, 2020. <i>The Journal</i>	Response	After the article highlighted that Pornhub allows anyone to upload videos, and anyone can download directly from the site, Pornhub announced new curbs on this meaning that only "properly identified users" can now upload videos, and downloads are now banned.
21	Finn, 2019. <i>The Journal</i>	Response Legislation	Ireland is behind the times when it comes to dealing with the issue of 'revenge porn', according to Labour leader Brendan Howlin, who sponsored the Bill.  Ireland is behind other countries like the UK, Australia, New Zealand which have enacted such laws
22	Costello, 2020. <i>The Journal</i>	Response Legislation	While some of these laws are more successful than others Ireland is now an outlier in having no law which explicitly punishes sharing these types of images without consent.  Irish law offers few remedies to victims of image-based sexual abuse.  However, Irish law provides little assistance to those who were over eighteen when the images were taken.

			<p>It does mean that we owe it the victims at the centre of this story to acknowledge that the law has failed to protect them and to ensure it does not continue to fail others in a similar way.</p>
23	MacNamee, 2019. <i>The Journal</i>	Legislation	<p>Irish laws covering so-called revenge porn – the posting of sexually explicit images of a person online without their consent, generally by a former partner or date – are not adequate</p> <p>Currently, the only law protecting against the distribution of these images without permission is contained in the Non Fatal Offences Against The Person Act. There is a subsection of this act which deals with harassment. However, there are no specific laws in place to guard against this type of online incident.</p>
24	West, 2021b. <i>The Journal</i>	Support Legislation They Lied	<p>We must recognise how cruel these statements can be, and how lacking in empathy or understanding they are.</p> <p>Victim blaming can also stop or hinder them from accessing support services, and victims can face further re-traumatisation as they listen to family, friends, colleagues and the media making victim blaming comments. Rape and sexual violence are not just a once-off trauma – secondary trauma comes from victim blaming too.</p> <p>While the perpetrators will be released in a few years, the impact of their actions on the victim will stay with them for life. Therefore, extensive and accessible support services are vital for victims</p> <p>Whether victims come forward immediately or years later, all victims should be able to access non-judgmental, inclusive services for as long as they need to.</p>
25	McKenna Barry, 2021. <i>Her.ie</i>	Legislation Support	<p>The two offences will be covered in the Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Bill. The legislation will also tackle adults pretending to be children online and it will strengthen current image-based sexual assault laws.</p> <p>Naomi Long, the Justice Minister, described the legislation as having “the protection of victims at its heart”</p>

			She said: "I am determined to do everything I can to ensure victims are heard and that they feel confident in the criminal justice system."
26	Hayden, 2021. <i>Her.ie</i>	-	-
27	Gallagher, 2020. <i>The Irish Times</i>	Response  Legislation	Gardaí investigating the online sharing of so-called "revenge porn" of hundreds of Irish women believe criminal charges are highly unlikely.  In a handful of past cases gardaí have prosecuted image-based abuse as harassment. But sources warned it would be very hard to put a harassment case together as the law is meant to deal with persistent activity rather than one-off uploading of material.  Gardaí also said the uploading of material from OnlyFans is also unlikely to be prosecuted. "At most it's a civil matter under copyright law," a garda said.
28	Coyne, 2020b. <i>Sunday World</i>	Legislation	"We believe that Irish women were targeted because the perpetrators know there is no law against sharing intimate images without consent."  "This is a profound violation of women and girls' rights and demonstrates again the inadequacy of Irish law in protecting them against such abuse," Ms McDonald said.
29	RTÉ News, 2020 <i>RTÉ News</i>	Response  Legislation	"We are very concerned at the slow pace of political action to address the harmful use of technology in intimate relationships. We are calling on whoever forms the next Government to immediately address the need for a real legal solution to issues like image-based sexual abuse."
30	Christodoulou, 2021. <i>The Irish Sun</i>	Support	Although she felt a shift and was referred to as a "victim" for the first time, she said she still "wanted to die" when she had to face her parents.
31	Fallon-Griffin, 2019. <i>Irish Mirror</i>	Response  Legislation	Jane's ex-boyfriend continued to upload explicit footage of her to an adult site and there was nothing Gardai could do  "There also needs to be sanctions around what you can do about confiscating materials and ensuring that it doesn't happen again", she added.  Labour leader Brendan Howlin who drafted the original version of the bill described current legislation as "ancient"

32	Powell and Flynn, 2020. <i>The Conversation</i>	Support	It is vital that we take positive action as bystanders by supporting victims and challenging perpetrators if we are going to get ahead of this issue.
33	Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019. <i>The Conversation</i>	Legislation Response Support	<p>“And yet, despite greater public awareness and four <u>new laws</u> in the past five years, legislation is still failing to fully protect victims and provide access to justice. The law is piecemeal, outdated and complicated – several forms of abuse are still not covered.</p> <p>There have been moves to address these failings – the UK government recently asked the Law Commission to conduct a two-year review. But this means that new laws will not be introduced until 2022 – at the very earliest.</p> <p>Victim-survivors are being let down by current laws, which are inconsistent, outdated and confusing.</p> <p>While organisations including the Revenge Porn Helpline provide valuable practical assistance and support, too often victim-survivors face the long and painful task of getting their pictures taken down alone. Few are able to access specialist emotional and psychological support, or assistance with navigating the complicated legal terrain.</p>
34	Speed, 2021. <i>INews.co.uk</i>	-	-
35	McGlynn and Johnson, 2018. <i>Huffington Post</i>	Legislation Support	<p>We need to modernise and strengthen our laws to combat all forms of image-based sexual abuse and to protect all victims. At the moment, victims whose sexual images are shared without consent have no automatic right to anonymity, but if someone takes an image of you in the gym changing room without your consent, you are entitled to anonymity. This and more anomalies do not make sense and leave victims, police and prosecutors confused, meaning fewer reports to police and fewer prosecutions</p> <p>So, let’s listen to what victims are telling us and act now before too many more women and men experience social rupture and have to endure the constant harms of image-based sexual abuse.</p>

## Appendix C – Theme 3, Coding Framework Table

<b>Theme 3: It Wasn't Really Abuse</b>			
<i>Article No.</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Quotes</i>
1	Adegoke, 2019. <i>The Guardian.</i>	Diminishing the impact on the victim	Her husband having access to naked images of her and choosing to leak them would be as “careless” on Hill’s part as him having access to her funds in a joint bank account and choosing to steal from her.
2	Walawalkar, 2019. <i>The Guardian</i>	Diminishing the impact on the victim  Real Harm  Mental Health	<p>One survivor known as Heather says that she felt police blamed her for her abuse, telling her: “Well I guess you’ve learned your lesson.”</p> <p>Victims of image-based sexual abuse – such as upskirting, revenge porn and fake porn – are having their lives shattered amid outdated and ineffective laws and police inaction, a report reveals</p> <p>Men and women are being isolated from their friends and families, suffer harassment and fear for their safety, and in some cases are being driven to try to take their own lives.</p> <p>In one case, a victim known only as Louise tells of how fears that her intimate photos would be shared drove her to take an overdose as her mental health deteriorated.</p> <p>In another, a man named Stephen described feeling paralysed and constantly “on-edge” after a female acquaintance took nude images of him without his knowledge and threatened to make them public once he tried to cut ties.</p>
3	Ankel, 2018. <i>The Guardian</i>	Mental Health  Widespread Harm	<p>“A lot of the abuse was online. And I still had to go to school every day. I was super angry and upset, but I was also racked with guilt because I just thought: I brought this on myself.”</p> <p>A report last year by the National Education Union (NEU) and the pressure group UK Feminista revealed that more than a third of girls have experienced some form of sexual harassment in UK mixed-sex schools</p>

			The backlash can be fatal: 51% of US revenge-porn victims have contemplated suicide, according to research carried out by the campaign End Revenge Porn.
4	Sky News, 2021. <i>Sky News</i>	Mental Health  Widespread Harm	<p>“I feel like I went through every single emotion... the embarrassment, the shame - there's so much of a lack of understanding around this topic still.”</p> <p>Of the 2,000 people surveyed, more than 40% knew someone who had been a victim of revenge porn and 22% knew someone who had been threatened with revenge porn.</p>
5	O' Rourke, 2020a. <i>Irish Examiner</i>	Real Harm  Mental Health  Widespread Harm	<p>Megan's mental health suffered severely after the attack, and she was later diagnosed with PTSD which was, in part, attributed to the attack.”</p> <p>“It was really bad, all the hate. I suffered a very severe suicide attempt after it, because of it all.”</p> <p>“It's a huge issue which affects thousands of people in Ireland. When I was in school, it happened to multiple girls I knew. With Snapchat and Instagram and everything, it has become so much easier for things like this to be sent around.”</p>
6	Dunphy, 2021. <i>Irish Examiner</i>	Real Harm	And in this case what it shows is wilful intent to really assault the girl's reputation and her person. It's an explicit degradation and a debasement and should be treated with absolute seriousness.
7	West, 2021a. <i>Irish Examiner</i>	Widespread Harm	<p>Consent culture also aims to raise awareness of the fact that sexual violence is a spectrum. For some, this is a new concept as previous understandings of sexual violence centred solely around violent penetration</p> <p>However, sexual violence can take many forms, from groping, sexual harassment, and coercion</p> <p>We also need to recognise that sexual violence doesn't always happen in person either — image-based sexual abuse such as sharing nudes without consent or sending rape threats digitally is also part of this spectrum of sexual trauma</p> <p>Research needs to include all forms of sexual violence in order to build an accurate picture of the reality of sexual violence in Ireland.</p>

8	O'Rourke, 2020b. <i>Irish Examiner</i>	Mental Health	<p>"It felt like a violation," said Ms Burke, describing the moment she realised her images had been leaked</p> <p>"The shame came afterwards, along with the guilt and the fear and everything like that."</p> <p>The fact that the issue has been so amplified has caused a lot of anxiety and distress for anybody who has been impacted by this experience, not even just relating to this case.</p>
9	Fowles, 2021. <i>Belfast Telegraph</i>	Mental Health  Diminishing the impact on the victim	<p>A Belfast man convicted of accessing his ex-partner's social media account and posting private sexual images, almost driving her to suicide, continues to protest his innocence.</p> <p>"Obviously this is a very serious case but the images were at the lower end of the scale. They were relatively modest and didn't feature — for example — full frontal nudity."</p>
10	Mohan, 2021. <i>BBC News</i>	Widespread Harm	<p>One in three women globally, around 736 million, have been subjected to physical or sexual violence in their lifetimes, according to new analysis by the World Health Organization (WHO).</p> <p>One in four women aged between 15 and 24 years will have already experienced violence by an intimate partner by the time they reach their mid-twenties.</p> <p>"Since the outbreak of Covid-19, emerging data and reports have shown that all types of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, has intensified in what we have called the Shadow Pandemic,"</p> <p>Speaking exclusively to the BBC, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka said violence against women was "one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations in our world today"</p>
11	BBC News, 2021a. <i>BBC News</i>	Widespread Harm	<p>Ms Sara told the BBC that allegations on the site included "sexual harassment, groping at a Christmas party, image-based abuse, revenge porn, non-consensual sharing of intimate photos - and just general sexism and misogyny"</p>
12	Sproule, 2021. <i>BBC News NI</i>	Widespread Harm	<p>Official figures from Ireland's Central Statistics Office showed that in 2020 - the most recent full year figures</p>

			<p>are available for - 79% of victims of sexual violence were women.</p> <p>Women were much less likely to be the victims in cases of murder or manslaughter than men, with six women killed in 2020 - representing 16% of victims - compared to 32 men.</p> <p>In 2019, the percentage of women killed in such circumstances was 18.4%, in 2018 it was 22.5% and in 2017 it was 35.2%.</p>
13	BBC News, 2020. <i>BBC News</i>	Diminishing the impact on the victim	The inquiry said the Church did not take allegations seriously and neglected the “physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of children and young people in favour of protecting its reputation” - which was in direct conflict with its mission “of love and care for the innocent and the vulnerable”.
14	BBC News, 2021b. <i>BBC News</i>	Diminishing the impact on the victim	In December 2020, after he was first accused of sharing revenge porn, he reportedly described the allegations as “silly rumours”
15	McGrath, 2021. <i>Irish Independent</i>	Real Harm Mental Health	<p>“For six long years, this video was used against me. I was blackmailed, I was intimidated, and I was harassed online and in person”</p> <p>“Thinking today is the day I would to take my own life because I couldn't bear to live with it anymore. I'm one of the lucky ones, because I'm still alive," she added.</p>
16	Coyne, 2020a. <i>Irish Independent</i>	Widespread Harm Mental Health Real Harm	<p>One in two young women who experienced relationship abuse had intimate images shared without consent – Women’s Aid</p> <p>New research from the frontline domestic abuse service said that 1 in 5 women aged between 18 and 25 had experienced some kind of abuse from a current or former partner, and over 50pc had been under 18 when it happened.</p> <p>“We know that the abuse that takes place online can be particularly devastating given the ‘always on’ nature of life online. It is draining, can often feel inescapable and can be difficult to block a persistent abuser from making contact. It is not a reasonable solution to ask a young person being abused to ‘opt out’ or ‘switch off’. This only isolates people</p>



			<p>ever more and they should never suffer or be further excluded because of the actions of the perpetrator,” Ms Benson said.</p> <p>While 1 in 5 young women reported experiencing abuse, the figure for young men was 1 in 11.</p> <p>The vast majority of women who had been abused, 84pc, said that it had had a “severe” impact on them. Young women who endured abuse said that it was causing anxiety, depression, low self-esteem as well as isolation from family and friends. Some women reported feeling suicidal, while others had been hospitalised following physical abuse.</p>
17	O’Loughlin and Coyne, 2020. <i>Irish Independent</i>	Widespread Harm	Although this bill was initiated in 2017, the addition of offences for image-based sexual abuse garnered cross-party support after it emerged last month that thousands of images of Irish women have been shared online without their consent.
18	Young, 2020. <i>The Independent</i>	Widespread Harm Real Harm	<p>Domestic violence charity Refuge conducted a survey of 2,060 people, including 282 women aged 18-34, and found that this age range are twice as likely than the general population to have sexual photos of themselves used against them as revenge porn.</p> <p>It added that while 60 per cent of those who experienced threats were under 40, around one in eight were in their 60s, suggesting revenge porn takes place across age groups.</p> <p>One victim referred to it as “like being raped again and again in public”. It is an increasingly used, and very potent threat by domestic abusers, especially if their victim threatens to leave.</p>
19	Petter, 2020. <i>The Independent</i>	Widespread Harm	Roughly two-thirds of reports to the helpline involved women.
20	Ní Aodha, 2020. <i>The Journal</i>	Widespread Harm	Concerns had been raised that allowing anyone to upload videos made revenge porn, videos of underage teenagers and videos being uploaded without the person’s consent a serious and widespread concern.
21	Finn, 2019. <i>The Journal</i>	-	-
22	Costello, 2020. <i>The Journal</i>	Widespread Harm Real Harm	Last week it was reported that thousands of intimate sexual images, including images of Irish women, had been shared without their consent through the online messaging platform Discord.

			The very real social and psychological distress which image-based sexual abuse causes for victims is compounded by this casual indifference to participating in their public exposure
23	MacNamee, 2019. <i>The Journal</i>	Real Harm	<p>“I honestly nearly got sick. It was just disgusting. I wanted the world to swallow me up.”</p> <p>“For me it’s just a big violation of my privacy. I didn’t really sleep for days when I found out about what was happening.”</p>
24	West, 2021b. <i>The Journal</i>	Real Harm  Mental Health  Diminishing the impact on the victim	In addition to the impact of sexual violence itself, victim blaming can cause enormous damage to victims, impacting their physical and mental wellness. Mental health impacts can include PTSD, depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, or self-harm. Physical health impacts include difficulty sleeping, higher rates of the stress hormone cortisol, or using substance abuse as a coping mechanism.
25	McKenna Barry, 2021. <i>Her.ie</i>	-	-
26	Hayden, 2021. <i>Her.ie</i>	-	-
27	Gallagher, 2020. <i>The Irish Times</i>	Widespread Harm	The matter came to public attention on Thursday when Victims’ Alliance, a crime victim advocacy group, said it had uncovered thousands of sexual images of Irish people being shared on internet forums
28	Coyne, 2020b. <i>Sunday World</i>	Widespread Harm	<p>The Government is under pressure to urgently ban 'revenge porn' after hundreds of thousands of intimate images - including many of Irish women - were released online without their consent.</p> <p>A victims support group has said that 140,000 intimate and sexual pictures have been leaked and shared on the internet.</p>
29	RTÉ News, 2020. <i>RTÉ News</i>	Widespread Harm	<p>It can be difficult to know exactly how often this is happening to people in Ireland, but there were 561 disclosures of digital abuse and stalking made to Women’s Aid in 2018 alone.</p> <p>It is also important to note that digital abuse can happen to anyone no matter their gender or sexual orientation.</p> <p>“According to EU research 1 in 4 women in Ireland experience physical and sexual abuse, and 39 percent of</p>

			young women (aged 18-29) in Ireland have experienced emotional abuse by a boyfriend or partner.”
30	Christodoulou, 2021. <i>The Irish Sun</i>	Mental Health Real Harm	Love Island star Zara McDermott reveals revenge porn ordeal aged 14 drove her to contemplate suicide
31	Fallon-Griffin, 2019. <i>Irish Mirror</i>	Real Harm	Jane who still suffers from anxiety over her ordeal was only made aware of the footage after a friend came across it online.
32	Powell and Flynn, 2020. <i>The Conversation</i>	Real Harm Widespread Harm Mental Health	<p>Women victims in particular reported greater harms and fear for their safety, as well as experiencing multiple forms of victimisation.</p> <p>According to Australia’s eSafety Commissioner, it received more than 1,000 reports of image-based abuse between March and May 2020. This represents a 210% increase on the average weekly number of reports they received in 2019.</p> <p>The problem is not limited to Australia. The United Kingdom has witnessed a similar increase, where its Revenge Porn Helpline says it has opened double the number of cases from the previous April.</p> <p>Many victims of image-based abuse report experiencing shame and humiliation. They often feel violated and exposed by the perpetrator’s actions.</p>
33	Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019. <i>The Conversation</i>	Widespread Harm Real Harm	<p>Victims and survivors can experience profound “social rupture” – a major devastation that drastically alters all aspects of their lives, as well as the lives of those who love and support them.</p> <p>While it seems widely recognised that image-based sexual abuse causes considerable harm, many of the victim-survivors we spoke to felt that the real extent and nature of this harm was not properly understood.</p> <p>One victim-survivor spoke of being “completely, completely broken”; others characterised their experiences as “life-ruining”, “hell on earth” – “a nightmare ...[that] destroyed everything. Another, Anna, said: “it’s torture for your soul”.</p>

			<p>As Anna said: “There is no end to it, there is no stop, there is no finale.”</p> <p>“I was embarrassed and I was ashamed ... and I felt stupid. Even now I’m still not sure whether or not she will send them. My mental health deteriorated quite significantly. I took an overdose.”</p> <p>“It’s an abuse of me and my body. It feels like it’s sexual abuse... I know people might say that sounds like an exaggeration, but that is genuinely how I feel...”</p>
34	Speed, 2021. <i>INews.co.uk</i>	-	-
35	McGlynn and Johnson, 2018. <i>Huffington Post</i>	Diminishing the impact on the victim  Real Harm	<p>We all need to recognise the enduring and constant nature of the harms of upskirting, ‘revenge porn’ and all forms of image-based sexual abuse. Too often, they are dismissed as not that significant</p> <p>Just last week, as part of the 16 days of the Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, victims shared with us their worry that politicians and policy makers do not fully understand the seriousness – or the ‘essence’ – of the harms they experience</p> <p>This experience of ‘social rupture’ is similar to that felt by victims of other forms of sexual violence such as rape. This might help to explain why many victims, such as actor Jennifer Lawrence, describe the non-consensual sharing of their intimate images as a form of sexual assault.”</p> <p>Victims also talk about the <i>persistence</i> and <i>constancy</i> of the harms caused by image-based sexual abuse; often because once intimate images have been shared they often remain ‘out there’ on the internet, forever discoverable</p> <p>Too often, these abuses are dismissed as not really being that significant: ‘just turn your phone off’, or ‘just move on’, being common responses.</p>

## Appendix D – Theme 4, Coding Framework Table

<b>Theme 4: The Perpetrator Didn't Mean To</b>			
<i>Article No.</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Quotes</i>
<b>1</b>	Adegoke, 2019. <i>The Guardian</i> .	-	-
<b>2</b>	Walawalkar, 2019. <i>The Guardian</i>	Changing Attitudes (Focus on Perpetrator)  Normalised Harm	<p>“The focus needs to be on the perpetrators,” McGlynn added. “We need to start talking about why someone would send on photos without the other person’s consent.”</p> <p>He said that the police told him: “Sorry, nothing we can do.”</p> <p>More than half of those interviewed said that police dealt with the complaints using informal measures, including cautions and requests to remove the images, allowing perpetrators to “get off scot-free”</p>
<b>3</b>	Ankel, 2018. <i>The Guardian</i>	-	-
<b>4</b>	Sky News, 2021. <i>Sky News</i>	Intent  Relationship to Perpetrator	<p>One in five said they “wanted to scare” the victim, a quarter said it was “just a laugh”, and a similar number believed the image was “their property” to share.</p> <p>About 40% of threats came from an ex-partner, 18% from a friend and 11% from a family member.</p>
<b>5</b>	O’ Rourke, 2020a. <i>Irish Examiner</i>	Normalised Harm	<p>“As well, young people feel pressured to do it — like its part of dating. There needs to be more information and education available to young people who are making these decisions.”</p>
<b>6</b>	Dunphy, 2021. <i>Irish Examiner</i>	Intent  Changing Attitudes (Focus on Perpetrator)	<p>“What we need to look at is not just the image itself but the intent behind it. It is the drive to debase and demean and ridicule and isolate.”</p> <p>“It’s a disgrace that this is continuously happening in Irish culture and misogyny is engrained; these boys should be held accountable for their actions particularly after bringing in legislation. It needs to be acted on.”</p>
<b>7</b>	West, 2021a. <i>Irish Examiner</i>	Normalised form of Harm	Rape culture is not just the act of rape — it is the commonality of victim blaming, dismissal of trauma, rape

		Intent	jokes, a retraumatizing justice system, and the lack of funding given to support services.  The only cause of sexual violence is a person who makes the decision to commit sexual violence.
8	O'Rourke, 2020b. <i>Irish Examiner</i>	-	-
9	Fowles, 2021. <i>Belfast Telegraph</i>	Normalised Harm  Relationship Perpetrator to  Intent	A Belfast man convicted of accessing his ex-partner's social media account and posting private sexual images, almost driving her to suicide, continues to protest his innocence.  The court heard the victim contacted police on August 12, 2019 and reported at 4am that morning, someone had accessed her personal Facebook account and posted intimate photographs "with an obvious intent to cause her embarrassment"
10	Mohan, 2021. <i>BBC News</i>	Relationship Perpetrator to	Intimate partner violence was found to be the most widespread global form of abuse reported, with around 641 million women saying they had experienced it.
11	BBC News, 2021a. <i>BBC News</i>	Relationship Perpetrator to  Normalised Harm	Many of the accounts describe allegations of sexual harassment and sexual violence carried out against young women by young men who are at school or college or university with them, or part of the same social groups.  These are stories of rape culture - so where behaviour that's not normal is normalised,
12	Sproule, 2021. <i>BBC News NI</i>	Changing Attitudes (Focus on Perpetrator)  Relationship Perpetrator to	"We must focus on the behaviour and attitudes of perpetrators of violence in order to dismantle them and work with men as allies in order to model healthy, respectful behaviours."  In 2019, 99.4% of suspected offenders of sexual violence were men.  Women's Aid, which has been recording violent deaths of women at the hands of men in Ireland since 1996, points out that women are more likely to be killed in their own homes than anywhere else.  It stated that 55% of those women were killed by a partner or ex-partner and that 87% of victims knew their killer.

13	BBC News, 2020. <i>BBC News</i>	Changing Attitudes (Focus on Perpetrator)  Normalised Harm	The Church defended alleged perpetrators instead of protecting children and young people from sexual predators, the report added.  The inquiry's chairwoman, Prof Alexis Jay, said: "Over many decades, the Church of England failed to protect children and young people from sexual abusers, instead facilitating a culture where perpetrators could hide and victims faced barriers to disclosure that many could not overcome."
14	BBC News, 2021b. <i>BBC News</i>	-	-
15	McGrath, 2021. <i>Irish Independent</i>	Relationship to Perpetrator  Normalised Harm	Alexandra Ryan, a journalist and publisher, on Thursday shared her story of how several years ago a man she was in an intimate relationship with secretly recorded a video of them together.  We must stop excusing all forms of sexual violence and abuse.
16	Coyne, 2020a. <i>Irish Independent</i>	Relationship to Perpetrator	New research from the frontline domestic abuse service said that 1 in 5 women aged between 18 and 25 had experienced some kind of abuse from a current or former partner, and over 50pc had been under 18 when it happened.
17	O'Loughlin and Coyne, 2020. <i>Irish Independent</i>	Changing Attitudes (Focus on Perpetrator)  Intent	Passed by the Dáil on December 18, the first offence deals with the taking, distributing, publication or threatening to distribute intimate images without consent with the intent to cause harm to the victim. This offence will hold a maximum penalty of an unlimited fine and/or seven years imprisonment.  The second offence is the same, however, without the requirement that the person intended to cause harm to the victim. This will carry a maximum penalty of €5,000 and/or 12 months imprisonment.
18	Young, 2020. <i>The Independent</i>	Relationship to Perpetrator	The survey showed that of the one in 14 women overall who had been threatened with revenge porn, 72 per cent were threatened by a current or former partner and of these 83 per cent experienced other forms of abuse.  More than three quarters (78 per cent) also said they changed the way they acted, with one in 10 allowing the perpetrator contact with their children, and a slightly lower proportion saying they felt forced to continue or resume the relationship.

19	Petter, 2020. <i>The Independent</i>	-	-
20	Ní Aodha, 2020. <i>The Journal</i>	-	-
21	Finn, 2019. <i>The Journal</i>	-	-
22	Costello, 2020. <i>The Journal</i>	Relationship Perpetrator	to Such images are most frequently published not from hacks by a distant third party but as a result of voluntary sharing by current and former partners
23	MacNamee, 2019. <i>The Journal</i>	-	-
24	West, 2021b. <i>The Journal</i>	Changing Attitudes (Focus on Perpetrator)  Intent	These statements are a common feature of rape culture where the focus is on blaming the victim rather than laying the blame solely on the perpetrator – which is exactly where 100% of the blame lies.  Sexual violence has nothing to do with the substances consumed by a victim, and everything to do with a perpetrator who decided to inflict violence on their target  Hindsight bias often excludes the fact that most sexual violence is committed by people who know their victims, whether they are in a relationship with them, or are family, friends, or colleagues.
25	McKenna Barry, 2021. <i>Her.ie</i>	Changing Attitudes (Focus on Perpetrator)	Additionally, the Bill will exclude members of the public from attending the hearings for serious sexual offences. It will also introduce anonymity for defendants before they are charged.  Earlier this year, a man who upskirted a woman on the Green Line Luas received a suspended sentence.
26	Hayden, 2021. <i>Her.ie</i>	Relationship Perpetrator  Intent	to “This type of abuse, the sharing of imagery online without consent is one of the deepest betrayals of trust by a partner or ex-partner who is using online means to cause harm.”
27	Gallagher, 2020. <i>The Irish Times</i>	Intent	On Friday, Minister for Justice Helen McEntee said she will bring proposals before Cabinet next week to make it illegal to share “intimate images” without consent “regardless of the motivation of the person who passes them on”



28	Coyne, 2020b. <i>Sunday World</i>	Normalised Harm	Labour TD Duncan Smith criticised the men who thought that sharing such images was “acceptable, laddish behaviour”
29	RTÉ News, 2020. <i>RTÉ News</i>	Relationship Perpetrator to	It is abuse and this type of abuse is one of the deepest betrayals of trust by a boyfriend or ex.
30	Christodoulou, 2021. <i>The Irish Sun</i>	Intent Normalised Harm Relationship Perpetrator to Changing Attitudes (Focus on Perpetrator)	In 2015, it became an offence for jilted lovers to disclose private sexual images without consent.  Meanwhile, the boy who had shared the photo got off “scot-free”  But she became the victim of revenge porn for a second time in 2018 when she sent a picture to a then-boyfriend she believed she could trust.
31	Fallon-Griffin, 2019. <i>Irish Mirror</i>	Relationship Perpetrator to Changing Attitudes (Focus on Perpetrator)	A young woman whose ex-boyfriend uploaded intimate footage of her to an adult site has said she can no longer “trust men at all”  Jane said that while such measures were “a step in the right direction” she would like to see perpetrators names being placed on an offenders list. “If you get a fine that’s not going to follow you”, she said. “That’s not going to impact the perpetrator’s life going forward the way it impacts the victim’s life going forward”
32	Powell and Flynn, 2020. <i>The Conversation</i>	Normalised form of Harm Intent Relationship Perpetrator to Changing Attitudes (Focus on Perpetrator)	We also found one in six people surveyed reported they had been the perpetrator of image-based abuse  Perpetration rates were highest among men in their 20s and 30s, with one in three men aged 20 to 29 years disclosing they had engaged in these behaviours.  COVID-19 has seen many people lose their jobs or income. So financial pressures could also be in play as more perpetrators look to exploit non-consensual nude or sexual images for financial or other material gain.  We also know that image-based abuse occurs in the context of domestic and family violence. Victims living in isolation with an abusive partner or family member may be particularly vulnerable to these harms.  According to the UK’s Revenge Porn Helpline, the majority of their increased reports came from victims experiencing

			<p>image-based abuse by an abusive or controlling intimate partner.</p> <p>As a community, we must challenge the attitudes that minimise the abuse, blame victims and make excuses for perpetrators.</p>
33	Rackley, McGlynn and Johnson, 2019. <i>The Conversation</i>	-	-
34	Speed, 2021. <i>INews.co.uk</i>	-	-
35	McGlynn and Johnson, 2018. <i>Huffington Post</i>	-	-