Introduction

Contemporary digital culture can be characterised by a fixation on visuality – on both the technological artefact that captures or broadcasts the visual, and the material subject/object which can be "seen" and monitored. This is evidenced through contemporary trends such as reality television, "selfies", live-streaming, webcams and amateur pornography – what Calvert (2000) calls "the voyeurism value". Understanding this cultural appetite for "authentic" visual representations of reality is important for sharpening and deepening our understandings of image-based sexual abuse. While not a new phenomenon, the non-consensual taking or sharing of nude or sexual images is far more common today, not only because of massive advances of digital communications technologies (e.g., smart phones, social media, artificial intelligence), but also due to changes in culture, including the increasingly visual, interactive and voyeuristic nature of digital communications (Andrejevic, 2004).

This chapter examines the micro and macro context that underpins the prevalence, nature and perpetration of image-based sexual abuse. The chapter brings together criminological, sociological, philosophical and social learning theories to investigate the relationship between, on the one hand, the "cultural scaffolding" of sexual violence (Gavey, 2019), in which image-based sexual abuse takes place, and on the other hand, the phenomenological, relational and "first-person" context. Our aim is to build, through "theory-knitting", a feminist ecological framework for understanding the complexity and diversity of image-based sexual abuse by bringing together key elements of the micro-macro puzzle (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007: 3).

We argue that image-based sexual abuse needs to be understood within a contemporary context of digital media that is characterised by a cultural obsession with visuality and realism, a fixation on feminised bodies, and a social system predicated on a gender hierarchy which pervades social interactions and conceptions of self. We first explore the usefulness of criminological approaches to understanding image-based sexual abuse. Second, we examine image-based sexual abuse through the lens of Bandura's (1986) social learning theory in conjunction with Bourdieu's theory on habitus and field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007) as a way to understand the cognitive self-regulatory mechanisms that are deactivated within individuals to produce image-based sexual abuse behaviours – within a system of meaning and symbolic power. Finally, we examine trends in pornography, voyeurism and digital cultures to further understand image-based sexual abuse perpetration.

An etiology of image-based sexual abuse

As we have argued in Chapter 2, image-based sexual abuse exists on a continuum of sexual violence (see Kelly, 1988). As such, it is important to explore existing theories on sexual and other forms of gendered violence in order to better understand this phenomenon. It is best to start by acknowledging the long-standing debate about the etiology or causes of sexualised violence emerging from three basic schools of thought. First, psychological theories tend to focus on psychopathological explanations such as childhood abuse and neglect, exposure to pornography, poor social learning, low self-esteem, acceptance of interpersonal violence, low education, drug and alcohol use, or attachment and personality disorders as risk factors underlying gendered violence (see e.g., Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss, & Tanaka, 1991; Marshall & Barbaree, 1990). Second, evolutionary psychology perspectives focus on inherited biological dispositions, such as natural selection, adaptation

and sex selection, with some theorists controversially claiming that sexual aggression is an outcome of evolved reproductive traits inherited from ancestral contexts to ensure genetic survival (e.g., Thornhill & Palmer, 2000; for a critique, see Ward & Siegert, 2002). And third, feminist sociological theories tend to treat sexual aggression as a manifestation of social control and gender inequality within a sociocultural context of patriarchy and masculine privilege (e.g., Baron & Straus, 1987; Brownmiller, 1975; Clark & Lewis, 1977).

While all three single-factor theories are in fact more diverse and heterogenous than briefly outlined here, broadly speaking they each have their own limitations for theorising the causes of sexual violence. Evolutionary theories view sexual aggression as a natural phenomenon and tend to discount the role that power and culture play in men's violence against women. Psychological theories often gloss over the broader structural and cultural factors in perpetuating sexual violence, such as problematic beliefs, attitudes and norms around gender and sexuality, with the focus instead being on psychopathology or "proximal causes" such as mental health issues or drug and alcohol addiction. And third, sociological feminist theories tend to ignore individual-level factors and cognitive processes. As Jewkes (2012) argues in relation to understanding rape perpetration, it is useful to merge these different theoretical approaches to examine individual thought processes and social learning alongside the social and structural context of patriarchy and gender hierarchy. In the discussion below, we explore the applicability of various criminological, sociological, psychoanalytic and social learning theories on violence, with the aim of crafting a feminist ecological approach to theorising the etiology of image-based sexual abuse. Our approach is inspired by Bourdieu's dialectic on interrelations and intersubjectivity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007).

Criminological theories

Criminological theory is useful for understanding the nature of crime, including its causes and impacts, as well as the social responses to crime (White, Haines, & Asquith, 2017). In this section, we focus on three strands of criminological theory for developing a richer understanding of image-based sexual abuse perpetration: Routine activities theory; strain theory; and feminist criminology.

Routine activities theory

Routine activities theory focuses on three factors said to affect both the extent of the crime and the location. These include: The presence and proximity of likely offenders who are motivated to commit the crime; the absence of capable guardians to intervene; and the availability of "suitable targets" (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Routine activities theory has been increasingly used by cybercrime scholars to show how risky online behaviours puts individuals at risk of cybercrime and technology-facilitated victimisation (e.g., Grabosky, 2001; Holt & Bossler, 2008; Yar, 2005). Studies have focused on issues such as cyberstalking (e.g., Reyns, Henson, & Fisher, 2011), cyberbullying (e.g., Navarro & Jasinski, 2012), online harassment (e.g., Bossler, Holt, & May, 2012; Marcum, Higgins, & Ricketts, 2014), digital dating abuse (e.g., Van Ouytsel, Ponnet, & Walrave, 2018) and sexting (e.g., Reyns, Burek, Henson, & Fisher, 2013; Wolfe, Marcum, Higgins, & Ricketts, 2016).

Most studies applying routine activities theory to understanding technology-facilitated abuse have not adequately addressed the role of gender or applied a critical feminist lens to understanding either victimisation or perpetration. One exception is the study by Bossler et

al. (2012), which found that although women are more likely to be victims of online harassment compared to men, being female was not a factor in and of itself for predicting victimisation. Instead, they found that although women were less likely to engage in online deviance, women were more likely to engage in social networking with greater identification of their gender through disclosure of personal details, and to have more friends who engaged in harassment behaviours (see also Navarro & Jasinski, 2012). Like other routine activities theories, however, the focus of this study was on the victim rather than the perpetrator, or the causes of offending.

In responding to the gender-blindness apparent within routine activities theory, Schwartz and Pitts (1995) developed a "feminist routines activity theory" in relation to sexual assault on college campuses. They observed in their study that lifestyle factors, such as alcohol and drug use, increases the risk of sexual victimisation. They also noted that the motivations of offenders have been neglected in traditional routine activities research and called on feminist theorisation to contextualise offenders' motivations within a patriarchal and "rape supportive" culture and system.

While there has not yet been empirical testing of routine activities theory in relation to image-based sexual abuse, a feminist routine activities approach can provide some insight into prevalence, as well as victimisation and perpetration experiences. All three key factors can be said to converge on the internet sites where non-consensual intimate imagery is shared. First, the online platforms bring together motivated offenders who have proximity to their victims through their existing relationships (e.g., as partners or former partners) and through their online contact with other users, victims and the victims' online networks. Second, available female targets are present in the images uploaded – images that are often taken by and/or shared with intimate partners or other known persons. And third, "capable guardians" willing to intervene are not only absent, but are themselves often perpetrators (partners, family members, friends and acquaintances). Moreover, users are actively supported by their online male peers, as well as the digital platforms, to post images, comment and abuse the women depicted in the images (Henry & Flynn, 2019).

Using a routine activity approach can help to guide practical solutions to image-based sexual abuse, including greater awareness, action, transparency and accountability of digital platforms who have the power to act as the "capable guardians" (see Chapter 8). However, exhorting the "risks" associated with online behaviour for victims is inherently problematic, given the practical implications that may arise from such an approach. For instance, this can unfairly place the burden on victims to engage in a range of online safety behaviours, such as desisting from taking or sharing intimate "selfies", deactivating social media accounts, or removing themselves altogether from online interactions. It also runs the risk of unfairly placing the blame onto victims. Moreover, while routine activity theory may be useful for understanding risk factors for victimisation, it does not adequately explain the underlying individual or sociocultural causes or "drivers" of abuse and harassment.

Strain theory

In contrast to routine activities theory, strain theory provides a more sociological approach to understanding the individual, situational and structural causes of criminal offending. Strain theorists posit that social and economic strains or pressures, including the unequal and uneven distribution of opportunities within a given society, have a powerful influence on

individuals, making crime a means through which individuals can achieve socially defined goals of monetary success or middle-class status (e.g., Broidy & Agnew, 1997; Durkheim, 1893/1984; Merton, 1938). From within the strain theory tradition, subcultural theory positions crime as interpersonal, located at the level of group interaction whereby subcultures emerge from class-based status frustration, usually in poor urban environments (e.g., Cohen, 1955; Sutherland & Cressey, 1974). Through association with gangs and male delinquency, individuals within subcultures are insulated from the unachievable demands and expectations placed on them by conventional society, seeking alternative ways to achieve these means through crime and deviance. Crime is thus seen as "an attempt to make a mark on the world, to be noticed, to get identity feedback" (Braithwaite, 1979: 68).

While strain theories provide some insight into criminal behaviours, they have, by and large, failed to recognise the important role of gender, or the intersections of gender with other markers of difference, such as race, sexuality, age and ability (for a discussion, see Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Broidy & Agnew, 1997; Burgess-Proctor, 2006). Strain theorists also focus almost exclusively on crime within lower socio-economic contexts and fail to explain crime across class and advantage or disadvantage.

Despite its limitations, strain theory is nonetheless a useful conceptual tool for understanding image-based sexual abuse because it helps to explain the interrelationships between the individual and the society, the will to power, the dynamics of subcultures, and the communications among like-minded peers. For instance, the production and distribution of non-consensual intimate imagery within deviant online subcultures may be explained in reference to "anomie", characterised by abrupt social change, a lack of social guidance around ethics and norms, and the association of deviant peers seeking alternative means to achieve validation and recognition. On many of the sites observed by Henry and Flynn (2019) in their digital ethnography, users developed their own norms, languages and practices to create subcultures of online deviancy. On some sites, users adopt specific, customised language to describe certain actions, such as "dumps" (for uploading images), "wins" (for images of women being shared), or practices that facilitated the sharing of images, such as the use of file-sharing and chat sites (called VOLAs) that allow users to create rooms and engage in conversation and share images, or through file sharing databases and Google Drive accounts. On one site, chatrooms were temporary, meaning they were closed by the moderators after users had had a brief window of opportunity to download files containing non-consensual sexual images of women. On this site, identifying information was provided about the women depicted in the images, such as their name and links to their social media accounts (Henry & Flynn, 2019).

While not usually considered part of criminological "strain theory", feminist scholars have usefully drawn on German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of ressentiment (1969: 127) to provide further explanation for individual actions and sentiments within social systems of support (e.g., Brown, 1995; Nussbaum, 2010; Powell & Henry, 2017). According to Nietzsche, ressentiment is a feeling of bitterness or "vengefulness" which prompts the individual to seek out a cause of his or her suffering – a "guilty agent … upon which he can, on some pretext or other, vent his affects, actually or in effigy" (Nietzsche, 1969: 127). Nietzsche (1969: 127) likened this to the "desire to deaden pain" rather than confront it with consciousness and reflexivity. Feminist postmodernist scholar Wendy Brown (1995: 69) uses his concept as a way of understanding the late modern subject, who she claims, "quite

literally seethes with ressentiment". She argues that the liberal subject is both "starkly accountable and yet dramatically impotent" owing to the domination of capital and bureaucracies, the "unparalleled individual powerlessness over the fate and direction of one's own life", and the increased fragmentation or disintegration of community (Brown, 1995: 68).

In relation to misogynist objectification online, Nussbaum (2010: 76) also draws on the concept of ressentiment. She describes it as "a reactive emotion inspired by the feeling of weakness", which is deeply connected to "shame punishment". According to Nussbaum, much of the gender-based hate speech online serves to satisfy the needs of the objectifier, who reduces and debases his or her (sexed) object of hate to bodily parts and physical appearance (see also Powell & Henry, 2017). Indeed, many contemporary feminist scholars, although not specifically interpreting harassing and harmful online behaviours through the lens of strain or subcultures, or indeed ressentiment, have provided multiple examples of hate, bitterness and hostility through acts such as trolling, hate speech, doxing and other online forms of abuse (e.g., Gorman, 2019; Jane, 2014). Although these behaviours are arguably distinct from the non-consensual taking, sharing, or threats to share, nude or sexual images, there is much overlap because the people who engage in these behaviours are sometimes embittered, expressing misogynist, racist, homo- and transphobic attitudes and beliefs, as reported by the victim-survivors we interviewed (see Chapter 4).

Moreover, as Gavey (2019: 250) argues, men "heavily invest in the myth of masculinity" within a gender hierarchy which is shaped by broader societal discourses that position men as not only "dominant, superior, and entitled to taken-for-granted prominence and authority", but also invulnerable. Gavey (2019) contends that men who subscribe to the myth of masculinity not only perform their gender and heterosexuality according to a proscribed (unwritten) script, but also resist and defend against any threat to their privileged status and position. Perceived "threats" might include: Women who have rejected them; women who do not conform to proscribed conventions of femininity, such as lesbian, bisexual, or queer women; or women who are "outspoken" or ambitious.

Feminist criminology

Feminist criminology is a useful conceptual framework from which to understand crime victimisation, female offending and male perpetration in the context of unequal social structures of (patriarchal) power. It is important to note, however, that like other theoretical traditions, feminist criminology is not a unified theoretical approach, but rather "a diverse collection of theoretical perspectives and methods" (Renzetti, 2013: 99).

One feminist approach to understanding the causes of gendered violence is through an ecological model, which examines the complex interplay of individual, social and structural factors, including attitudes, beliefs, norms and values about gender and sexuality (e.g., Heise, 1998; Jewkes, 2012; Pinchevsky & Wright, 2012). Recognising the central role that gender inequality plays in gendered violence, an ecological model helps to explain the divergences in perpetrator background and experiences; for instance, why some individuals without adverse childhood experiences or mental health or drug and alcohol issues, are capable of perpetrating sexual or domestic violence.

An ecological model is useful for explaining "reciprocal causation"; that is, the social, economic and political context which shapes individual behaviours, which in turn shape the social context. An ecological model is furthermore instrumental to devising interventions and responses to the problem of men's violence against not only women, but also children and other men. For instance, addressing the multitude of individual-level risk factors, such as low self-esteem, lower socio-economic opportunities, adverse childhood experiences, and adherence to problematic beliefs and values about gender and sexuality, is equally as important as is addressing broader societal beliefs, attitudes, norms and values about gender and sexuality, including moving towards formal and substantive gender equality at the societal level.

A focus on masculinity within feminist scholarship in particular has been fruitful for further developing understandings of the underlying drivers of online harassment and violence. While many scholars argue that perpetrators of gendered violence (including both sexual and domestic violence) constitute a diverse group of (mostly) men from different racial, ethnic, age and socio-economic backgrounds, some scholars note that economic and social marginalisation, in conjunction with adherence, resistance or adaptation to hegemonic masculine norms, can help to explain subcultural forms of misogynist violence and abuse as a form of "compensatory masculinity" (e.g., Carrington & Scott, 2008; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2010). DeKeseredy and Schwartz's (2010: 160) feminist criminological theory examines how gender power relations intersects with other systems of inequality to shape criminal offending and victimisation experiences. Their theory embraces some of the key ideas of left realism, which contend that "people lacking legitimate means of solving the problem of relative deprivation may come into contact with other frustrated disenfranchised people and form subcultures, which in turn encourage criminal behaviors". According to DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2010), individuals who turn to patriarchal crime "behind closed doors" are marginalised men who fail to live up to the standards of hegemonic masculinity. Similarly, as Carrington, McIntosh and Scott (2010: 402) explain in relation to male-to-male violence in remote geographical locations: "Where men's place, status or territory is threatened … violence can become a way of re-enforcing boundaries, exercising power, asserting male honour and re-establishing social status with other groups of men" (see also Gavey, 2019).

Drawing on traditional criminological theories of socio-economic strain and the importance of subcultures, DeKeseredy and Schwartz's (1993) "male peer support theory" is an important ecological model which seeks to explain the bonds of attachment of some men to their patriarchal and abusive male peers behind closed doors. The model takes into account broader social forces such as patriarchy, as well as community-level factors, such as membership in social groups (e.g., college fraternities and gangs), socio-economic status, and disinhibiting factors, such as alcohol use and lack of guardianship (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1993). Within these deviant peer groups of men, beliefs, values, attitudes and norms are cultivated, validated and reinforced – within the context of a patriarchal society. Gavey (2019) calls this the "cultural scaffolding" of coercive sexuality. She argues that normative heterosexuality is constructed through narratives, scripts and discourses which provide the conditions possible for coercive sexuality, where the effects are to minimise, excuse and condone men's sexual aggression. This was demonstrated in a recent study that involved 16 interviews with image-based abuse perpetrators in Australia (OeSC, 2019). The study found that for many perpetrators, image-based sexual abuse is untroubling and

normative within a context of male bonding and homosociality, through peer-to-peer competition and identification.

As we demonstrated in the previous chapter, some forms of image-based sexual abuse represent a mechanism for the achievement or consolidation of social power among a subculture of male peer support and online sexual deviancy. In Henry and Flynn's (2019) digital ethnography, they identified online community forums as a particular example of this, where members come together to form part of an active community. The purpose of these community forums is discussion among a group of users, sometimes in subforums using threads based on particular topics of interest. Some forums specialise in the non-consensual sharing and trading of non-consensual nude or sexual photos or videos of their current partners. For instance, on one forum, specific challenges were set for users – such as taking a nude or sexual image of their wife or girlfriend in a public place and then uploading the image onto the forum without the woman's consent or knowledge. Another forum was labelled "degrade and abuse" which involved users posting images of clothed or nude women and asking others to respond with answers to what they would do to her. An even more highly interactive forum was one that encouraged users to "post their girls" for other men to download and then re-upload as a "cum tribute", where a man ejaculates on a printed image or on the screen of their phone or computer (Henry & Flynn, 2019).

A new trend in image-based sexual abuse is the rise of so-called "deepfake pornography", using sophisticated techniques in artificial intelligence (or "machine learning") which enable users to create realistic fake or "synthetic" pornographic videos (see Chesney & Citron, 2019). The creation of fake pornography is not a new issue with digitally altered images having been made available in the past (e.g., through "photoshopping" or other techniques, such as speeding, slowing, cutting and other methods – see Paris & Donovan, 2019). Yet in November 2017, a Reddit user, who called himself "deepfakes", created a video-editing desktop application, which allows users to train algorithms (through machine learning) to replace the face of one person with another's – to make it look like a person is appearing in a video when they were not. Although the Reddit forum was removed in February 2018, the Reddit user donated the "deep learning" faceswap source code to the open-source community. This means that since 2017, not only have the techniques for creating fake imagery become more sophisticated, but there appears to be soaring demand for deepfake pornography, as evidenced by the number of deepfake websites, communities, forums, tools, and services (see Ajder, Patrini, Cavalli, & Cullen, 2019).

Deepfake pornography, as well as other online practices of image-based sexual abuse, are, we contend, constitutive of a gender order – "a historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women and definitions of femininity and masculinity" (Connell, 1987: 98–99). Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) concept of "hegemonic masculinity" characterises this gender order as one of subordinated masculinities and femininities which serves to legitimate and stabilise patriarchy, male dominance (by the hegemonic few) and heteronormativity. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 832), "[h]egemonic masculinity [embodies] the … most honoured way of being a man, it require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimate[s] the global subordination of women to men".

Masculinities scholar Michael Flood (2008: 341) also notes that ritualised acts of sexual humiliation against women is used for men's collective amusement in the service of proving one's position in a male social hierarchy. He contends that this is achieved through the "markers of manhood", such as occupation, wealth, physicality and sexual prowess. The performance of hypermasculinity is typically achieved through the conduit of bodies and sexualities. Prior to the age of the internet, social media and camera-enabled smart phones, while some markers of manhood were no doubt easily verified (e.g., occupation, wealth and physicality), sexual prowess was much harder to prove. However, in the digital era, a nude or sexual photograph or video is incontrovertible "proof" of intimacy and conquest. While the exchange and trade of non-consensual nude or sexual imagery may be competitive in nature, it is also actively encouraged, supported and normalised within peer contexts. DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2016: 3), for instance, argue that "[d]isseminating image-based sexual abuse is a means of 'doing masculinity' in a culturally specific way … [t]hese men provide attachments to other abusive men, and resources that involve specific verbal and emotional support".

Image-based sexual abuse may thus be seen as a conduit through which to perform one's gender. Goffman (1977) and Garfinkel (1967) argued that all persons manage and practice their gender on a metaphoric stage that follows a socially proscribed script. West and Zimmerman (1987) developed these ideas further to argue that gender is a "routine accomplishment" embedded in everyday interactions and functioning to reinforce the "naturalness" of the sexed or gendered binary. This mutually interactional and self-regulatory disciplinary practice, they argue, ensures that gender is being done "correctly".

In relation to image-based sexual abuse, gender is performed within a script premised on heteronormativity, masculine privilege and misogyny. Images then are a form of social currency or social capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007) that individuals draw upon to seek approval, sexual gratification, social control, retribution or validation from others, as indicated by many victim-survivors in the 75 interviews we conducted (see Chapter 4). This means then that the non-consensual taking or sharing of nude or sexual images is an identity-consolidation practice – where the subject uses an object (for instance, a nude or sexual representation of another person without their consent) as a means through which to "do gender".

This might be further explained using psychoanalytic theory which, like Goffman (1977) and Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodological approach, does not presuppose consciousness or cognitive intent. In Kristeva's (1982) theory on abjection, she argues that the abject is the "radically excluded" – that which "disturbs identity, system, order" and violates the "borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva, 1982: 2–4). The abject is a "primal repression" that precedes the subject's relationship to objects and other subjects. Abjection symbolises a breakdown of meaning caused by a loss of distinction between the "self" and the "other", and the reestablishment of the boundary between self and other. For Kristeva (1982: 12–13), abjection is a way in which "primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder". It is that which we reject within ourselves – the maternal object which created us but which we became separated from "in order to be" (Kristeva, 1982: 10). In a similar vein, Layton's theory on projection is useful to explain men's sexual violence against women as "relational scenarios marked by the effects of projection

of repudiated parts of self onto the other, by domination and submission and by the eroticization of positions of power and weakness" (cited in Gavey, 2019: 250).

Other theorists have described abjection in reference to the marginalisation of particular groups within the community, such as women, sex workers, transgender and intersex people, people with disabilities, single mothers and menstruating or menopausal women. The abject then is the bodily desires and fluids which transgress and threaten cleanliness, order and respectability, and as such, represent the part of ourselves that we reject, projected onto a "blameworthy" other. But there is also fascination in the abject – as demonstrated by Ringrose and Walkerdine's (2008: 227) exploration of reality makeover television, the contemporary production of neoliberal femininity, and the ways in which the "feminine" has become a new site of "limitless possibility and endless consumption".

Returning to Nietzsche's (1969) concept of ressentiment, disenfranchised men who subscribe to the "myth of masculinity" (Gavey, 2019), whose efforts to exert power over women have failed, including women of colour, women with disabilities, and LGBTQI women, seek out means through which to consolidate that identity and status. A pertinent example of this is the rise of "deepfake" pornography depicting well-known female celebrities, actors and musicians – women that most men will never be able to touch or possess.

Before moving on to the final theory on social learning, it is important to note that not all acts of image-based sexual abuse can be placed within the context of strain, subcultures, anomie, "toxic masculinity" or abjection/projection. Yet, for many instances of image-based sexual abuse, these theories are useful for explaining the underlying factors or drivers of image-based sexual abuse – many of which will be unconscious to the individual. While feminist, criminological, sociological or philosophical approaches are important for aiding our understanding of the complexity of image-based sexual abuse perpetration, macro-sociological theories on sexual aggression fail to account for the ways in which individuals come to engage in such behaviours in the first place. Thus, in the next section, we integrate social learning theory with Bourdieu's sociological theory on structure and agency to further develop an ecological model of image-based sexual abuse.

Social learning theory and the structure/agency puzzle

Alongside criminological theory, social learning theory is a useful conceptual tool to understand image-based sexual abuse behaviours. Bandura's (1971: 1) social learning theory seeks to explain "why people behave as they do". This includes the ways in which individuals are socialised through observation and mimicry, and how cognitive self-regulatory mechanisms are deactivated through external situational stimuli and internal thought processes to produce behaviour (Bandura, 1986). This model embraces an interactional model of causation that examines both dispositional and environmental factors, or "reciprocal causation". This posits human functioning as "a model of triadic reciprocity in which behavior, cognitive and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants of each other" (Bandura, 1986: 18). As part of this theory, Bandura identifies eight cognitive distortions that explain how individuals come to engage in antisocial or criminal behaviour: Diffusion of responsibility; displacement of responsibility; distortion of consequences; moral justification; euphemistic labelling; advantageous comparison; dehumanisation; and attribution of blame.

Below we interpret Bandura's model predominantly in sociological terms to suggest that these cognitive processes are not necessarily conscious or unconscious. Indeed, this is made clear by Bandura (1971: 1) who stated that the principal causes of behaviour are "often operating below the level of consciousness".

We also draw on elements of Bourdieu's philosophy of structure/agency, which

> … refuses to establish sharp demarcations between the external and the internal, the conscious and the unconscious, the bodily and the discursive. It seeks to capture the intentionality without intention, the knowledge without cognitive intent, the prereflective, infraconscious mastery that agents acquire of their social world by way of durable immersion within it.
> (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007: 19)

Bourdieu's theory on field and habitus, in particular, is useful for understanding why people behave the way that they do, and what internal/external processes are at play (without necessarily distinguishing between the internal and the external). According to Bourdieu, a field is a hierarchical, historical and heterogenous system where individuals and their social positions are located "anchored to certain forms of power (or capital)", including the larger, overarching field of power relations on the basis of gender, class and race. This is a space for conflict and competition over social, economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007: 17). Habitus refers to the physical embodiment of "a set of historical relations … in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007: 16) – the space of the "social agent" or the "cognitive structures inscribed in bodies and in minds" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007: 171). We provide a Bordieuan interpretation of Bandura's cognitive distortions, resisting the sharp or dualistic distinctions between structure/agency and the micro/macro, and instead interpreting social (or antisocial) behaviour as stemming from networks of power relations, performances and interactions where certain value is assigned to economic, social and cultural capital in particular fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007: 15).

Diffusion of responsibility

First, Bandura (1986) described the diffusion of responsibility as a key cognitive distortion prior to behaviour enactment, which is accomplished through the internal state of deindividuation, characterised by reduced self-awareness and self-evaluation, and a consequent diminished concern for the well-being of others. Deindividuation is understood in part as an immersion in group behaviours, where responsibility becomes diffused or displaced. This was famously illustrated by the Zimbardo (1970) Stanford Prison Experiment, which simulated a prison environment in which subjects were assigned either the role of prisoner or prison guard. Zimbardo found that through uniforms, identification numbers and group dynamics, identity loss and anonymity were facilitated, leading to the conclusion that group norms can exert a powerful influence over human behaviour, particularly when there is a common enemy. The diffusion of responsibility is also facilitated by an absence of eye contact and anonymity (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012). In online contexts, this is what Suler (2004) refers to as the "disinhibition effect", noting that people are not only more likely to share highly personal information about themselves and others online, but also more likely to engage in toxic behaviours. He argues that this is facilitated by anonymity, invisibility

asynchronicity (interactions not always happening in real time), “solipsistic introjection” (e.g., imagining it’s all in one’s head), “dissociative imagination” (e.g., imagining it’s all a game) and the minimisation of authority.

Compliance to group norms also contributes to diffusion of responsibility, often out of fear of rejection from the group or punishment. According to Walzer (1992: 315–316):

To disobey [the group] is to breach that elemental accord, to claim a moral separateness (or a moral superiority) involves the risk that may well be greater than that of punishment; the risk of a profound and morally disturbing isolation.

As discussed above, economic, social and cultural capital, particularly around masculinity and sex in the field (the broader system of meaning), mean that boys and men are typically judged by their male peers on the basis of group norms within a particular field, and self-esteem thus is derived from these sources (O’Sullivan, 1993). This shapes and feeds the habitus (the internalisation and embodiment of the discourses in the field), and in turn, feeds back into and shapes the field. Again, it is important to note, as Bourdieu does, that these social practices are not necessarily either conscious or intentional (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007). Indeed, as political philosopher Hannah Arendt (1963/1994) so cogently explored in her book about the criminal trial of Adolf Eichmann (German-Austrian SS-Obersturmbannführer who orchestrated the Nazi concentration camps), the “banality of evil” is the incapacity for independent critical, conscious thought, and the resulting failure to think from the perspective of the “other”. In relation to image-based sexual abuse, this is perhaps aptly demonstrated by the comments of Kevin Bolleart, the website operator of an infamous “revenge porn” website. In an exclusive television interview while in prison after being convicted of identity theft and extortion, Bolleart said he did not realise that so many people would be harmed by his actions: “I thought it was more of, like, a joke, than damaging people’s lives to that extent” (Dye, 2015).

Moral justification and euphemistic labelling

Second, Bandura (1986: 376) defined moral justification as “cognitive restructuring” – a process in which “reprehensible conduct is made personally and socially acceptable by portraying it in the service of moral ends”. Bandura used military training as an example of how killing is transformed into heroic, honourable behaviour, arguing that the task of converting socialised individuals into trained combatants is achieved not through personality transformation, but through restructuring the moral value of killing. Likewise, with online abuse, again while the intentions and processes might not necessarily be conscious to individual agents, when asked to explain, perpetrators typically justify it using moral reasoning, framing it as either expressions of humour, fun or free speech. This is also an example of Bandura’s (1986: 378) euphemistic labelling cognitive distortion which “provides a convenient device for masking reprehensible activities or even conferring a respectable status upon them” – for instance, terms such as “revenge porn”, “nudes” or “deepfakes” are examples of euphemistic labelling that fail to capture the harms. Sometimes, moral justification is also rooted in ressentiment and revenge, such as embittered partners or ex-partners justifying the non-consensual sharing of intimate images for perceived wrongs done to them.

Displacement of responsibility

The displacement ofresponsibility refers to responsibility being displaced onto others, but also the influence (or absence) of authority figures (Bandura, 1986). In online spaces, the absence of capable guardianship to intervene in harassment and abuse when it occurs (Yar, 2005), has long been recognised as a factor that disinhibits abusive online behaviours. According to Suler (2004), people are reluctant to say what they really think in front of an authority figure for fear of disapproval, censure or punishment, but online they are more willing to express their own opinions due to the anonymity and invisibility that being online can provide. Moreover, it is not only the absence of capable guardianship that facilitates image-based sexual abuse behaviours, but many digital platforms, as semi-authority figures, implicitly or explicitly encourage the sharing and trading in non-consensual sharing of intimate imagery, or at least condone or permit these image-sharing practices through the functionality and architectural design of their sites.

Distortion of consequences

A fourth cognitive distortion identified by Bandura (1986) concerns the distortion of consequences, or the minimisation or disregard of anticipated negative consequences. This is particularly relevant in relation to image-based sexual abuse where detection, regulation and punishment are major challenges across jurisdictional borders. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, in many jurisdictions it is not a criminal offence to take, share or threaten to share, nude or sexual images, and even where it is a criminal offence, many jurisdictions include various thresholds and caveats that limit the scope of the offence.

Bandura (1986) also notes that the absence of punishment may communicate that such behaviours are socially acceptable and normative to individual users. In a study on men and pornography, Antevska and Gavey (2015) interviewed 21 men about their pornography consumption and their reflections on what they were watching. Their participants described their pornography use as normative among other men – so much that they failed to think about it and were untroubled by some of the content they consumed. Again, it is useful to draw on Bourdieu's philosophy about preconsciousness. According to Bourdieu, "social agents" internalise and accept as natural assumptions, postulates and axioms about the world "because their mind is constructed according to cognitive structures that are issued out of the very structures of the world"(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007: 168, emphasis original). In relation to gender and power, Bourdieu further argues that the "male order is so deeply grounded as to need no justification: it imposes itself as self-evident, universal…" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007: 171). Indeed, Bourdieu demonstrates that gender domination is the clearest example of what he called symbolic violence, which accomplishes itself"through an act of cognition and of misrecognition that lies beyond – or beneath – the controls of consciousness and will"(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007: 171–172, emphasis original).

Dehumanisation

Dehumanisation is another cognitive mechanism that facilitates aggressive behaviour (Bandura, 1986) and is useful for thinking about in relation to image-based sexual abuse and other forms of online abuse. Dehumanisation refers to the attribution of subhuman qualities to others, serving to exonerate and justify offensive behaviour towards them. The divesting of human qualities to minority or marginalised groups is strikingly evident in the language used to abuse and humiliate victims online, as described with words such as "cunt", "whore" and "slut" (see also Jordan, 2018 for a discussion of "objectification"). This process enables

individuals to overcome feelings of empathy and concern for others because the target is perceived as different and dissimilar; as something less than human. Once dehumanised, writes Bandura (1986: 382), the enemy is “no longer viewed as persons with feelings, hopes, and concerns, but as subhuman objects demeaningly stereotyped”. Drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic power, women are required to conform to a “masculine ideal of feminine virtue”, treated as objects of exchanges between and among men for social capital; as “symbols for striking alliances” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007: 173). As explained in detail above, this is illustrated in the online peer networks that see users exchanging non-consensual sexual imagery as a form of illicit trade – as a form of both compliance and competition (Henry & Flynn, 2019).

Attribution of blame

Finally, Bandura (1986) discussed the ways in which attribution of blame serves to deactivate self-regulatory mechanisms to produce the deviant behaviour. Blaming the victim has long been recognised in feminist literature on sexual and domestic violence. Feminist scholars have recognised that it is not just the perpetrator in social isolation who blames the victim-survivor, but the victim-survivor herself or himself also internalises those broader societal discourses. In relation to image-based sexual abuse, many scholars identify victim-blaming as a key issue, with significant implications for media reporting, educational programs, victim support services and law and policy responses. In particular, victim-survivors are routinely blamed for having taken and shared intimate photos of themselves. Burns (2015), for instance, argues that notions of “choice” are used to blame victim-survivors for the original sharing of nude or sexual images. She claims that this serves a dual purpose of facilitating sexual gratification, as well as serving to condemn and degrade women who choose to take images of themselves.

Understanding these disinhibiting cognitive factors and the field and habitus in which they are part, is not akin to justifying or excusing these behaviours. Rather, it helps us to understand why people behave in the ways that they do, as well as assisting in the design of more effective laws, policies and practices to both respond to and prevent image-based sexual abuse from occurring in the first place (see Chapters 7 and 8). As we have shown here, it is essential that in conceptualising the “causes” or “drivers” of image-based sexual abuse, we adopt a feminist ecological approach that positions the individual within multiple sociocultural contexts where certain norms, beliefs and behaviours have certain value over others. But, as we argue in the final section of the chapter below, it is important also to consider other aspects of culture which also serve to legitimate and normalise image-based abuse behaviours, alongside cultures of gender hierarchy, domination and inequality.

Voyeurism, pornification and the age of user-generated content

Image-based sexual abuse is not only a manifestation of gender inequality, domination and gender performance, it must also be contextualized within broader sociocultural contexts that are characterised by rapidly changing conceptualisations of privacy, new forms of pornography, voyeurism and exhibitionism, and a deep societal fixation with visuality and technological innovation. Of course, the fields associated with these trends (to use Bourdieu’s language) are not devoid of the hierarchies and relations of symbolic power derived from the broader field of gender, race and class inequalities (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007). In this section, we briefly examine these trends in visual culture to understand the demand for user-generated sexual or pornographic content that is non-consensual.

Voyeurism and performative surveillance

Although the term "revenge porn" is problematised because (among other things) it likens the non-consensual taking or sharing of nude or sexual images to the production of commercial pornography (Henry & Powell, 2015), non-consensual nude or sexual images are nonetheless taken or shared in some cases for sexual gratification and social status building purposes (see Chapter 4). Given that there is so much commercial and amateur pornography available to users online for free, it is useful to reflect on why there is a demand (or indeed a marketplace of sorts) for nude or sexual images that have been produced or distributed without consent. In particular, how do such images come to have significant social capital?

To explain the "cultural appetite" for non-consensual nude or sexual imagery, we need to first turn our attention to voyeurism. According to the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-V (APA DSM-V), a voyeuristic disorder is defined as "intentionally spying on unsuspecting people who are naked, getting undressed, or participating in sexual activities". This is narrowly restricted to psychopathology beyond the norm – where a person is over the age of 18 years, has persistent and intense sexual arousal from deliberately observing the unsuspecting person over a period of at least six months, and has either acted on these sexual urges or is significantly distressed or impaired by them (APA, 2013). The DSM (and psychiatry more broadly) is by and large focused on psychological, pathological and biological factors with little reference to the social and cultural contexts that shape and produce these affective states in individuals. For example, depression is often treated not as an illness that may in part be caused by social dislocation and disconnection, but by low serotonin levels. Similarly, in relation to voyeurism, the DSM treats voyeurism as a psychopathological deficit and fails to account for the complex manifestations of voyeurism within popular culture which are facilitated and normalised by reality television, pornography and social media, and in turn, are internalised by social agents. This is what Calvert (2000: 2) describes as the obsession with "the mass consumption of information about others' apparently real and unguarded lives". Thus, while voyeurism continues to be conceptualised as a form of mental illness in law and medical discourses, voyeurism trends in contemporary settings, particularly relating to non-consensual nude or sexual imagery, reflect a "more pervasive practice … that informs, and perhaps infects, much of our modern world" (Green, 2018: 213). Indeed, the production and dissemination of non-consensual nude or sexual imagery in contemporary digital societies is part of the ever-encroaching external and voyeuristic gaze into people's private lives.

This is by no means divorced or separate from the pervasive influence and encroachment of digital surveillance. This is manifested in two ways. First, "surveillance capitalism" is what Zuboff (2019: 53) argues is an unprecedented form of capitalism where our "lives are plundered for behavioral data" by global technology companies, who use machine learning and algorithms to sell information about us to business customers, particularly advertisers for the purpose of economic profit. Second, those same technology companies, through their platforms and services, have created the norms and means through which individual users can themselves engage in "performative surveillance" in the form of tracking, monitoring and observing other users on social media, whether that be romantic partners, friends, acquaintances or strangers (e.g., Marshall, 2012; Westlake, 2008).

Combined with increasing surveillance (including the more voyeuristic forms), whether from above or below, digital culture is also increasingly marked by the democratisation of production, where ordinary internet users are not simply passive recipients of content but also producers of content. This is particularly evident within the online pornography economy where the diversification of pornography (e.g., "queer porn" or "women-friendly porn") (Attwood, 2018; McNair, 2017) has seen an exponential growth in user-generated pornographic content or "amateur pornography" online over the past few decades. McNair (2017: 29) describes this as "citizen porn" or "DIY porn" – pornography made by amateurs "armed with digital cameras and the facility to upload their video" within a globalised online network on social connectivity and interactivity.

And yet, it is not simply the capacity of digital technologies that enable individual users to produce their own content, but there is also a cultural yearning for authentic or "real" content, as strongly indicated by the popularity of, for example, reality television and amateur pornography. According to Paasonen (2010: 1305), amateur pornography's appeal lies in the "fantasy of realness, directness and authenticity, supported by low-fi aesthetic and lay performers" (emphasis added). Amateur pornography thus reflects a valorisation of the "real", alongside the rejection of commercially produced pornography. But as L'Hoiry (2019) explains in relation to reality television, it is perhaps more complicated than this. Although audiences are seeking to encounter the "real" in their consumption of visual content, L'Hoiry (2019: n.p.) argues that realism in digital media is attractive to audiences because of "the fluid nature of realism, performance and identity" and the pleasure that is derived from not knowing for sure what is real and what is fake.

While understanding these broader social trends in digital media (or pornography more specifically) helps to explain the exponential growth in user-generated content (including amateur pornography), it does not sufficiently explain why there is a particular demand or market for non-consensual nude or sexual imagery online. In Henry and Flynn's (2019) digital ethnography, they observed that non-consensual material (e.g., "hidden web cam", "deepfakes", "revenge porn") are popular genres in mainstream pornography (see also McGlynn & Vera-Gray, 2018). This includes stylised (fake) representations of non-consensual acts, as well as authentic intimate imagery created and shared without the knowledge or consent of the subject depicted in the image. On one site, for instance, there were 9,160 videos under the category "Leaked" (a colloquial term used to describe content that is shared without consent), 15,965 videos under "Hidden Cam" (secret cam recordings of upskirting or downblousing, women undressing or engaged in a sexual act), 16,619 videos under the category "Ex-girlfriend" and 17,358 videos under the "Revenge Porn" category (see Henry & Flynn, 2019).

These findings on the popularity of non-consensual pornographic genres support those of another study by the cybersecurity company, Deeptrace (Ajder et al., 2019), which discovered 14,678 deepfake videos on the internet, with 96% of those being deepfake pornography exclusively of women (mostly female actors and musicians). The authors note that deepfakes are growing in popularity, with an increase of 100% of videos being made available online between December 2018 and August 2019, and on the top four deepfake websites, more than 134 million views of videos targeting women celebrities.

It is again useful to ask about the appeal of deepfakes and other forms of image-based sexual abuse. In relation to pornographic texts more broadly, Braidotti (2011: 200) suggests that such text discloses and reveals “actions and interactions that are commonly kept private”. She notes that the pornographic text is a “confessional genre that brings the intimate, the forbidden, and the shameful into full vision and representation” (emphasis added). Although both commercially produced and amateur pornography can bring the taboo of sexuality into full view, non-consensually produced or shared content may be considered a more “authentic” representation imbued with ambiguity that certain audiences might find gratifying. As we have explored in this chapter, image-based sexual abuse must be understood within the broader cultures of visuality and voyeurism, as well as gender and identity practices of the “self” (as gendered). In this way, it is complex and cannot be explained by a single-factor theory.

Conclusion

Images are embodied because they have a “genesis in material production” (Kappeler, 1986: n.p.), and are identity-shaping because they represent that which we reject or disavow within ourselves; that is, the maternal object that created us (Kristeva, 1982), or the vulnerability (Gavey, 2019) that is inherently marked as “other”, abject and feminine. Non-consensually produced or shared images are thus not merely representational, but function also as relational “objects of exchange” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007) among producers, distributors and consumers, and can be understood as part of the performance of gender by subjects. As we have argued in this chapter, we must examine image-based sexual abuse in context – not exclusively as a gendered phenomenon but also, as a reflection of contemporary visual culture.

This chapter has drawn on feminist, criminological and philosophical perspectives to contextualise image-based sexual abuse within broader trends around digitisation, the over-saturation of visual imagery, online pornography and the existing structures of gendered power relations. We argue that the production and distribution of non-consensual intimate imagery online, through the invocation of broader norms and values around gender and sexuality, is a source of identity-negotiation for producers, traders and consumers of such images, which is achieved through the debasement, dispossession, reduction and commodification of those depicted in the images.

While some feminist criminological theories provide a useful starting point, it is important that feminist scholars continue to theorise the causes and consequences of online abuse and harassment. This will further help to inform best practice education, prevention and awareness of image-based sexual abuse that is designed to address gender inequality, foster respectful relationships and dismantle the problematic norms, values and attitudes around gender and sexuality.

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Notes

1 Note that in this chapter we do not engage with evolutionary perspectives on image-based sexual abuse, nor do we explore in detail psychological theories on individual psychopathology.
2 Several studies have empirically examined the applicability of routine activities theory to technology-facilitated victimisation. For instance, Reyns et al. (2011) found that the measures of each theoretical concept – proximity/exposure to offenders, absence of guardianship and target attractiveness – were significantly related to cyberstalking victimisation, with online deviance having the strongest effect on all forms of victimisation. Bossler et al. (2012), on the other hand, found that measures assessing proximity to motivated offenders were more significantly related to online victimisation compared with guardianship or target attractiveness.

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