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## From physical violence to online violation. Forms, structures and effects: A comparison of the cases of 'domestic violence' and 'revenge pornography'

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**From physical violence to online violation. Forms, structures and effects:  
A comparison of the cases of ‘domestic violence’ and ‘revenge pornography’**

**Abstract**

In this paper, we examine the nature and limits of violence by way of a comparison of the physical violence and online violation, in terms of their form, structure and effects. We explore similarities and dissimilarities in what precedes the event, perpetrator intentions and motivations, the forms and types of violence, the medium through which they are delivered, who they are directed towards, the technologies and processes deployed, and their impacts. We argue that it is problematic to restrict the concept of ‘violence’ to intended physical acts that cause harm, because non-physical, psychological, emotional and other forms of non-(directly)physical violence may be equally or even more impactful. Our discussion draws, illustratively, on research, including our own, on both ‘domestic violence’ and ‘revenge pornography’, with the latter an example of the growing numbers of relatively new forms of representational and psychological forms of violence. These are important political, policy and practical concerns, not only with the spread of violence, abuse and violation with and through digital technologies, but also as examples of differing ways in which these can be, and are, constructed, within academic, policy and popular media debates.

Keywords: ‘domestic violence’; ‘revenge pornography’; digital gender-sexual violence; modern technologies

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## **Introduction**

Violence, abuse and violation clearly range very widely. The notion that there is a continuum, or perhaps continua, of these, in particular as against women, stretching from, for example, femicide and homicide to various forms of non-contact harassment and other forms of coercive control, is well established (Kelly, 1988; Stark, 2009; also see Cockburn, 2014), but here we reconsider this range and continuum through a focus on, and comparison between, physical violence and online violation. In this paper, we examine the nature and limits of violence by way of a more specific comparison of those violences, abuses and violations that have been labeled as ‘domestic violence’ and ‘revenge pornography’, in terms of their forms, structures, and effects. These are important political, policy and practical concerns, not only with the spread of the many and various forms of violence, abuse and violation that are enacted with and through digital technologies, but also as examples of differing ways in which these can be, and are, constructed, within academic, policy and popular media debates.

The importance and centrality of measuring direct physical violence in the measurement and analysis of violence more generally is well recognized and widely debated (Walby et al., 2016). Physical violence is of clear and urgent importance yet is not the whole story (see Hearn et al., 2022; Yadav & Horn, 2021); indeed, in some reports of women who have experienced domestic physical violence the non-physical, psychological, emotional and other forms of non-(directly) physical violence are stressed as more impactful than the physical violence (Herman, 2015). Such situations also involve the construction of new or different (distorted) realities, for both parties, where in due course the whole reality of the victim-survivor is shaped and under the control of the perpetrator (Hanmer, 1998, 2000; Sheffield, 1987; cf. Dutton et al., 2009).

These issues echo longstanding debates on gender violence(s), gender-based violence, direct physical violence and other non-physical or less directly physical violences, for example, representational, psychological, coercive control, and link back to debates on representational violence, and especially pornography (for example, MacKinnon, 1993). There is, for example, a well-established research literature on links between pornography consumption and

tendencies towards sexually aggressive behavior, and thus (potential) sexual violence, amongst both young people (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016) and the general population (Wright et al., 2016), meaning in practice primarily men and boys.

These debates have become more complicated in the contemporary social world, characterized as it is by the proliferation of the various forms of online, digital and ‘technology-facilitated’ violences, abuses and violations.<sup>1</sup> These include: online distribution of sexual images without consent (sometimes referred to as ‘revenge pornography’), sexual abuse online, happy slapping,<sup>2</sup> spycamming,<sup>3</sup> online surveillance, online representations of offline violence, and online constructions of violence that are not direct reproductions of offline violence, as in some fanfiction genres. This complex contemporary situation brings renewed urgency to the question of the nature and limits of violence, abuse and violation.

In particular, there is a need to consider the comparison of online violence/abuse/violation, and in-the-flesh (‘in real life’) physical and psychological violences. Accordingly, in this paper, we argue that clarifying and untangling these differences may make it easier to draw comparisons with domestic/offline/fleshy abuse, as well as physical/non-physical violences, such as representational, psychological, coercive control, as well as attending to their overlaps, intersections and combinations. We approach this comparison through the illustrative use of ‘domestic violence’, and what has come to be known as ‘revenge pornography’, or ‘revenge porn’ for short.

## **Material and Methods**

A broad scoping review type method was used to review relevant literature, regardless of study design, in order to describe the key features of relevant studies, such as the main sources and types of evidence, and gaps in the research (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005; also see Page & Moher, 2017; Tricco et al., 2018). The review was rigorous in procedure and review, and prioritized breadth of relevant literature rather than an in-depth review of relevant studies. Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005) framework for conducting scoping reviews was followed: (1) identifying relevant studies through systematic searches; (2) study selection according to clear inclusion

and exclusion criteria; (3) charting the data through systematic extraction; and (4) collating, summarizing and reporting findings. The following databases were explored: Academic Search Complete; Scopus; and PsycINFO. In addition, a wildcard search of Google Scholar was also included to identify eligible quantitative, qualitative and mixed method studies, if they reported findings (themes) related to: (a) online non-consensual image-based gender-sexual-sexual violations or (b) offline 'domestic violence', or (c) the interface between these domains. Both authors reviewed the studies, with further focus on those studies that contained findings on the interface between (a) and (b): the focus of this paper. Grey literature was also explored where there appeared to be gaps in the studies, in order to provide additional clarity, description, and synthesis.

## **Theory**

The term, 'domestic violence', is well established, in both academic and policy discourse. 'Domestic violence', along with intimate partner violence, has been conceptualized and described largely as perpetrated by men victimizing known women as current or former intimate partners in order to have power and control over her, which may include violence and abuse often escalating over time (Capaldi & Kim, 2007).<sup>4</sup> 'Domestic violence' is an established way of naming and conceptualizing such violence, despite the term being open to various critiques: notably, not all such interpersonal violence is domestic in its location or context, and the term itself is non-gendered. 'Early' uses of the term, 'domestic violence', promoted especially from Second Wave feminism, often focused primarily on physical violence, building on, extending from and critiquing earlier conceptualizations (see Fagan, 1996). The concept has broadened significantly in recent decades to include psychological, emotional, physical, sexual, financial or emotional violence or abuse mainly between adults regardless of gender or sexuality (Hanmer & Itzin, 2000; Kelly & Johnson, 2008), control of family and friends, space and time, as well as violence and abuse from and between different family members.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, 'domestic violence', and intimate partner violence, can themselves include representational violence, and what we may call online violation.

In this paper, we focus initially on ‘domestic violence’ and ‘revenge porn’, before considering some crossovers. Indeed, having said that, overlaps, intersections, combinations between direct and indirect physical violence and harm, the blurring of the offline/online, and (un)known violences, are likely to become more commonplace (Bailey et al., 2021; Freed et al., 2017, 2018, 2019; Shimizu, 2013). This is an important complication we return to later in this paper.

Because people experience ‘domestic violence’ in different ways, and the underlying reasons may vary considerably between individuals and relationships. Some commentators (for example, Miethe et al., 2006) suggest the term should be re-conceptualized to include typologies such as gender of the perpetrator and victim-survivor, frequency and severity of the act(s), type of violence (for example, psychological, physical, sexual, economic, control of family and friends), motivations, and whether the violence is confined to intimates or includes non-intimates. Engaging with these typologies, we focus, in particular, on gender, type of violence (focusing on physical and sexual violence, but also taking account of other forms of violence and abuse), and the perpetrator’s motives, in current or former intimate relationships.

In our comparison with ‘domestic violence’, we focus on online violation by way of the distribution of sexual images or image-based sexual abuse or non-consensual ‘pornography’, or more colloquially, ‘revenge porn’, entail the online, at times offline, non-consensual distribution, or sharing, of explicit images of someone else for seeking revenge, entertainment or political motives. Although male ex-partners are reported as the main perpetrators, current partners, (ex-)friends of both victim-survivor and perpetrators, people known to the victim-survivor, people seeking revenge for friends, internet hackers and trolls, amongst others, may also be involved (Tyler, 2016). While these violent practices link to debates on representational violence and especially pornography, the difference now with ‘revenge pornography’ is that it is (largely) targeted on a specific person or those close to them, unlike generic pornography or film violence, for example.

The term 'revenge porn' is, however, misleading, partly because it is not always about revenge, but may be about profit, notoriety, and entertainment, and be perpetrated current or ex-partner, acquaintances, strangers, hackers, purveyors of spycamming or 'upskirt' images and so on. As such, the term 'revenge porn(ography)' is open to telling critiques. The term is thus misleading because it implies the images are pornographic, when they are not in themselves or were taken for pornographic motives, rather than within an intimate relationship for private consumption. As made clear by Franks (2016, p. 2), "... the term 'revenge porn' is sometimes interpreted to mean that taking a picture of oneself naked or engaged in a sexual act (or allowing someone else to take such a picture) is pornographic." However, making the images public arguably may become pornography from the perspective of some viewers, because the images then become available for public sexual consumption and entertainment (Franks, 2016, p. 2), and thus a commodity for further use. For all these reasons, the *non-consensual* nature of such online distribution of sexual images is fundamental in the definition and understanding of online violation.

On a slightly different tack, some commentators suggest all pornography is based on more general gendered revenge, mainly by men, mainly against women, and is in that sense 'revenge porn'. A linked argument is that consent in pornography is questionable – partly because women's continued economic, political, social and sexual inequality in turn contributes to forms of cultural coercion into (online) pornography production. Relatedly, this perspective recognizes how sexual violence and abuse against women in porn is common, and how the porn industry rests on and reinforces sexual objectification of women (Tyler, 2006). Furthermore, some feminists and gender activists argue against both labels of 'revenge pornography' and 'pornography'. In the project on online violence against women organized by the Women's Rights Association in Iceland, 'revenge porn' survivors opposed the use of the very words, as they considered it was degrading to talk of such acts of gendered violence as pornography (Rúðólfssdóttir & Jóhannedóttir, 2018).

Given these caveats, we argue that online violation means: acts (non-consensual), medium and mode (mostly home-made sexually suggestive or explicit images and/or videos, but also includes those commercially produced), perpetrators (largely male ex-partners), victim-survivors (predominantly female ex-partners), and context (post-relationship revenge, but also including hacking and commercial pornography), location of the act (online largely from offline practices) and motivations (revenge, entertainment or political motive) (Hall & Hearn, 2017; 2018a; 2018b; 2019). Although, we advocate a broader more encompassing definition, we focus in particular on sexual image- and text-based online violation, with particular reference to so-called ‘revenge porn’, in the context of an intimate relationship in this paper.

## Results

We now turn to a broad comparison of some of the principal features of ‘domestic violence’ and ‘revenge porn’ (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Comparison of ‘domestic violence’ and ‘revenge porn’**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>‘Domestic violence’ of intimate partners</b>	<b>Sexual Image and Text-based Online Violation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What happened before</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-story</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-story</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intentions and motivations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intention to harm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intention to revenge ... harm</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form of violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directly physical violences, psychological, emotional, isolation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not direct physical, representation, reputational, psychological, emotional</li> <li>• Non-consensual distribution</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Types of violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control</li> <li>• Economic</li> <li>• Digital/online abuse</li> <li>• Emotional abuse and intimidation</li> <li>• Forced marriage</li> <li>• Female genital mutilation (FGM)</li> <li>• Honor-based violence</li> <li>• Isolation</li> <li>• Physical</li> <li>• Sexual</li> <li>• Using male privilege</li> <li>• Verbal abuse: Coercion, threats, blame</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual image- and text-based</li> <li>• Emotional abuse and intimidation</li> <li>• Using male privilege</li> <li>• Non-consensual distribution</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medium</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offline/online</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blurring online and offline</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directedness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directed to known persons</li> <li>• Usually private, not necessarily known by others</li> <li>• Specific time and place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Known and/or not known</li> <li>• Public, imagined audiences, can be known by others</li> <li>• Endless, reproducibility</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of positive or negative exemplar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Available for re-use by others</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technologies and processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Processual</li> <li>• Use of body, weapons and objects</li> <li>• Use of non-physical 'objects' and controls</li> <li>• Escalation over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Processual or not</li> <li>• Use of non-immediate technologies and affordances</li> <li>• Dispersion over time and space</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impacts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chronic fatigue</li> <li>• Psychological distress</li> <li>• Physical marks</li> <li>• Problems with intimate relationship</li> <li>• Sexual dysfunction</li> <li>• Depression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychological distress</li> <li>• Problems with intimate relationship</li> <li>• Sexual dysfunction</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Stalking</li> <li>• Social isolation</li> </ul>

## Themes

### *What happened before*

According to the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) around three-quarters of 'domestic violence' victims-survivors in England and Wales are female, with almost 40% involving physical violence and nearly 19% sexual offences (ONS, 2021, p. 1). Females aged 25 to 34 years tend to be the majority of victim-survivors, although abuse-related offences decrease with age

(ONS, 2018, p. 14). According to the World Health Organization (2021), similar patterns can be found globally (see Devries et al., 2013). For example, a third of women globally report experiencing sexual abuse by their partners and as many as 38% of murders of women worldwide are committed by an intimate partner (WHO, 2021).

Similarly, the majority of victims-survivors of sexual image- and text-based online violation, specifically so-called ‘revenge porn’, are female (c. 90%) aged teens to 30 years of age (Cyber Civil Rights Initiative, 2014; Franks, 2016). The ONS (2018, p. 28) reports that around 90% of ‘revenge porn’ prosecutions from March 2016 to March 2018 were ‘domestic violence’/abuse-related. In this way, ‘revenge porn’ and other online violations can be seen as yet another form of, or extension of, ‘domestic violence’, that includes psychological, physical (in)direct, sexual, financial or emotional violence.

Given these statistics, ‘domestic violence’ and ‘revenge porn’ can be understood as part of the huge range of gender-based, and largely male violence against females (Hagemann-White et al., 2008; Hanmer & Itzin, 2000; Stark, 2009). In this context, the emphasis is on the power and control, typically gender-based power and control, that is exerted and reproduced in both offences. Yet, one of the main differences between both crimes is that ‘domestic violence’ can be directly physical through, for example, hitting, punching, and slapping, whereas physical harm associated with ‘revenge porn’ is indirect through attacks from others, self-harm and suicide.

### *Intentions and motivations*

According to the ONS (2018), the most cited reasons for ‘domestic violence’ are accusations of infidelity, coquetry, and constant nagging or moaning. A systematic review by Langhinrichsen-Rohling, McCullars and Misra (2012, p. 429) also found that control (76%), self-defense (61%), using violence as an expression of negative emotions (63%), difficulty communicating (48%), retaliation (60%), jealousy (49%) were commonly reported motives. ‘domestic violence’ from accusations of infidelity and coquetry can be seen as a form of the range of practices of revenge, specifically interpersonal revenge, and overlaps with ‘revenge

porn'. Revenge in both offences can be viewed as ways of dealing with, and coping with, such emotions and social relations as disappointment, communication issues, loss, punishment, shaming, conflict and antagonism (Yoshimura, 2007). Revenge can be material and/or symbolic. It can be direct, involving getting one's presumed 'just' and material desserts, or extracting yet more than that, or it can be more tangential and symbolized in specific textual or representational acts.

A wide range of research (for example, Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Hanmer & Itzin, 2000; Stark, 2009) also has shown that male perpetrators of 'domestic violence' frequently position their female partners as responsible for the violence and abuse in their relationship, downplaying the violence and abuse, and ultimately claiming they are not the kind of males who assault or abuse females (see Stokoe, 2010, for a more detailed analysis). We found similar results in our own research (Hall & Hearn, 2017; 2018a; 2018b; 2019; Hearn & Hall, 2019) of former 'revenge porn' site, MyEx.com. For example, in these studies, perpetrators of 'revenge porn' tended to blame their ex-partner for them posting sexually explicit images of them online, and in doing so they positioned themselves as the victim, and their ex-partner as the perpetrator. Reported reasons for revenge included infidelity, coquetting, stealing 'his' children, fraud and so on. Ex-partners were constructed as someone deserved of punishment and so 'revenge porn' could be seen or represented by the poster as supposed 'equalizing' action for an alleged prior misdemeanor. As with 'domestic violence', perpetrators downplayed their intentions to harm in order to ward off personal accountability (cf. Hearn, 1998), or risk being viewed as vindictive for seeking revenge. Indeed, a recent survey of 3,044 adults by the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative (CCRI) (2017) found 79% of all perpetrators claimed they did not intend to hurt the victim-survivor by sharing their sexually explicit images, but 'just' embarrass them.

But, what is clear from the intentions/motives of both 'domestic violence' and sexual image- and text-based online violation is the will to have, or regain, power and control. The gender/sexual power relations of both 'domestic violence' and 'revenge pornography' exploit the paradox of intimacy and violence – specifically how the person most intimate, most open,

most vulnerable, can be hurt, damaged, violated through that very closeness. The initial known-ness is part of its power, and power to violate. Where sexual image- and text-based online violation differs from 'domestic violence' is that the paradox of intimacy and violence makes the private intimate public and thus virtual intimate (ex-)partner abuse and violence. In this way, the damage experienced by the victim-survivor comes not just from the (ex)partner but the sexually explicit images being viewed by the victim-survivor, the postee, friends and acquaintances, and an unknown and imagined audience.

### *Form of violence*

'Domestic violence' and abuses include psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional violence largely between adults who are or have been intimate partners (WHO, 2021). 'Revenge porn' shares similarities with domestic abuse in that it is psychological and emotional violence but contrasts in that is not directly physical but is representational and reputational (Brown, 2018). That is, sexual image- and text-based online violations that are aimed at harming or damaging the victim-survivor's reputation by presenting them as sexually promiscuous, adulterous, untrustworthy, criminal, unclean, unintelligent, and naïve.

### *Types of violence*

According to the UK Government (2018), 'domestic violence' between intimate partners can be emotional (belittling; blaming; isolation; accusations; controlling actions, money, friends, work, what to wear, who to see, where to go, and what to think), include threats and intimidation (to hurt or kill the partner, themselves or children; destroy property; invade personal space; read personal communications; harass or stalk), physical abuse (slap, hit or punch; push or shove; bite or kick; burn, choke or hold the person down; throw things), and sexual abuse (touch in an unwanted way; make unwanted sexual demands; hurt during sex; pressure for [un]safe sex; sexual assault; rape).

‘Revenge porn’, on the other hand, aims to intentionally damage someone’s reputation by spreading malicious gossip, rumours or photos (these can be manipulated) (Brown, 2018). Like ‘domestic violence’ this can have negative psychological and emotional implications. And, there is an element of not knowing what has been done, where the images or text have been placed and replicated, or who has viewed the images, for example, family, friends, work colleagues, and acquaintances, or even a more diffuse, unknown and imagined audience (Lacey, 2007).

### *Medium of violence*

‘Domestic violence’ often occurs within the private sphere where the perpetrator/victim-survivor reside, although a significant number of ‘domestic violence’s’ do happen in the public sphere and include fraud, public order offences, criminal damage and arson (ONS, 2018). Conversely, sexual image- and text-based online violation may be the sharing of explicit images of another via cell phones within a specific locality or community, it is predominantly facilitated by ICTs accessing various online platforms, and thus largely in the public sphere. Indeed, the publicness of the crime is one of the motives for it (Hall & Hearn, 2017; 2018a; 2018b; 2019; Hearn & Hall, 2019). Whilst both crimes are intentional behavior to harm another, often repeatedly, the ‘revenge porn’ victim-survivor has less opportunity to defend themselves, due to not knowing all of the possible online platforms where their images have been posted, who is viewing and interacting with them, and the difficulties in removing such images even when the platforms hosting them are known (Slonje et al., 2013). And, given material posted online is almost impossible to remove the violence and abuse can last in perpetuity (Svoboda, 2014). There is a growing range of resources to assist victim-survivors in these situations, some public and online, some more specialist professional, in terms of both preventive and remedial measures.<sup>6</sup>

One other obvious difference in the mediums of ‘domestic violence’ and sexual image- and text-based online violation is the proximity of perpetrator and victim-survivor. In most examples of ‘domestic violence’, the perpetrator is in close proximity, whereas in ‘revenge porn’ the

perpetrator has the ability to remain anonymous and may be anywhere in the world facilitated by the affordances of computerized communication networks (Wellman, 2001). Whereas ‘domestic violence’ may be confined to a private chain of events between the perpetrator and victim-survivor ‘revenge porn’ on the other hand may lead to a chain of events, occurrences, times and places beyond itself. For example, victim-survivors have experienced ‘embarrassment, reputation ruination’, and some have also faced stalking, harassment and threats of being gang raped because their personal information was placed in the public domain (Lichter, 2013, p. 1).

### *Directedness*

In ‘domestic violence’ the violence and abuse is direct to known persons and in particular the victim-survivor, or those close to the victim-survivor such as family, friends or new partners. Thus, the offence is often in the private domain, and not necessarily known by others, and may also be related to specific times (for example, after work, social events, weekends, holidays) (Capaldi et al., 2012). Whilst ‘revenge porn’ may be directed to the (ex-)partner, it can also be targeted to their family, friends and work colleagues, as well as for consumption, and sexual pleasure of others (un)known (Short et al., 2017). ‘Revenge porn’ also differs in that the offence may last in perpetuity, and an endless reproducibility, since material posted online is almost impossible to revoke and can be shared in a relatively short amount of time (Henry & Flynn, 2019). Indeed, a 24-year-old victim-survivor, Anisha, talking on BBC Newsbeat (2014) said that when her boyfriend posted sexually explicit images of her online after their relationship had ended they are now on over 200 websites across the globe.

### *Technologies and processes*

It seems that what has usually been called ‘domestic violence’ and what we are calling online violation, such as what has been popularly labeled ‘revenge pornography’, have somewhat different histories, socio-legal contexts, technological apparatuses, and technologies of the self, in the wider (Foucaultian) sense (Foucault, 1988). For a start, ‘domestic violence’ has

historically developed primarily through the use of, first, the body as a technology (arms, hands/fists, legs, feet, head, torsos, and so on), and, second, weapons, including sticks, canes, rope, guns, knives, as well as less purpose built items such as kitchen equipment, telephones, sports equipment. However, it is clearly well established that ‘domestic violence’ also entails other less obviously directly physical forms of violence and abuse, as with control of money, friends and family, pets, mobility, and so on. Each of these latter forms use different non-human (for example, objects, media) and human (listening, observation, persuasion, belittling, etc.) technologies and affordances (Barter & Koulu, 2021).

Online violation goes one step further in dealing with non-immediate technologies and affordances, and the many open-ended and undefined possibilities of ICTs for violation. These include bringing such features to everyday life as: time/space compression of distance and physical separation, instantaneousness in real time; asynchronicity; reproducibility of images; creation of virtual bodies; blurring the ‘real’ and the ‘representational’; broader bandwidth, wireless portability and globalized connectivity; personalization, and blurring, even abolition, of online/offline boundaries (Hearn, 2006; Wellman, 2001). The upshot now is that the separation of DV and OV is not so straightforward, at least for many with access to the latter technologies.

It is now clear that ‘domestic violence’ can now entail a multi-faceted symbiotic relationship with new technologies such as the internet, smartphones, tablets, and computers. Indeed, Southworth and colleagues (2007) found that fax machines, e-mail, Internet-based harassment, global positioning systems, spy ware, video cameras, and online databases had also been used in ‘domestic violence’ and abuse. Woodlock’s (2017) survey with 152 ‘domestic violence’ advocates and 46 victim-survivors found that new technologies were commonly used for stalking, and other online abuses. Where ‘domestic violence’ was once largely confined to the physical space and the close proximity of perpetrator and victim-survivor the use of new technologies means that abuse can take place at a distance and physical separation, be instantaneousness in real time, create virtual public (and private) spaces for abuse which may



be local or global, blur the ‘real’ and the ‘representational’. These technologies allow the abuser to create a sense of their omnipresence, in order to isolate, punish, and humiliate the victim-survivor.

One of the more recent developments in the relationship between technology and ‘domestic violence’ is the sharing of non-consensual sexualized content online in to humiliate victim-survivor – often referred to as ‘revenge porn’ (Hall & Hearn, 2017; 2018a; 2018b; 2019; Hearn & Hall, 2019). The non-consensual sharing of sexually explicit images means the abuse can last in perpetuity with open-ended and undefined possibilities and effects. Moreover, ‘revenge porn’ can be conceptualized in terms of the processual nature of the interactive Web, in which ‘producers’, ‘prosumers’ and other hybrids create the Web interactively (see Whisnant, 2010, for further discussion in relation to the production and consumption of pornography), as evidenced in do-it-yourself pornography, naked selfies, sexting (sharing sexually explicit images via smartphone and tablet [Grogan et al., 2018; Hasinoff, 2015]), reflectoporn (a seemingly ordinary photo of an object, often for sale, which has pornographic images intentionally reflected onto the surface), and so on. These all increase the ability to abuse an intimate partner through new technologies. Thus, online ‘revenge porn’ as a means of domestic abuse can be understood as both novel and unfinished forms of ‘domestic violence’s’ and abuses.

This raises some complex issues, for example, how such violations can be simultaneously embodied and virtual. They are not reducible to just one form or possibility, may be multi-medial and multi-modal, and may only be understandable in the context of a range of social practices beyond the visible and readable text (Barter & Koulu, 2021). For example, a particular posting may reference, implicitly or explicitly, another earlier topic or social occasion offline and off-screen, positive or negative, for one, both or more parties, which would not be decipherable by an uninvolved party or viewer. Specific instances may be part of a complex chain of events, occurrences, times and places, along with contacts and avoidances.

Another key aspect of process of ‘domestic violence’, online violation, and their conjoining concerns time. This matter of time is relevant to both relation of act of violence/violation and the impact of that violence over times, as well as change over time. On the first count, physical violence is immediate. Control and abuse of, say, money, family and friends, may be much more extended, even subtle, taking some time to take effect, or at least come to consciousness. Online violation may become known, in theory at least, around the world, before the target, the violated person, knows (perhaps much later), indeed even if at all. On the second, one predictor of physical violence is previous violence (Walby & Myhill, 2001; also see Schinkel, 2010), and thus escalation is one real danger in ‘domestic violence’. With online violation, clearly escalation may take place, but in a sense, escalation can take the form of dispersal and spreading to a wider audience. These two sets of processes – escalation and dispersal – can intertwine over time.

### *Impacts*

‘Revenge porn’ differs in part from some forms of ‘domestic violence’ because it is not directly physical on the fleshy body, although indirectly it can lead to physical outcomes for the victim-survivor from physical harm from others, self-harm, and even suicide (Plank, 2013). What it does share with ‘domestic violence’ is psychological harm.

‘Domestic violence’ and abuse, and ‘revenge porn’ have been linked with risks of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, attempted and actual suicide, and psychological distress (Bates, 2017; Pico-Alfonso, 2006). There is also an increased risk for victim-survivors to increase alcohol use and substance abuse. Because ‘domestic violence’ can be directly physical victim-survivors may also suffer adverse reproductive and physical health consequences such as injury, chronic pain, gynecological issues, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy and so on (Campbell, 2002; Walby, 2010).

Although ‘domestic violence’ can have significant psychological impacts and may be more impactful than physical harm (Herman, 2015), the psychological impacts of ‘revenge porn’

differ somewhat. In our analysis of perpetrator posts on former ‘revenge porn’ website, MyEx.com (Hall & Hearn, 2017; 2018a; 2018b; 2019; Hearn & Hall, 2019), perpetrators claimed victim-survivors were unhygienic, deceitful, poor partners and parents, sexually lacking or had non-normative desires, committed infidelity, coquetting, promiscuity, violent and criminal, all of which were made public for the victim-survivor, their family, friends and colleagues to see as well as the victim-survivor’s new partner or others (un)known. Thus, victim-survivors reported experiencing humiliation, shame, embarrassment and reputation ruination with or from intimate partners, family, friends, work colleagues and in public; sexual shame and sexual problems; body image issues; education and employment disruptions; becoming paranoid and hyper-vigilant; having trust issues; and concerns for personal safety faced due to stalking, harassment and threats of being gang raped because their online and offline personal and professional information had also been published alongside the photos and text – also known as ‘doxing’ (Lichter , 2013; McAfee, 2013).

## **Discussion**

In this paper, we have examined violence by way of a comparison of physical violence and online violation. We argue, in comparison to Walby et al. (2016, p. 4), that it is not “better to restrict the concept of ‘violence’ to a specific and precise definition connected to intended physical acts that cause harm”. Although physical violence is clearly and vitally important, (and sometimes lethal, interpersonal and intimate partner violence where non-physical, psychological, emotional and other forms of non-(directly)physical violence may be equally or even more impactful (Herman, 2015; see Hearn et al., 2022). In particular, we draw on the example of ‘revenge porn’ as one of the growing numbers of relatively new forms of representational and psychological forms of violence which can devastate lives, and indeed have physical outcomes for the victim-survivor. For example, harm from others, or the mental health impacts, may lead to self-harm from post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, or may lead to increased alcohol use and substance abuse, or indeed, actual suicide (Bates, 2017; Pico-Alfonso, 2006). Thus, as we demonstrated, it is problematic to restrict the concept

of violence when there are clearly overlaps, intersections, combinations between (in)direct physical harm, and the blurring of the offline/online, and (un)known violences.

We suggest also that changes in the opportunities to commit violences are a feature of the symbiotic relationship that violence and abuse has shared with technologies. Whilst ‘domestic violence’ has historically developed primarily through the use of technologies such as guns, knives, kitchen equipment, telephones, more modern ICTs have allowed ‘domestic violence’s’ and abuse to move online, at distance, in public, and arguably with greater impact, maybe delayed impact too. Indeed, as the ONS (2018, p. 28) reports the majority of ‘revenge porn’ prosecutions were ‘domestic violence’/abuse-related.

For some people also, especially younger generations, the online-offline distinction may not be meaningful, or at least becoming less meaningful. Online uses of ICTs for sexual purposes are now normalized in many parts of the world, and especially so, but not only, for younger people. For example, in one recent four-country (Canada, Germany, Sweden, the United States) study of 2,690 college students’ sexuality-related activity online, 89.8% reported accessing sexual information, 76.5% experiencing sexual entertainment, 48.5% browsing for sexual products, and 30.8% having engaged in cybersex (Döring et al., 2017; see also Cooper et al., 1999, 2003; Shaughnessy et al., Byers, & Walsh, 2011).

The normalization of sex on the internet, via sexual selfies, sexting, sexual posting and cyberintimacy (Grogan et al., 2018; Hasinoff, 2015) all provide resources for further non-consensual harassment, bullying, exploitation, violation and ‘revenge porn’ from previous intimate relationships. The blurring of the offline and online means there is a greater potential for violence, abuse and harassment to occur together, and in public and private spaces. And, the publicness of the previously private space has the potential to have a multitude of impacts as we have shown, often repeatedly, where the victim-survivor has less opportunity to defend themselves, and this may last in perpetuity (Slonje et al., 2013; Svoboda, 2014).

Finally, there is the broader question of whether there is a relation of offline/IRL and online/virtual, of social practice and representation. On one hand, there are differences

between direct violence and online violating representations of sex, sexuality and violence, which may, or may not, be representations of previous or real-time sex, sexuality and violence. On the other hand, there are, to complicate matters, all sorts of connections and crossovers between violent practices and representations of sex, sexuality and violences. Moreover, representations are practices, and are the result of practices, including practices of representation and representational practices. Online violating representations can also have very harmful effects and effects that are experienced as harmful. Slippages around these questions of practice-representation are one, but not the only, reason for the degree of disagreements between analysts and commentators on these issues. Divergences in approach build on established and related differences around, for example, sexual(ized) representation, pornography, and prostitution, even though these debates have their own specific character. But the difference now with the multitude of online violences, such as ‘revenge pornography’, are that they are largely targeted on and against a specific person, unlike (most) generic pornography, and may last indefinitely.

Much ‘domestic violence’ is now both offline and online, merging and reinforcing with each other in some instances (Bailey et al., 2021; Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Harris, 2018; Harris & Woodlock, 2019; Hall et al., 2022). More specifically, Refuge (2020), the UK ‘domestic violence’ charity, found in 2019 that 72% of their service users had experienced abuse through technology, and 85% of respondents surveyed by Women’s Aid UK (2020) in 2015 reported that the abuse they received online from a (ex-)partner was part of a pattern of abuse experienced offline (Hadley, 2017). Similarly, a recent Swedish study highlighted perpetrators can use technology as a means of coercive control and continue “to be constantly present in the woman’s life, even after she has left him.” On the other hand, the same technology can also be important to women, in assisting their management of their victimization, monitoring of perpetrators, storing evidence, obtaining information, gaining support and maintaining contact with family and friends (Boethius et al., 2022). Indeed, in their recent meta-review of

‘Cyber intimate partner violence (C-IPV)’ and ‘face-to-face IPV (F2F-IPV)’, Gilbar et al. (2022) summarized:

Cyber intimate partner violence (C-IPV) is a technology-mediated form of violence. It has been examined only in the last 10 years as a form of violence that can cause psychological damage to its victims. How this phenomenon connects to and differs from face-to-face IPV (F2F-IPV) has been, as yet, little studied. ... The findings suggested that C-IPV and F2F-IPV are highly correlated, and though not the same, they may share similar characteristics.

By examining the nature and limits of violence by way of comparison of direct physical violence and online violation, we emphasize the importance and centrality of measuring and analyzing both direct and indirect violences and abuses, including online violations, as part of the measurement and analysis of violence, violation and abuse more generally. The continuum of violence and abuse, and violence against women, certainly needs to be extended to online violation. Moreover, this approach also seeks to draw attention to the complex intersections, and even co-occurrence, of online violations and abuses with physical violence and ‘domestic violence’. It is very likely indeed that domestic and intimate partner violence will include online violation more frequently in the future, and that online violation will also be understood as constituting domestic and intimate partner violence more in the future. The analysis of these connections and overlaps are thus important in empirically measurement, policy development, and theoretical understanding of violence and violation.

### **Notes**

1. The range of terminology in use, in both academic and policy discourse, regarding online, digital and ‘technology-facilitated’ violences, abuses and violations is still highly variable. For overviews, including possible problems with the prefix ‘technology-facilitated’, see Brown & Hegarty, 2018; Hall et al., 2022; Henry & Powell, 2018; Henry et al., 2020; Vera-Gray, 2017).

2. The practice of physically attacking, originally slapping, and often verbally abusing, a person and photographing or filming the attack, with the recording sometimes sent to others to further the humiliation of the victim-survivor.
3. The use of a still or video camera, that is hidden in another or built into another device or a very visible object such as a pen, to take pictures or videos, without consent, and then sometimes circulate.
4. In addition to the gender-neutral term, intimate partner violence (IPV), other relevant framings have included violence to women (VAW), violence to women and girls (VAWG), wife abuse, wife battering, as well as the non-gender specific terms, conjugal violence, partner abuse, spousal violence, and family violence.
5. This may also include women's violence and abuse to men, and same-sex, transgender and intersex intimate partner violence (Otero et al., 2015), as well as violence to and from children, especially older children, and to and from older kin. In some cases, 'domestic violence' can also extend to other family members, friends, neighbors, and (assumed) intimates or supporters of the victim-survivor. Additionally, 'domestic violence' can be extended to situations of women as property of men/husbands.
6. Examples of where such resources are to be found include: the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (<https://www.nsvrc.org/blogs/online-harassment-resources>), and Pen America (<https://onlineharassmentfieldmanual.pen.org/additional-online-harassment-resources/>).

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