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Image-based sexual abuse: A qualitative exploration of the lived experience and perceived consequences for women

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Image-based Sexual Abuse: A Qualitative Exploration of the

Lived Experience and Perceived Consequences for Women

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Edith Cowan University

2019

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Abstract

Being a highly convoluted and contemporaneous issue, defining and conceptualising image-based sexual abuse has proved difficult for scholars. Although research on image-based sexual abuse is limited, previous inquiries have identified serious consequences and accumulative harms for affected individuals. I aimed to explore the lived experience and consequences of image-based sexual abuse as identified by women, in an attempt to taper the research dearth on this phenomenon. An in-depth qualitative phenomenological exploration of seven women's experiences of image-based sexual abuse saw five overarching themes emerge from participants' discourse. The themes comprised mental health impacts; perceptions of self; loss of control; mistrust; and experiences of abuse. Along with depressed mood, shame, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress, which have been identified outcomes in previous literature, participants experienced eating issues and body dysmorphic related consequences as an antecedent to self-objectification. As new findings, my study has identified that participants revealed experiences of sexual re-victimisation, poly-victimisation, chronic abuse, and presented with significant and enduring inter-relational disturbances. In addition, image-based sexual abuse may be a precursor to domestic violence vulnerability. Experiences of victim blaming presented a barrier to support seeking subsequent to the abuse, producing secondary victimisation and contributing to isolation, feelings of loneliness, and a lack of support. Managing this diverse, multifaceted, and complex social issue may benefit from a multidisciplinary approach that considers the interpersonal and societal factors implicated in image-based sexual abuse. Clinical implications such as working within a trauma informed approach are discussed and future directions are explicated.

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Consequences for Women

The non-consensual use of digital technologies is an increasingly prevailing

phenomenon in contemporary society (Henry & Powell, 2016b). The burgeoning use and

accessibility of smartphones in recent times has cultivated an innovative way of sexual

engagement known as 'sexting' (sending sexually explicit media or messages over

communication technologies) (Krieger, 2016; McCue, 2016; Slane, 2013). Sexting has

become a common form of sexual engagement, with prevalence rates in the adult population

estimated to be between 53-57% (Klettke, Hallford, & Mellor, 2014). Technology allows

individuals to capture and distribute images with ease. Although the taking and sharing of

sexual images is common sexual behaviour, disseminating intimate images without consent,

is abusive. Focus needs to be placed on the non-consensual *distribution* of sexual material,

rather than its acquisition, which has often been the emphasis of image-based abuse and

where culpability is frequently attributed. It is noteworthy that this abusive conduct is

increasingly observed in the context of otherwise seemingly 'healthy' relationships. Vitis,

Joseph, and Mahadevan (2017) assert that previous forms of violence are now incorporating

digital technologies. The use of technology in the modern age has fashioned novel ways to

facilitate and experience gendered, sexual, and intimate partner violence (IPV) (Vitis et al.,

2017). The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2013) informs that 35% of women across the

globe have faced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, or sexual violence

perpetrated by a friend, associate, relative, or stranger. Furthermore, the reported harms of

physical and sexual violence and harassment are alarmingly widespread, purported to be

highly gendered in nature, and are frequently relational (Henry & Powell, 2016b; WHO,

2013). According to the WHO, this has a significant public health impact with extensive

physical, sexual, reproductive, and mental health effects that influence women's morbidity and mortality rates.

Technology facilitated sexual violence (TFSV) comprises a variety of behaviours where technology is used to facilitate sexual harms through online and physical means (Henry & Powell, 2016b). This includes contact based sexual harassment (unwelcomed calling/messaging), cyberstalking, and image-based sexual abuse (herein abbreviated to IBSA) (Vitis et al., 2017). IBSA is perpetrated in a shared and collusive fashion that involves accumulative harms to targeted individuals (Vitis et al., 2017). IBSA incorporates the non-consensual dissemination of an individual's sexual images (photographs/videos), often, but not necessarily, with intent to shame, humiliate, and harass (Bennett, 2015; Kamal & Newman, 2016; Vitis et al., 2017). A study conducted by Henry, Powell, and Flynn (2017) reported that more than 1 in 5 (23%) of their Australian sample (N=4,274) had been subjected to IBSA. Although TFSV can, and is, perpetrated by women against males and does occur in the LGBTIQA+ community (Henry et al., 2017; Vitis et al., 2017), research shows that men are much more likely to perpetrate IBSA against females (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2016).

There is a paucity of research on the extent, nature, perpetration, and outcomes for adult IBSA sufferers to date (McCue, 2016). Due to this dearth in research and the propensity for females to be the primary targets of this abuse, the focus of the current study is to explore the experience and consequences of IBSA for women, as it is anticipated that individuals may experience additional previously unexplored negative mental health effects. I engaged a qualitative study to reveal further information on the impacts of IBSA, as there is insufficient data to date in order to effectively identify appropriate variables to be measured in quantitative research. Conducting an exploratory study expected to provide the necessary clarification to guide future quantitative analysis.

The current paper commences with a review of the literature where IBSA is discussed in the context of IPV and sexual assault. The various physical, psychological, relational, social, and economic effects are explicated and the impact of minimising and victim blaming attitudes is elucidated, with emphasis being placed on the absence and requirement of sufficient legal remedies and community-based education strategies. The gendered nature of this phenomenon is examined. Subsequently, an in-depth qualitative exploration of the experience and perceived consequences of IBSA for women is described. IBSA was found to have significant psychological implications for sufferers, which were exacerbated by pervasive victim blaming societal attitudes.

Image-based Sexual Abuse

IBSA is commonly referred to as 'revenge pornography', due to the non-consensual distribution of sexually explicit material being increasingly observed amongst ex-intimates (Kamal & Newman, 2016). Within this context, vengeful ex-partners use private images or videos that have *often* been given voluntarily, within a trusting relationship, and choose to distribute them online or to third parties without consent, after the relationship has ended (Kamal & Newman, 2016). 'Non-consensual pornography' is another term commonly used in the literature, however, such terminology has been deemed too restrictive because it does not suitably summon the potential consequences to victims. As a broad range of motives and contexts is being explored, the preferred term is IBSA (Grobbelaar & Guggisberg, 2018; Henry & Powell, 2015; Henry et al., 2017; Suzor, Seignior, & Singleton, 2017). Furthermore, 'image-based sexual abuse' appropriately highlights the emotional and psychosocial harms experienced by targeted individuals due to the non-consensual creation and circulation of private images (McGlynn & Rackley, 2016; Walker & Sleath, 2017).

There are a gamut of practices that encompass IBSA, and furthermore, this type of abuse resides on a continuum of numerous other forms of sexual violence (McGlynn,

Rackley, & Houghton, 2017). IBSA practices include cases involving an anonymous stalker or hacker accessing private images; doctored pornographic images that include an individual's face ('sexualised photoshopping'/'morph porn'/'parasite porn'); recording and distributing a sexual assault; obtaining photos/footage of a person when they are incapacitated (unconscious, asleep, affected by substances) (Henry & Powell, 2016b; Vitis et al., 2017); and/or acquiring media surreptitiously (e.g. when showering/getting dressed), which includes 'upskirting' or 'downblousing' images (Henry et al., 2017). Disseminating intimate media without consent can occur in various forms, whether to friendship groups/third parties on personal devices, or alternatively distributed via the internet on social networking sites or 'revenge porn' web pages.

The Internet

The widespread use of the internet and the ease, vast use, and propagation of digital technologies, has transformed the way community members relate in interpersonal-sexual domains. Virtual sexual engagement has become a quotidian practice. However, the internet provides a platform where virtual sexual abuse potentially reaches large audiences across the globe (Goldnick, 2014). Due to this proliferation, Franks (2015) infers that some individuals subjected to IBSA experience instant, highly destructive, and irreparable damage. Furthermore, considering that once a photo has been disseminated online it is very difficult to eliminate, there is potential for long term harm (Cecil, 2014). Therefore, tackling IBSA requires primary prevention measures and necessitates the implementation of commercial and user responsibility (Henry & Powell, 2016a; Suzor et al., 2017). Some targeted individuals have their full name, social media accounts, phone number, email, and/or location posted online (also known as 'doxing') next to their image or video (Cecil, 2014; Henry & Powell, 2016a), perpetuating experiences of online and offline sexual harassment and stalking.

Perpetrator Motivations

Motives, other than vengeance, include bullying, financial gain, sexual gratification, notoriety, amusement, bragging, control, intimidation, humiliation, and sextortion (Franks, 2015; Henry et al., 2017; Lee, 2017; McCue, 2016). 'Sextortion' is a form of sexual exploitation where perpetrators threaten to release an individual's image/s with the aim to blackmail for money or sexual favours, coerce participation in unwanted sexual acts, or prevent them from leaving a relationship or pursuing legal action in cases of IPV (Henry et al., 2017). Although there are many ways in which an individual can obtain someone's intimate material, 'catfishing' is becoming an increasingly popular method in virtual spaces. Catfishing involves adopting a fictitious or deceptive online identity, often through the use of impersonation, in order to persuade or elicit an unwitting individual to forward sexually explicit media (Greenberg, 2017). Although IBSA occurs in numerous contexts, this form of abuse is increasingly being perpetrated within interpersonally-violent relationships (Henry & Powell, 2016a).

Intimate partner violence.

Academics and social science researchers report that intimate partners are progressively using technology as mechanisms of control, and surveillance, to intimidate, and abuse (Burke et al., 2011; Fraser, & Tucker, 2007; Grobbelaar & Guggisberg, 2018; Southworth, Finn, Dawson, & Woodlock, 2017; Vitis et al., 2017). Furthermore, Vitis et al. (2017) assert that intimate partners may non-consensually release sexual images without relational conflict. Drouin, Ross, and Tobin (2015) found that one in five women sent sexts when they did not want to due to 'sexting coercion', and have inferred that this is a form of IPV. Additionally, Stonard, Bowen, Walker, and Price (2015), found that adolescent girls are more preoccupied with their partner's responses on technological devices, which may have an impact on females being more likely to experience sexting coercion, in contrast to males. As previously discussed, perpetrators may threaten to release images in order to control or

coerce a partner/ex-partner to stay in a relationship or to prevent them from filing for violence restraining orders (VRO's) (Henry & Powell, 2007). The dissemination of a recorded rape is interpersonal violence that can occur within an IPV relationship or via other means (Chiroro, Bohner, Viki, & Jarvis, 2004).

Sexual assault.

As formerly stipulated, IBSA can involve the recording and subsequent distribution of a sexual assault. With respect to rape motivations and proclivity, some scholars highlight that sexual gratification is the underlying impetus (Thornhill & Palmer, 2015). In contrast, rape from a feminist perspective is understood in terms of male dominance and an urge to exercise power over another (Chiroro et al., 2004). Perpetrators are said to harbour feelings of hatred toward females and intend to place women under their control (Bates, 2017; Chapleau & Oswald, 2010). Although there are multiple purported causes of sexual violence and contention exists in the literature (Bohner, Siebler, & Schmelcher, 2006; Buss & Malamuth, 1996), there is evidence that at least some perpetrators take pleasure in sexually subjugating women (Chiroro et al., 2004).

The Consequences of IBSA

There are numerous purported repercussions for IBSA sufferers highlighted in the literature. Individuals are increasingly more likely to experience physical and sexual assault, sexual harassment, cyber-harassment, and stalking (Bloom, 2014; D'Amico & Steinberger, 2015; Kitchen, 2015; Mesch, 2012). Moreover, IBSA sufferers are progressively more likely to encounter physical violence or victimisation for speaking out (Citron & Franks, 2014).

Sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment is any sexually motivated behaviour that is unwanted, objectionable, or disrespectful of another person's rights (Avina & O'donohue, 2002). Sexual harassment may have considerable implications (Citron & Franks, 2014) and is inferred to

have numerous adverse health outcomes for women (Ho, Dinh, Bellefontaine, & Irving, 2012; McDonald, 2011; Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). Some of the negative effects include impaired mental and physical wellbeing, such as, depressed mood, low self-confidence, reduced appetite, post-traumatic stress symptoms, problematic sleeping, reduced productivity, and occupational and economic costs (Avina & O'donohue, 2002; Barling, Rogers, & Kelloway, 2001; Fitzgerald, et al., 1988; Ho et al., 2012). Furthermore, Mesch (2012) states that cyber-harassment (online behaviour) in its various forms encompasses a degree of aggression that has amplified repercussions due to its repetitive, lasting, and insidious nature. In addition to sexual and cyber-harassment, IBSA sufferers can be victims of both stalking and cyberstalking.

Stalking.

Stalking is the deliberate, malevolent and recurring pursuit, harassment, and/or surveillance of another person (Davis, Frieze, & Maiuro, 2002). Being a victim of stalking can engender clinical depression, increased anxiety and hypervigilance, disruptions in sleep and appetite, suicidal ideation, post-traumatic stress, reduced occupational functioning, guilt, shame, distrust, confusion, substance abuse, and somatic symptomology (e.g., headaches, indigestion, and elevated blood pressure) (Abrams & Robinson, 2002; Bjerregaard, 2000; Kamphius & Emmelkamp, 2001; Nicastro, Cousins, & Spitzberg, 2000; Pathe & Mullen, 1997). Cyberstalking elicits fear through repetitive threatening via virtual means (Catalano, 2012). In addition, Catalano (2012) asserts that 25% of stalking victims experienced cyberstalking of some variety. According to West (2014), 65% of women who were exposed to cyber-violence experienced negative psychological impact. Davis, Coker, and Sanderson (2002) studied the long term effects of stalking with a sample of 13,268 males and females. Their study revealed that females experienced significantly more stalking (14.2%) than did males (4.3%) (Davis, Coker et al., 2002).

Davis, Coker et al. (2002) explicate that the extent of fear experienced by being stalked is central to negative health effects. Females were over thirteen times more likely to experience extreme fear being stalked, hence significantly more likely than males to suffer negative mental and physical health effects (D'Amico & Steinberger, 2015; Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012). Congruently, females reported higher levels of fear due to IBSA compared to males (Henry et al., 2017). In addition to potentially being exposed to, and suffering the consequences of, online/offline abuse, stalking, and harassment (Citron & Franks, 2014), individuals subjected to IBSA can experience psychological, relational, social, and economic consequences, which are discussed next.

Psychological, relational, social, and economic effects.

According to D'Amico and Steinberger (2015), 80% of IBSA sufferers reported severe emotional distress. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, mistrust, despair, and suicidal ideation are some of the purported repercussions (Bates, 2017). Individuals also reported anxiety, panic attacks, shame, humiliation, a loss of self-esteem, and some have suicided (Citron, 2009; Citron & Franks, 2014). Due to the non-consensual public circulation of private sexual images, targeted individuals may have difficulty finding partners, lose professional opportunities, future employment prospects, and experience economic hardship and decreased earnings (Avina & O'donohue, 2002; Bates, 2017; Citron & Franks, 2014; Kamal & Newman, 2016).

Citron (2009) affirms that persons exposed to IBSA are prone to being characterised as incompetent employees and subordinate sexual objects. Due to the repercussions experienced by sufferers, targeted persons are known to withdraw from social media, increasing their isolation and potentially minimising support networks (Bates, 2017). Citron states that the harms of IBSA pose a tangible threat to one's psychological and physical autonomy. It impedes one's control over their body, undermines an individual's self-

determination, integrity, and dignity (Citron, 2009; Citron & Franks, 2014). Langlois and

Slane (2017) assert that a person's damaged reputation can lead to identity crises as one's

control over social representation is compromised. Regardless of the aforementioned

associated repercussions from perpetrators releasing sexualised material without consent,

targeted individuals are predominantly blamed (Bothamley & Tully, 2018).

Victim Blaming

Individuals are often blamed for sending or consenting to their pictures being taken

(Bothamley & Tully, 2018), rather than accountability being placed on perpetrators'

decisions to circulate material without consent. In our digital age it is reasonable to expect

that sexuality and sexual expression shall continue to coalesce with technological

advancement. Furthermore, as is recognised in numerous other situations, consent is context

dependent (for a comprehensive review of the literature see Beres, 2007). A woman's

consent to have sex with one man does not imply her consent to have sex with his friends.

Likewise, if someone consents to one person being in possession of an intimate image, that

does not mean they consent to have that image shared with others.

With respect to TFSV, community members are unclear on the concept of consent and

where to draw the line between acceptable, unethical, and criminal behaviour (Burke, Wallen,

Vail-Smith, & Knox, 2011). For instance, as previously mentioned, women are progressively

being pressured or coerced into sending sexually explicit images (sexting coercion)

(Grobbelaar & Guggisberg, 2018). Furthermore, the holding of minimising and victim

blaming attitudes by some professionals along with the wider community (Henry et al., 2017)

may hinder accessibility to satisfactory support services. Further, such attitudes are inherent

to the perpetuation of violence against women, serve to silence victims, and exacerbate guilt,

shame, and self-blame (Grobbelaar & Guggisberg, 2018; Powell & Webster, 2016). In this

regard, community based education on the nature and impacts of IBSA is essential, in order

to mitigate negative effects. Moreover, efficacious legal measures are necessary to assist community members in understanding virtual sexual consent and to provide victims with appropriate restitution.

The Legal System

The internet permits the rapid propagation of private material across international borders, making the removal of information almost impossible (Bennett, 2015). As current laws have not kept up with technological development (Bartow, 2012; McCue, 2016; Plater, 2016; Stroud, 2014), or the negative effects that occur when people utilise the world wide web (WWW) as a forum for abuse (Bates, 2017; Citron 2009; Pina, Holland, & James, 2017), perpetrators are often protected by their rights to free speech (Genn, 2014; Pollack, 2016). Both the individual responsible for uploading the information and the website owners who promulgate this material, are largely left unaffected by any legal efforts to cease proliferation (Kopf, 2014; Levendowski, 2013; Pina et al., 2017). Also, sufferers are frequently unable to gain justice in regards to any consequences of TFSV (Dickson, 2016; Suzor et al., 2017).

Although exploring in-depth where the law stands on this issue is beyond the scope of this paper, it is noteworthy that current laws remain inadequate to protect people from TFSV (Bloom, 2014; Folderauer, 2014; Gillespie, 2015). The Victorian Inquiry into Sexting found that Australian law fails to sufficiently appreciate the detrimental impact experienced by individuals whose explicit media has been disseminated without consent (VPLRC, 2013). Considering the paucity of research on the consequences for IBSA sufferers (Bothamley & Tully, 2018), having an improved understanding of the associated outcomes is essential to assisting with appropriate law reform and informing support services.

Additionally, the dearth of legal parameters surrounding IBSA, fosters a climate that promotes victim blaming attitudes (Henry & Powell, 2016a), prompts victim silencing, and exacerbates existing psychological and social harms. There is growing recognition in the

literature that many of the mental health effects relative to the non-consensual distribution of sexually explicit media are synonymous with experiences of sexual abuse (Bates, 2017; Henry et al., 2017). With respect to this, IBSA is a form of sexual violation (Bates, 2017; Kopf, 2014). Certain Australian states introduced bills in parliament seeking to criminalise IBSA. Legal definitions are still inconsistent, however, and the proposed criminalisation is yet to be applied across the country. As Berns (2001) states that sociocultural attitudes tend to obscure men's violence and place the burden of responsibility on women, and that such attitudes are found on the Internet, in courtrooms, political debates, and everyday dialogue, the gendered nature of IBSA will be discussed presently.

A Gendered Phenomenon

Feminism views human behaviour through the lens of gender, emphasising social context with respect to interpersonal relationships and violence (Biever, De Las Fuentes, Cashion, & Franklin, 1998). Numerous scholars conjecture that IBSA is incited by gendered dynamics that intend to publically shame targeted individuals (Citron & Franks, 2014; Henry & Powell, 2016b; Vitis et al., 2017). In contrast, the gender symmetry debate deliberates whether violence is found equivalently across both sexes (Johnson, 2006). Gender symmetry theorists infer that violence pertains to individual pathology and is ascribed to the internal world of perpetrators (Fagan & Wexler, 1987). In regard to IPV, these theorists believe intimacy, insecure attachment styles, and particular psychological attributes increase the probability of IPV perpetration across both genders (Dutton, 2010; Dutton & Nicholls, 2005).

With respect to the gender symmetry debate, Johnson (2011) maintains that primary methodologies used in gender analysis are partisan. The context in which the data are obtained (e.g. surveys/shelters) is surmised to produce biased outcomes, therefore producing theoretical discrepancies (Johnson, 2011). Although numerous scholars recognise individual differences and the impact of attachment on an individual's propensity for violence (Dutton

& Nicholls, 2005; Gormley, 2005), perceiving violence from an individual perspective

disregards the consideration of political, economic, sociocultural and historical contexts as

influential factors (King, 2012). What is evident, is that the notable variability in sexual

inequality across large community samples demonstrates that simplistic explanations of male

violence and domination are insufficient (Buss & Malamuth, 1996). With respect to this,

scholars recommend an integrated approach that is inclusive of the micro and macro factors

that violence entails (McPhail, Busch, Kulkarni, & Rice, 2007).

The impact of patriarchy.

Patriarchy is a sociocultural, economic, and political system where males possess

primary power, predominate leadership roles, and social privilege (Mies & Federici, 1989).

Wharton (2011) maintains that a system of social practices constructed on patriarchal ideals

maintains gender disparity, creating inequity and differences in power. Patriarchy has meant

that women's sexuality has historically been inhibited and controlled, with females perceived

worth and standing in the community revolving around compliance, or lack thereof, to social

norms. Women's sexuality, and consequently their sense of self, is impacted by gender role

socialisation and subsequent perceptions of how one's sexuality aligns with sociocultural

expectations (Carter, 2004). With respect to this, contemporary Western culture is informed

by patriarchy (Boon, 2005).

Salter (2013) purports that gendered bias is inherent to IBSA and that women's social

status has traditionally been linked to chastity and modesty. Furthermore, Stonard et al.

(2015) found that compared to males, females perceived technology facilitated abuse to have

more significant negative impacts. As such, I contend that the ramifications of IBSA may be

increasingly harmful to women in contrast to men, as a result of socialisation and residual

social norms constructed upon patriarchal ideologies. Women are more likely to suffer from

negative consequences, due to the combined impact of online and offline stalking and

harassment, women's subjective experiences of fear, and the impact of gender role socialisation.

Cyber-misogyny and female objectification.

IBSA is conjectured to be a form of gender discrimination as feminist scholars consider this form of abuse to be primarily targeted against females, by males, on account of women's gender (Vitis et al., 2017). Scholars infer that social and gender inequalities persist on the WWW (Citron & Franks, 2014; Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013; Wajcman, 2000). Moreover, there is a gendered divide with respect to how individuals use and experience the internet (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013). Cyber-misogyny is defined as online gendered hatred, harassment, and abuse, toward females (Jones, 2017). Jones (2017) asserts that the prejudiced nature of cyber-misogyny is contextualised in marginalisation and power differentials, and has a disproportionate impact on women. In contrast, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) state that cyberspace has the potential to *de-traditionalise* gender and promote freedom of expression that remains unbound by the constraints of tangible face-to-face communication. Despite the potential for individuals to engage virtual realities with anonymity and empowerment, numerous scholars recognise that technology and its use is still gendered in numerous ways (for a comprehensive review of the literature see Henry & Powell, 2015b; and Powell & Henry, 2017). For instance, there has been a significant rise in incel (involuntary celibate) culture and forums across the WWW. Involuntary celibates are individuals desiring to have sex, however, are unsuccessful in finding romantic partners (Donnelly, Burgess, Anderson, Davis, & Dillard, 2001). These online incel forums comprise rejected men who propose and engage gendered hatred attacks against women (Webber & Peltz, 2018).

With respect to female objectification, sexual harassment and other objectification experiences, can give rise to self-objectification, as individuals assess themselves through the

lens of others (Davidson & Gervais, 2015). According to objectification theory, self-objectification is characterised by an internalisation of objectification experiences (Symanski & Henning, 2006). Thus, individuals regard their physical appearance as salient to their self-concept, in contrast with alternative traits (Davidson & Gervais, 2015). Self-objectification engenders body surveillance, and subsequently, body shame is an emotional response that ensues from negative self-appraisal (Davidson & Gervais, 2015). Therefore, female sexual objectification can yield significant negative repercussions.

As females subjected to IBSA are overrepresented among victims (Citron, 2009), feminist scholars propose that this a gendered phenomenon (McGlynn, et al., 2017; Vitis et al., 2017). Furthermore, feminists consider the marginalisation of women and the imbalance of power that continues between the sexes in contemporary society. Feminists propose that individuals may hold misogynistic attitudes (Jones, 2017). Photos/videos are often downloaded, exchanged, collected, and commented upon in a derogatory way, shaming individuals for their sexuality (D'Amico & Steinberger, 2015). Both the uploading of these images and any associated comments targeting the person's gender in a sexually demeaning manner, are often accompanied with fallacious comments regarding a willingness to engage sexual activities (D'Amico & Steinberger, 2015). Thus, individuals who disseminate non-consensual intimate media on the internet (and potentially through other means) may hold misogynistic attitudes. Furthermore, as 'revenge porn' websites are created with the intent to objectify, degrade, shame, humiliate, and harass some individuals, IBSA is inherently gendered in nature. Although there are men who are harassed online in this way, there are disproportionately more women affected, as the intent behind IBSA originated to harass women (Salter, 2013).

Feminist theorists assert that IBSA is analogous to other gendered violence, such as IPV, and is entrenched within our discourse, policies, and practices, at individual and

systemic levels (Boonzanier, 2008). For example, in Australian in 2016, a 14.3% wage gap was reported between men and women, and 32.3% of Australian firms had a woman employed in a senior managerial position (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2018). With respect to IBSA, a feminist perspective provides a framework to explore this emergent concern to consider community and legal approaches to bring about sociocultural change. Plater (2016) claims that a broader approach to addressing IBSA necessitates the incorporation of efficacious civil legal remedies. Likewise, the creation of effective guidelines, methods, and practices to be implemented by institutions, such as online and social media networks, educational organisations, service providers, and law enforcement agencies, are essential to ensure the integrity and equality of digital citizenship (Henry & Powell, 2016a; Plater, 2016).

Limitations and Future Research

Research on IBSA is in its infancy and scholars have a limited understanding of the nature and complexities inherent to this phenomenon. Considering females are overwhelmingly the targets of IBSA, further investigation into the outcomes for women is essential. However, research on the experience of all genders would address gaps in the literature and assist in better understanding the nature of IBSA. Further examination of any barriers to sufferers accessing support services, in addition to calculating prevalence rates across all IBSA contexts are also important endeavours. Moreover, exploration of the perpetrators' experiences and motivations, including elucidating the similarities and differences in female as opposed to male perpetration, is imperative.

The Current Study

The purpose of the current study was to explore the lived experience and perceived consequences of IBSA for women who have experienced it. Considering the dearth of qualitative research regarding this phenomenon (Bates, 2017), I endeavoured to address gaps

in the literature by investigating the lived experience of such women. The research question

was: What is the lived experience and perceived consequences of IBSA for women?

Research Design

Framework

As I aimed to investigate subjective lived experiences, interpretative phenomenology

was a suitable philosophical approach (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Smith, 1996).

Phenomenology endeavours to gain authentic, subjective truth and portray this as it

materialises into the investigator's consciousness (Moran, 2000). Pollio, Henley, and

Thompson (1997) state that phenomenology is "a determinate method of inquiry (directed

toward) attaining a rigorous and significant description of the world of everyday human

experience as it is lived and described by specific circumstances" (p. 28). The theoretical

underpinnings of this study include feminist theory; the gendered nature, prevalence, and

perpetration of IBSA (Henry et al., 2017) and its gendered effect in regard to the experiences

and consequences for targeted individuals, were the premise of its inclusion in the research.

Social constructionism is the epistemology that shapes phenomenology and feminist

theory, which captures the influence of sociocultural and political norms inherent to

subjective experience (Liamputtong, 2013). Social constructionism refers to the *social

construction of reality*; "truth" is said to be assembled via social processes and transpire

through human discourse (Merryfeather & Bruce, 2014; Ryle, 2012). Individuals make sense

of the world around them by grouping and organising human experience (Ryle, 2012).

According to social constructionism, individual interpretations of contemporary issues are

constructed on existing cultural attitudes and integrated with society's understandings of

phenomena (Berns, 2001). Thus, conceptualisation changes over time and is informed by

socio-historical context (Hawkes & Scott, 2005; Torgovnick, 1990).

A qualitative research design was used in the form of semi-structured face-to-face interviews that were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. As researchers intend to use qualitative data to encapsulate the subjective lived experience of participants, data collection methods necessitate allowing participants to convey the meanings they attribute to life events (Willig, 2008). With respect to this, the use of semi-structured interviewing and open-ended questions provides flexibility in data collection and allows for unforeseen representations of experience to come to light (Moran, 2000).

Sample

Smith (2004) affirms that an in-depth interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) can only be conducted with relatively small samples, with many studies including between 5-10 participants. When employing interpretative phenomenology, numerous scholars corroborate that 10 participants represent an adequate sample size to cognise phenomena in context (Liamputtong, 2013; Smith, 2011). Thus, I ceased data collection after 10 interviews. Homogenous inclusion criteria required participants to be fluent English speaking female IBSA sufferers, not currently undergoing therapy in relation to the event, and who were over the age of 18 when the incident took place. A time lapse of twelve months since the occurrence of the event was obligatory. Participant demographics are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics.

Participant Number	Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation
1	Amy	19	Caucasian	Heterosexual
2	Brittany	25	Eurasian	Heterosexual
3	Claudia	43	Caucasian	Bi-Sexual
4	Ebony	33	European Australian	Bi-Sexual
5	Finn	19	Caucasian	Bi-Sexual
6	*Katie	27	Caucasian	Heterosexual
7	*Kelly	39	Caucasian	Sexually Diverse
8	Rebecca	65	Caucasian	Bi-Sexual
9	Sarah	29	Caucasian	Heterosexual
10	*Susan	22	Caucasian	Heterosexual

*Participant data excluded from findings

Although the inclusion criteria were clearly stipulated in the information letter and each participant signed the corresponding consent form, nearing the end of the interview when I was collecting demographics, two of the participants could not accurately recall their age at the time the IBSA occurred. Both individuals were uncertain whether they were 17 or 18 years since a significant amount of time had passed. As a result, I ceased the interview, as this indecision compromised adherence to guidelines negotiated with the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Moreover, after completing a third participant's transcription and subsequently examining it in its entirety, I was able to estimate the approximate number of years that was alleged to have lapsed from the participant's current age. This caused me to call into question whether the participant did in fact meet the age criterion. Due to this ambiguity, and in order to ensure adherence to ethical conduct, three of the participants' data were excluded from the project. Thus, data for analysis comprised seven semi-structured in-depth interviews.

According to Malterud, Siersman, and Guassora (2016), small sample sizes suffice for investigations with a narrow aim, such as that of the current study pertaining to the experience and consequences of IBSA. The seven semi-structured interviews that were used exhibited equivalent and consistent themes and subthemes to the original dataset. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) state that having a smaller sample size in interpretative phenomenology allows for increased depth and a superior examination of the similarities and differences in participant narratives.

Materials

The materials of the current study comprised an information letter, a consent form, an interview schedule, a research recruitment flyer, a digital voice recorder, and a notebook. The information letter (appendix A) detailed the study along with a list of support services should participant disclosure of sensitive information trigger discomfort. The information

letter outlined; the inclusion criteria; how potential participants' de-identified information

would be collected, stored, and used; the benefits of being involved in the research; and the

contact details of the ECU Research Ethics Officer, should individuals wish to discuss the

study with an independent person. The consent form (appendix B) explained that participants

would be audio recorded; pseudonyms would be used to de-identify transcripts; de-identified

information may be published in academic literature and used in other research projects; and

participants may be asked to look over a summary of the main themes. The Interview

Schedule (appendix C) included five open-ended questions and was used to guide the semi-

structured interviews. The topic areas discussed in the Interview Schedule were the

individuals experience of IBSA; the context in which the abuse occurred; the perceived

impact; coping mechanisms; experiences of support; and experiencing IBSA as a woman in

contemporary society. The aforementioned schedule was developed by addressing the lack

of qualitative data and scholarly understanding of the experience and outcomes for IBSA

sufferers, and attending to the gendered aspect of IBSA. A question on experiences of

support was produced as it was likely that targeted individuals would face barriers to support

due to victim blaming attitudes. The Interview Schedule included additional probing

questions that intended to elicit depth and expand on previous answers without contaminating

future responses (Babbie, 2015). An example of one of the interview schedule questions is

"tell me about how this event has impacted on your life?" The research recruitment flyers

(Appendix E) provided potential participants with a brief synopsis of the study and the

contact details of the principle researcher. A voice recorder and reflexive journal were used

to document the process.

Data Collection Procedures

After obtaining ethics approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

at Edith Cowan University, data collection took place (see Table in appendix D). Purposive

and chain referral sampling were employed to ensure that participants matched the inclusion

criteria and information pertinent to the study's aims was collected (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

Participants were recruited via numerous forums in an attempt to add to the variability of the

sample. I employed the ECU undergraduate research participation scheme (SONA) to recruit

psychology undergraduate students. Participation afforded these students with credit points

toward the completion of one of their psychology units. Flyers were placed in locations

where women are known to congregate (e.g. university; community boards) and word of

mouth was used to recruit prospective participants. I contacted various human rights

organisations and, if given permission, I had my flyer posted onto their Facebook page. An

article outlining the study was written by one of the community newspapers and I was

interviewed by RTRFM regarding the study. In appreciation, a $15 gift card was given to

participants who were not recruited through SONA (see Table in appendix F).

In each of these recruitment forums, I provided potential participants with a virtual

voicemail number, a brief synopsis of the current study, and participation inclusion criteria.

Women who expressed interest were provided with information on the research, assured of

confidentiality, and told they could withdraw their participation at any stage with no penalty.

Those who were interested in participating were sent an information letter to read and consent

form to sign on the day of the interview. They were advised that the interview was going to

take place in a room at ECU Joondalup, and a meeting time was arranged. For participants

requiring a Skype interview due to living interstate, one was organised at a mutually

convenient time once the consent form was signed and returned. The researcher verified the

signed consent form via Skype just prior to the commencement of the interview.

Upon convening at the assigned meeting place, I reiterated that involvement in the

study was on a voluntary basis and withdrawal could occur at any time. I addressed any

questions the participant had and once the consent form was signed, the interview

commenced. With respect to participants recruited via SONA, I provided the individual with the information letter and consent form on the day the interview was scheduled. I answered any questions after the information letter was perused, and reassured participants of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of the study. After reading and signing the consent form, the interview proceeded.

The duration of interviews ranged from 30 to 102 minutes. The average interview time was 52 minutes. During the interview, gestural cues were noted to assist later data analysis. Each interview was transcribed verbatim for analysis and pseudonyms were used to de-identify the data and maintain confidentiality. I alone had access to any identifying information; all transcripts and interview material were kept in a locked safe at my place of residence. De-identified interview transcripts were kept on a USB and my computer was password protected. The consent forms were scanned directly after the interview took place and uploaded to a USB which was also stored in the safe. The original documents were subsequently destroyed to assist with confidentiality. Interview audio recordings were erased upon completion of the research.

Data Analysis

Smith and Osborn (2008) state that IPA is particularly appropriate for under researched subject matter or where the issues under investigation are complex or indistinct. In this regard, IPA as a double hermeneutic, which balances emic and etic positions was a suitable analytic approach (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA is "idiographic, inductive (and) interrogative" in nature (Smith, 2004, p. 41). IPA involves the researcher and participant co-creating meanings of the participant's lived experience (Shaw, 2010). Thus, IPA is a co-analytic technique that encompasses interpreting the findings along with the interaction between investigator and participant concurrently (Shaw, 2010). Focusing on the main research question, What is the lived experience and perceived

consequences of IBSA for women?; I interpreted each interview transcript along with any accompanying notes in order to identify emerging themes (Smith, 2004). I employed partial data analysis, prior to the commencement of subsequent interviews, due to time restraints and accommodating for SONA booking schedules. After data analysis was completed, I employed cross-case analysis and interrogated emergent themes for convergence and discrepancies (Smith, 2004).

Each transcript was read over multiple times. Notes were taken, which highlighted specific elements, and any thoughts and prejudices were diarised. Preliminary codes were generated for noteworthy aspects of the data. These preliminary descriptors were organised into themes and compared with the complete data-set. The themes were clustered into groups or principal themes, which are discussed in the findings with illustrative participants' quotes (Smith, 2004). Data analysis was conducted in a flexible manner; as novel themes emerged, previous steps were repeated.

Rigor

Triangulation

Triangulation aims to enhance rigor by examining the data from three vantage points (Smith, 1996). I triangulated interpretations of the data through the use of member checking and cross-referencing emerging themes of de-identified transcripts with a supervisor (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). In regards to member checking, three members of the sample were chosen to peruse a summary of the specified themes. Each participant concurred that the themes I identified were representative of their views. Two of the transcripts were subsequently examined by my supervisor and the same reoccurring themes were identified.

Variability of the Data

Recruiting participants from a wider array of sources and using platforms such as broadcasting and social media that have the ability to reach a large proportion of the

community aimed to increase the variability of the demographic sample. As outlined in

Table 1, participant diversity in relation to age, culture, sexual orientation, and background,

served to enrich the data and provide differing perspectives and contrasting

phenomenological experiences (Wertz, 2005). This enabled difference to be obtained in a

relatively small sample size (Patton, 2002).

Reflexivity

Phenomenology posits that if participants' acts of consciousness are to be discerned,

the researcher needs to meticulously describe those experiences, whilst using reduction to

avoid the investigator's misunderstandings from contaminating this process (Moran, 2000).

Reduction includes embracing curiosity and suspending judgment, at the same time as

bracketing one's own assumptions in an endeavour to attend to the present (Schostak, 2006).

The use of bracketing helps to avoid any interpretive distortions by suspending the

researcher's biases, beliefs, and presuppositions (Pollio et al., 1997). In order to avoid

imposing the researcher's meanings onto the findings, the investigator maintains awareness

of her or his own subjective experience and applies the aforementioned techniques, along

with self-disclosure, throughout the research process (Wertz, et al., 2011). Horizontalising all

information and determining it of equal importance also helps to minimise interference and

facilitate a world-view that permits the researcher to adequately understand the participant's

lived experience (Pollio et al., 1997).

I am an Anglo-Australian woman in my 30's who advocates strongly for human

rights. Considering some of the sample were similar in ethnicity and age-group, maintaining

awareness and employing reduction throughout the data collection and interpretation phases

were paramount to avoid over-identification with the interviewees. To minimise any

potential biases and to provide an audit trail throughout the research process, I kept a journal

over the duration of the study to record any prejudices and/or reactions to the data

(Liamputtong, 2013; Smith, 2011). During the interviews and when analysing the data, it became apparent that there were occasions when I had attempted to elaborate on material that was meaningful to me, however it appeared that this was not meaningful to the participant.

Findings and Interpretations

I aimed to explore the experience and consequences of IBSA for women. As there are a diverse range of practices that encompass IBSA, information regarding participant age at the time the event occurred, how the material was obtained, the relationship between perpetrator and participant, and the various methods of distribution are outlined in a table in appendix G. As shown in the table, the perpetrators of IBSA were identified to be seven males, one female, and numerous unidentified parties. The average age of the participants was 33 years and individuals were between the ages of 18 and 63 when the image-based abuse took place. Perpetrators used both still images and video recordings, and the media was acquired in numerous ways. This included consensually, via sexting coercion, non-consensual surreptitious attainment, and procurement during a rape. The methods of distribution employed ranged from having the explicit media shared to a third party; having it distributed to numerous individuals over a carriage service; and having images disseminated throughout diverse internet forums.

The perpetrators of IBSA were identified as three ex-partners, four partners, and one friend. This corroborates Vitis et al.'s (2017) findings that partners non-consensually release intimate images without any prior conflicts or issues preceding image dissemination. With respect to incidences of sexting coercion, although Drouin et al. (2015) infers that this is a type of IPV, it is noteworthy that participants did not seem to perceive their relationship in this way. Although IBSA occurs in many contexts, there seems to be a gradual shift toward coercive behaviours related to taking and/or sending images in otherwise 'usual and healthy' realtionships. When talking about her experience of sexting coercion, Amy stated *"I had*

been asked before and it was always no, and then (he) *asked again no, no, no…*(he) *kept asking over the course of like, many months"*. Amy explained that she felt like she had to justify her reasons for not sending sexts, and those reasons were not seen as acceptable by her partner.

IPA indicated that the experience of and perceived consequences of IBSA for women are captured in five overarching themes: mental health impacts, perceptions of self, loss of control, mistrust, and experiences of abuse. These themes with their corresponding 13 subthemes are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes of the Experience and Consequences of IBSA for Women

Theme	Sub-Theme
Mental Health Impacts	Development of Depressive Symptoms
	Development of Anxiety Symptoms
	Post-Traumatic Stress Symptomology
Perceptions of Self	Depreciated Self-Worth
	Body Image Issues
	Shame
	Blame
Loss of Control	Loss of Bodily Autonomy
	Lack of Support
Mistrust	Social Isolation
	Expectations of Ulterior Motives
Experiences of Abuse	Types of Abuse
	Interpersonally-Violent Relationships

Mental Health Impacts

Development of depressive symptoms.

A prominent feature surfacing from the narratives related to post distribution was depressive symptomology. This is congruent with prior research (Bates, 2017; Henry et al., 2017). With respect to this, Finn explained, *"at the time, I got like really depressed"*, and Sarah mentioned *"all of these I hate the world feelings came with depression"*. Some participants also expressed feelings of hopelessness and suicidal ideation, which is consistent with previous research (Bates, 2017; Citron & Franks, 2014). Ebony spoke about not being able to get out of bed, saying *"I lose hope"* and Finn declared, *"I kind of just wanted to die"*. Sarah clarified, *"I would run around the river, and I would say about three times I stopped to consider, oh maybe I should just jump off this bridge"*. Brittany exhibited comparable feelings, stating;

> *if I get too much thinking about it, I just don't want to live…I just want to stay in bed, like I am not eating properly, I am not exercising, I am not going out and enjoying the sun, like I am just living a very sad life, just being overwhelmed by it.*

Finn reported self-harming after being subjected to IBSA. She recalled, *"at the time there was one night, that, where I was really really down, and I like, cut my wrists a bit"*. To the best of my knowledge self-harming behaviours are a new finding in relation to IBSA. According to Klonsky and Muehlenkamp (2007), self-injury is often performed in order to momentarily relieve negative emotionality, serve as an expression of self-disgust or self-directed anger, to assist in deterring suicidal thoughts, and to aid in help-seeking.

An additional consequence of IBSA is the potentiality for individuals to turn to substances to cope with the resulting challenges. In relation to this, Sarah stated, *"I began drinking very heavily…I had just, derailed my life…I just sort of drank to numb that feeling"*. This finding deviates from Patrick, Heywood, Pitts, and Mitchell's (2015) finding where substance abuse prevalence rates were associated with IBSA perpetration. In Patrick et al.'s study, adolescents who disseminated sexually explicit texts were more likely to be using drugs or alcohol compared with peers. However, my findings reveal that IBSA sufferers may

be vulnerable to substance abuse in order to to cope with the associated repercussions. Moreover, depressive symptomology, suicidal ideation, and substance abuse are impacts that are congruent with sexual abuse literature (Bayatpour, Wells, & Holford, 1992). Furthermore, literature has correlated an increased risk of substance abuse with mental health diagnoses of anxiety, PTSD as well as depression (Davis, Uezato, Neweel, & Frasier, 2018; Grant et al., 2004; Mills, 2006). An interested reader can refer to Ougrin, Tranah, Syahl, Moran, & Asarnow, (2015) and Harris and Barraclough (1997) for information pertaining to suicide, substance use, and mental health disorders.

Development of anxiety symptoms.

In accord with the literature, as illustrated by Bates (2017), in interpreting the findings I identified that anxiety was a salient theme. Pertaining to this, Finn stated, *"I got like, bad anxiety, yeah, and just like social anxiety"*. In addition, Sarah declared she was *"very anxietised quite often"* and Claudia mentioned, *"well I was just super sensitive, anxious"*. Ebony spoke about employing coping mechanisms to help manage her anxiety and how this continues to impact on her life, asserting, *"I channelled my anxiety into overworking, so I will push myself to the point of collapse"*. Experiences of anxiety were incited by IBSA in some cases, whereas anxiety was pre-existing and exacerbated by IBSA for others.

Consistent with prior findings (Bates, 2017; McGlynn & Rackley, 2017), some individuals in the current study also developed panic attacks. Finn pronounced;

> *I feel really trapped in like, where I am... I started getting anxiety attacks like when I would think about it, or when I would see people out...like everyone's judging you and it felt like the whole room was like closing in on me, and it would feel like I was suffocating kind of, and I would just get real shaky...*

In contrast, when asked whether the event had impacted on Rebecca's mental health, she replied, *"no, I don't believe so"*. Although she stated that IBSA had made an impact and she would not be able to forget it, Rebecca did not seem to experience extensive repercussions

due to the event. This is potentially due to the fact that her photo was shared by her partner to one of his friends and she was able to prevent wider propagation of her images. Thus, Rebecca did not face the same accumulative harms compared with other participants.

Fear was a prominent theme arising from participant narratives, which was congruent with previous research (Henry et al., 2017; McGlynn & Rackley, 2017). Brittany explained, *"I just had this fear of, you know, like my face and my body is out there, without my permission...this needs to be taken down, like these are my personal details, and are exposing me for something I am not"*. Fear of re-victimisation was another facet of concern. In this regard, Finn expressed;

> *I was like, worried that a guy would be a bit crazy, and see them, and use that as a reason to like stalk me, or rape me, or something like that...so there was definitely a period where I was scared to like walk around at night on my own, or like go anywhere on my own...but yeah I was worried that someone was going to start stalking me, or already was...*

Stalking literature emphasises that amplified levels of fear are correlated with an increased likelihood of experiencing negative mental health effects (Sheridan & Lyndon, 2012). Furthermore, Finn's statement highlights that she was living in fear of possibly having someone stalking her as she had no idea to whom her images were disseminated. Therefore, she felt she was in imminent danger. It seems that those subjected to IBSA may experience elevated levels of fear due to the threat of experiencing re-victimisation at the hands of potentially numerous unidentified persons. As the degree of fear induced by stalking behaviours is directly correlated with adverse health outcomes, it is reasonable to surmise that the level of fear felt by individuals who have been subjected to IBSA, may be an indicator of the extent that one's wellbeing will be adversely impacted. Moreover, the accumulative harms associated with IBSA deviates from the experience of sexual assault victims as reflected in the literature (Pereda, et al., 2009).

Post-traumatic stress symptomology.

Participants in the current study indicated that they experienced post-traumatic stress symptoms, which is consistent with prior research (Bates, 2017). Although it is not clear whether Finn was formally diagnosed with PTSD, she declared *"I felt a little bit like PTSD afterwards"*. Trauma memories include re-experiencing symptoms where individuals can encounter intrusive memories in relation to the traumatic event (Ehlers, Hackmann, & Michael, 2004; Ozer, Best, Lipsey, & Weiss, 2003). With respect to this, Finn spoke about the occurrence of intrusive and repetitive thoughts referring to what people were thinking or saying about her. Moreover, Brittany eluded to symptoms that could possibly be related to PTSD, expressing *"then, the memory of everything, and the memory of how I was feeling back then, like comes back, and it feels as if it's happening all over again"*. Thus, like Bates (2017) asserted, it seems that for some individuals, living through IBSA may be consistent with experiencing a sexual trauma.

Numerous scholars purport that individuals who have suffered a sexual trauma have an increased risk of being subjected to subsequent sexual victimisation (Collins, 1998; Santos-Iglesias & Sierra, 2012; Wisdom, Czaja, & Dutton, 2008). Furthermore, Cloitre, et al. (2009) infer that prolonged, recurring, or multiple traumatic events, particularly when experienced throughout childhood, might give rise to complex PTSD. Ebony revealed that she had experienced childhood sexual abuse prior to IBSA as well as extensive re-victimisation and poly-victimisation well into adulthood. She pronounced *"looking back on it now, I was in PTSD mode…that's something I have had my entire life"*.

Re-victimisation was equally found to have occurred subsequent to the non-consensual distribution of images; this is a new finding for IBSA. Claudia revealed that she was subjected to sexual assault by the person who received her video, stating, *"he went for a grope of my butt"*. Furthermore, Sarah spoke about being in dangerous situations where people could *"take advantage of her"*. Although reluctant to talk about these experiences in

any detail, when asked whether this had led her to be in situations where she either felt, or was, sexually unsafe with men, Sarah replied *"yes…that was the one thing I didn't want to happen, cos I was so distraught after what had* (already) *happened"*. Sarah revealed that these sexually unsafe incidences occurred when she was intoxicated, and she also stated that they transpired outside of the context of IBSA. In other words, her re-victimisation experiences did not transpire because the men she was with were aware of her IBSA victimisation. This indicates that IBSA suffers may be sexually vulnerable.

Testa and Livingston (2009) refer to heavy sporadic drinking episodes as being a proximal risk factor to sexual victimisation. In contrast, there is evidence that sexual self-esteem is a possible mediator of sexual re-victimisation (Van Bruggen, Runtz, & Kadlec, 2006). Although it may seem that Sarah's drinking may have been a risk factor for her experiences of re-victimisation, it would be premature to assume that this was the only contributing factor. With respect to this, Sarah explained that during the time she found herself in situations where she felt sexually unsafe with men, she *"just didn't value"* herself. Although Sarah was vague in her explanation of this and was apprehensive to clarify this comment, it seemed that Sarah indicated she was potentially promiscuous during this time. Patten (1981) purport that self-concept and low self-esteem has an impact on promiscuity.

Although numerous scholars state that there is an increased risk of re-victimisation for women experiencing IBSA in the form of harassment, cyberstalking, stalking, physical, and sexual assault (Bloom, 2014; D'Amico & Steinberger, 2015; Kitchen, 2015; Mesch, 2012), these incidences are situated within the context of IBSA specifically, and often as a result of online postings (D'Amico & Steinberger, 2015). In other words, an individual who has had their sexual images posted up on websites along with their address and contact details, are more likely to be accosted and sexually assaulted by someone who has seen this image, compared with an individual who has not experienced IBSA. Considering that one of the

participants in the current study described experiencing sexual victimisation subsequent to her exposure to IBSA and not as a direct result of this, my findings deviate from prior research (D'Amico & Steinberger) and indicate that IBSA may produce a vulnerability to sexual re-victimisation for targeted individuals. This provides further preliminary evidence supporting the notion that the effects of IBSA may be comparable to sexual assault (Bates, 2017; Henry et al., 2017). An interested reader can consult Lurie, Boaz, and Golan (2013) and Mayers, Heller, and Heller (2003) for literature on sexual self-esteem, sexual assault, and re-victimisation.

Perceptions of Self

Depreciating self-worth.

Consistent with Bates' (2017) findings, participants described experiencing depreciated self-worth or a sense of worthlessness. Sarah mentioned that she felt like the event *"defined"* her for a long while, articulating, *"I was like, well, I am damaged goods"*. She also recounted *"I had felt like I lost all of my self-worth"*. Moreover, Finn expressed *"(I) had a lot of self-depreciating* (thoughts)*...it definitely completely shattered my confidence for a decent while"*. When referring to one of the key influential factors pertaining to her self-depreciation, Amy articulated that the dissemination of her images made her look as if she was *"sleeping around"*. Brittany highlighted the propensity for her sense of worth to permeate her self-talk; referring to study achievements, she said *"you know, do I deserve to get good marks? And then suddenly it will be like, you know what else I did deserve is, I did deserve this to have happen to me* (referring to the IBSA)*"*.

It seems that some participants were internalising objectifying experiences (Symanski and Henning, 2006) and I believe this to be a new finding in relation to IBSA within academic literature. Finn disclosed that she would ruminate on what others were saying about her and how people were *"dissecting images of her"*. She referred to the fact that her

male friends *"lost respect"* for her and her relationship with them changed from being a friend to *"being a sexual object in their eyes"*. Finn stated, *"the assumption was, immediately, that I was like easy, and the attitude toward me was, like, a lot more sleazy"*. When speaking about the person who viewed her sexual video, Claudia affirmed, *"I was interpreting through his lens"*. Thus, Claudia saw herself as an object. When Rebecca spoke about being seen as a sexual object by her partner, she shared *"I was just a piece of porn in a picture"*. Referring to being called derogatory names by peers, Amy stated *"it's hard not to believe things you're labelled as, when you get labelled them so frequently"*. Additionally, some participants indicated that post distribution they began engaging in unwanted sexual intercourse as this was what was expected of them. Thus, being sexually objectified by both female and male peers may generate self-objectification in some IBSA sufferers.

Sarah revealed *"I felt like I lost…who I was, and it kind of destroyed that sense of me, who I was"*. In a similar vein, Claudia stated, *"I started to feel like oh, you know, what are my values…where do I stand…what is acceptable and unacceptable…I did start to really question stuff about myself"*. It is possible that an increased evaluation of self through the lens of others generated a shift toward heightened external self-awareness resulting in a period of diminished internal self-regard for some participants. Furthermore, it seems that experiences of sexual objectification and self-objectification may be contributing to sufferers re-evaluating themselves and potentially leading to a change in self-concept. Although this is to the best of my knowledge a new finding in relation to IBSA, Lee (1994) surmises that in patriarchal societies, females may encounter feelings of fear, shame, and self-disgust as they become increasingly cognisant of being seen as sexual objects. Additionally, this sexual objectification can give rise to self-objectification (Davidson & Gervais 2015), which can consequently impact upon body esteem issues.

Body image issues.

Participants' accounts revealed that it was common for some who had their sexual images distributed to have their body ridiculed by female peers. When speaking about girls who were reposting her images on private Instagram accounts, Finn divulged that they were posting comments which were *"pointing out everything that was wrong with my body"*. Due to being mocked and treated with contempt post distribution, body dissatisfaction became a prominent issue for many participants. Finn stated that subsequent to the image distribution she hated herself, and clarified, *"a part of it was like, I wish I could change this, and this, about my body. Or, I hated that, and I got a lot of body confidence issues"*.

Consistent with Citron and Franks' (2014) assertion that problematic eating was associated with experiences of online harassment for IBSA sufferers, some participants showed significant changes in eating patterns following the dissemination of their images. Amy stated *"I struggled with eating for a very long time, because people were like, 'you're fat'"*. Although participants revealed they became more body conscious and struggled with eating post distribution, it is unclear whether this was only associated with online harassment. For example, Sarah made reference to her anxiety, stating *"I was feeling so anxious and stressed out with the whole situation, and feeling so worthless, that I just didn't want to eat"*.

Schechter, Schwartz, and Greenfeld (1989) infer that experiencing sexual humiliation can invoke a loss of control and some sexual assault victims attempt to regain a sense of control by controlling their bodies. Moreover, scholars affirm that self-objectification has a direct relationship with restrictive eating behaviours (Calogero, Davis, & Thompson, 2005; Muehlenkamp & Saris-Baglama, 2002). According to participants' narratives, IBSA sufferers may have an increased risk of developing problematic eating patterns.

Distorted body image was a concern for some. Finn spoke about developing a distorted body image after ruminating on peers' derogatory comments. She explained;

> *I started getting a bit of body dysmorphia, like I would look at an image, and like I know at the time I thought oh that's cool, I look great, I look hot, and then after it all happened I was looking at it and everything was like wrong with it, like this parts the wrong size, like I look so gross, and I would look in the mirror, and I would start changing.*

Although I believe there has been no research conducted on IBSA and its impact on body image disturbance or body dysmorphia to date, numerous studies suggest that verbal, emotional, and sexual abuse are correlated with its development (Neziroglu, Khemlani-Patel, & Yaryura-Tobias, 2006). An interested reader can refer to Didie et al. (2006) and Schaefer and Thompson, (2018) for more information.

Shame.

Previous research suggests that individuals who have experienced IBSA can often experience shame and humiliation (Bates, 2017; Citron & Franks, 2014). Consistent with this proclamation, numerous participants spoke about feeling ashamed. Claudia expressed she had *"a touch of shame"* and Brittany said;

> *You just feel kind of icky and dirty, because it feels as if, even though I didn't do it on purpose, it's out there and I have done it, and it just sort of makes you feel a little bit more ashamed.*

Sarah said that she felt *"quite ashamed"*, also indicating that she felt humiliated by the experience of having her images shared without her knowledge, saying, *"like I just couldn't believe everybody on that crew knew what I looked like physically naked. That everyone had seen things that I thought was intimate, but also the fact that…it was a big joke. I was devastated"*. Citron and Franks (2014) infer that individuals often internalise socially imposed shame and humiliation each time they see others who have viewed their sexual images and when they imagine others are viewing the images. Furthermore, Amy explained *"it felt like everybody in the whole world had seen it"*. Thus, it seems that individuals may be constantly reminded as part of their interpersonal interactions engendering continual feelings of humiliation and shame.

When considering her feelings of shame, Sarah indicated that some of those feelings were linked with her belief that she would be blamed by her family. This finding is in accordance with Grobbelaar and Guggisberg's (2018) conjecture that victim blaming exacerbates harm to victims and compounds self-blame. In contrast, Amy spoke about feeling *"embarrassed"*, rather than ashamed. Tangney, Mashek, and Stuewig (2005) affirm that compared to shame, embarrassment follows more unanticipated events wherein the individual feels less responsible. It is unclear whether attending therapy or alternative influential factors have assisted Amy to attribute embarrassment, as opposed to shame, when reflecting on her experience of IBSA.

Blame.

In accord with prior research (Vitis et al., 2017), numerous participants held themselves at least somewhat accountable for the IBSA event, with some participants believing they were solely responsible. Rebecca declared, *"maybe I was a bit dumb"* and Sarah mentioned, *"for a long time I felt it was my fault"*. When talking about IBSA being self-inflicted pain, Finn declared, *"I guess it is to a certain extent, because no one made me send it"*. It is interesting to note that Finn's images were non-consensually retained through the use of a phone application that *"screen records"*. Thus, her Snapchat images that were expected to disappear shortly after being sent were intentionally collected, and distributed, without her consent. Although sexting or consensual photo acquisition never means the victim is partially responsible for IBSA, the fact that individuals are blaming themselves when their images are acquired without consent, is noteworthy. As previously mentioned, considering that victim blaming exacerbates self-blame for the victimised individual (Grobbelaar & Guggisberg, 2018), it is possible that these feelings of blame are influenced by prevalent victim blaming societal attitudes. Furthermore, Miller, Markman, and Handley

(2007) explicate that sexual assault victims who blame themselves are significantly more likely to be re-victimised.

Various participants were subjected to victim blaming by numerous community members. Sarah had been *"lied"* and *"manipulated"* into thinking she was in a monogamous relationship with a man who was married and chose to non-consensually take images of her when she was asleep. He then disseminated them to 30 of their work colleagues in a group chat over the course of a few months. Both Sarah's family and the wider community blamed her for ruining his marriage when Sarah and his wife found out about his infidelity. With respect to this, members of Sarah's town greet her with *"hey home-wrecker"*.

Finn recounted that some of her friends said *"that's so slutty, why would you do that"*. Both Finn and Amy said that most girls they knew shared intimate photos, however, only non-consensually disseminated images instigated harassment and abuse. Amy stated that many girls had their sexual images shared without consent, however those images did not include their faces or genitalia, and due to this fact, *"a lot of the bullying wasn't as bad"*. Referring to sexting, Amy relayed *"I mean it is something that you know you shouldn't be doing...I feel dumb about it...I knew better"*. Amy also mentioned that her school held *"girl talks"* where they were warned about sexting and told *"be careful, don't do this"*. It seemed that this influenced Amy's experience of victim blaming attitudes by school friends. Referring to being told not to sext at a school assembly, she recounted, *"we all heard it, so if everyone heard it then why did you do it"*.

This finding is corroborated by Henry and Powell (2015b), who purport that institutionalised harm can arise for IBSA sufferers when institutional responses lag behind advances in technology and the issues that evolve. It is unclear whether boys in school settings are being spoken to about sexting, and if so, if there are gender differences in this regard. However, it seems that school staff may require education regarding appropriate

responses to sexting and image dissemination. As well as the need to provide timely, appropriate support for sufferers, it may be advantageous for institutions to focus their e-safety procedures on sexting coercion, non-consensual image acquisition (e.g. via screen recording), and the non-consensual distribution of images as problematic behaviours, rather than sexting, which is common sexual engagement practice.

Loss of Control

Loss of bodily autonomy.

Consistent with previous research (Bates, 2017; Citron & Franks, 2014; McGlynn & Rackley, 2017), analysis of participants' accounts identified that they experienced a loss of control. Furthermore, in accord with prior research (McGlynn, Rackley, & Houghton, 2017), participants' dignity as well as sexual and bodily autonomy were compromised. Amy revealed, *"people were seeing me in ways I didn't want to be seen"* and when speaking about the experience of violation related to IBSA, Finn declared, *"half of it was just feeling super-violated that everyone was looking at me…you feel slimy…you feel like, dirty…no, I don't want you to look at my body"*. She further affirmed;

> *there are so many things that I cannot change, or control, at all, and those are the things you think about the most. I mean, you can't remove it from the internet, <u>at all</u>. You can't track down every person who has seen it and explain the situation…It's like entirely possible that they have been put on a porn website somewhere…I have no control over that and I have no idea if that has happened…*

Participants highlighted that they did not know exactly who had seen the images or to whom they were sent or posted to. This appeared to contribute to participants' levels of distress with Claudia stating, *"he could have shown it to more people, I don't know"*. Similarly, Rebecca specified, *"I don't know how many other people he sent them to, you know, you have no control over these sorts of things"*.

Lack of support.

In contrast to previous research (Bates, 2017), narratives arising from the current study revealed that the nature of IBSA left participants' feeling misunderstood, unsupported, and without a voice. In turn, this seems to have impacted on participants' ability to access adequate supports. When referring to her school friends, Amy stated *"I don't think they understood and they weren't very supportive"*. Furthermore, when speaking about not feeling understood, Brittany shared;

> (I am) *in a lonely and dark world and you sort of feel like, unless the exact situation happened to someone else, like no one could understand what I was going through, no matter how much I explained to them, or how much detail I went into...*

Sarah confirmed, *"I didn't really have that much support"*, further describing, *"I felt like I couldn't tell my mum or dad, or anyone really, because I knew that my parents would probably not speak to me, would be ashamed of me, and the shame I have brought on the family"*. Rebecca acknowledged I was the first person she had spoken to about the event as she felt her friends were not open to the idea of sexting, while Finn mentioned, *"I have only spoken to that one mate, cos it's not something you want to talk to people about"*. When talking about her school's response when her ex-boyfriend and an old female school friend disseminated her images to peers, Amy explained;

> *I feel like school should have been more supportive, they should have done something more…I left and he still was there, and he was fine…they knew...and no one came up to me and asked if I was alright…they didn't really address it.*

In contrast to feeling unsupported and consistent with Bates' (2017) findings, Claudia mentioned that she received sufficient support and understanding from some of her friends, stating *"(it) really helped"*. It may be that Claudia's perception of receiving adequate support was due to the fact that her partner had showed one friend the video and to her knowledge, the circulation discontinued at that point. Hence, Claudia did not face the same accumulative harms associated with wider dissemination.

It is also possible that shame and fear of blame may have acted as a deterrent for some participants in seeking support from law enforcement officers. As Sarah lived in a town at the time of the event, she explained *"had I gone to the police, everyone would have known about it"*. Similarly, Brittany considered going to the police, however decided her and effort would have been futile, expressing *"well, what benefit can you get from reporting this"*.

Although participants in the current study seemed grateful of the assistance they did receive from friends or family, most of them faced significant barriers to accessing supports post distribution. In this regard, a lack of positive social support as well as negative social interactions (such as victim blaming) subsequent to experiences of abuse, are correlated with an increased risk of incurring further harm, such as secondary victimisation (additional trauma resulting from the attitudes, behaviours, and practices of service providers) (Davis, Brickman, & Baker, 1991; Ullman, 1996; 1999).

Mistrust

As identified by Bates (2017), trust was a significant issue for participants in the current study. Rebecca acknowledged, *"I don't trust as much"* and Finn stated, *"it was such a violation of my trust…I have definitely got like so many more trust issues now"*. Likewise, Sarah declared the event *"made me a very untrusting, closed off sort of person…you can't trust anyone"*. Mistrust seemed to impact participants in various ways.

Social isolation.

Becoming socially isolated post IBSA is consistent with Kamal and Newman's (2016) findings. Social isolation seems to have impacted upon participants' ability to access support networks and contributed to feelings of loneliness. When speaking about her life becoming *"de-railed"* Sarah stated *"I was very isolated"*. In addition, some individuals lost friendships because of IBSA with Finn declaring, *"I lost a couple of friends, like girls"*. Brittany and Amy stopped spending time with their group of friends post distribution. Brittany explained,

"I don't put in any effort to catch up with them, because of that" and Amy confirmed, *"I'm just not friends with those people anymore…it was easier for me to move past once I…deleted them from Facebook, removed them"*.

Considering the nature of some of the participants' male friendships changed after the event, it seems that this also resulted in a loss of friendships. When talking about her male friends, Finn stated, *"I trusted that they were like, all nice people, and like my friends, but a lot of them weren't…cos I thought they were genuinely interested in me as a person, but no, they just wanted to get into my pants"*. She added that these had become *"toxic"* relationships. Moreover, consistent with previous findings (Woodlock, 2017), some of the participants in the current study resorted to relocating residence or schools. When referring to Sarah's hometown, she stated *"I ended up leaving"*. Amy affirmed with tears in her eyes, *"well, I moved schools…I finished year 12 somewhere else, and I repeated somewhere else, cos it was pretty devastating"*.

In addition, it seems that arising trust issues meant that some individuals found it difficult to engage in new friendships and sexual relationships. To the best of my knowledge this is a novel finding with respect to IBSA. Brittany revealed that after her ex-boyfriend posted her images along with a fake profile soliciting sex on websites across the country, her trust was *"completely broken"*. Due to this, she has trust issues going into new relationships and she *"stopped dating for a very long time"*. In regards to friendships, Ebony shared *"I find it really difficult to make friends…I don't have a lot…and I have never really had long term friends…it gets really lonely and isolating"*. She elaborated on this, stating, *"like, I am terrified of any relationship, whether it is a family member, or a new friend, or a colleague, or an intimate partner"*. Finn also expressed, *"(I) just don't hang out with other people"*. When discussing her mistrust and isolation, Brittany reveals *"like I could have built a*

fortress and nothing could have got in...then I start feeling lonely". Sarah explained that she

felt heightened anxiety at the prospect of meeting and trusting new people.

Expectation of ulterior motives.

An interpersonal challenge not expressed in the literature to date is that some

participants believed people were ingenuine and had a hidden motive or agenda. With

respect to this, Sarah explains, *"(I was) thinking that everyone had hidden motives, and a*

reason they were using me. You know it wasn't that they wanted to spend time with me".

This was further distinguished by Brittany;

> *now I find myself always second guessing what they are saying or how they are trying*
> *to display themselves...are they doing that because they just want something from*
> *me? So, I can't just see that they are doing good for the sake of them just being a*
> *good person, it's always like, yeah, there's an agenda behind it.*

According to Taylor, Funk, and Clark (2007), social trust is characterised by having a belief

in the sincerity, integrity, and dependability of others. Levels of interpersonal trust are

influenced by life experiences and those who have experienced trauma or had their trust

broken can experience increasing distrust overtime (Delhey & Newton, 2003). With respect

to this, Sarah explained;

> *I became very tainted in general. Fuck the world, fuck everyone. Everyone's just in it*
> *for themselves...in contrast to before, when I was very loving, and giving, and selfless*
> *person. That's what it changed me into...I'm not the same...*

Considering some participants indicated that they were not mistrustful prior to IBSA, it seems

that some individuals may have had their social trust altered. For further information on

interpersonal trust, see Lewicki, Tomlinson, and Gillespie (2006) and Mitchell (1990).

Experiences of Abuse

Types of abuse.

Being shamed, blamed, criticised, and subjected to verbal assault after their images

were disseminated were some of the verbal and emotional abuse experiences described by

participants. These findings are congruent with Citron and Franks' (2014) inference that

IBSA sufferers may experience offline abuse. This seemed to have a detrimental impact on participants' self-esteem. Amy recounted peers saying *"you're a slut"* and *"you're a whore"*. She also explained that she was repeatedly told that she was not sexually desirable as peers had *"seen it* (all) *anyway"*. Due to this, for a period of time, Amy believed she was not going to be in another relationship. In addition, participants were also exposed to cyber-harassment, which can amplify ramifications (Li, 2005; Mesch, 2012); for example, one of Finn's peers fabricated a fake Facebook profile in order to repost her sexual images alongside derogatory comments. She explained, *"I was deleting the comments while they were coming up, but they were still there"*.

In accord with the literature, sexual harassment was a significant concern for participants (McGlynn & Rackley, 2017). Brittany experienced sexual harassment after her images were posted as personal sex adverts. She explained *"it was like call me for some like sex service, or like really cheap blow and go's, so he put like, really cheap prices on there so that I would get a lot of people calling up* (for sex)*"*. Likewise, Finn received frequent unwelcomed sexual advances from men. She stated, *"then I started getting a <u>whole</u> lot of random people adding me* (on social media) *and just sending me like unsolicited dick pics"*.

Interpersonally-violent relationships.

As has been suggested by numerous sources, IBSA was found to have occurred in the context of IPV relationships (Drouin et al., 2015; Grobbelaar & Guggisberg, 2018; Henry & Powell, 2016a; McGlynn et al., 2017). Ebony was involved in multiple domestic violence relationships where her partners forced her to engage in often sadistic and masochistic sex acts where she would be filmed or have images taken of her. Ebony revealed that along with her partners distributing and posting images through carrier services or on websites and social media, some of these sexual acts occurred at Swingers' parties where onlookers would take

footage without her consent, likewise, posting them on the internet. When referring to her

partner at the time she explicated;

> *he would use my career* (in the creative industries) *as a reason to push the boundaries…he was extra good at gaslighting and leading you down a path…it was definitely abuse. It took me many years to see that the problem was with him and not me. He had me thinking I was defective…*

Moreover, when referring to navigating interpersonal relationships, Ebony explained, *"I*

don't have any solid faith in my ability to manage that in a way that is safe for me". Along

with other relationships, Ebony was referring to an ex-partner who filmed her while he raped

her and then subsequently distributed the material without consent.

Chiroro et al. (2004) propose that a significant proportion of men are aroused by

sexual domination, and thus, are motivated to exert power in sexual contexts. In this regard,

it is reasonable to surmise that individuals who post photos online with intent to shame and

humiliate, may enjoy the sense of power they have over another. Furthermore, the

distribution of a sexual assault may serve to amplify the humiliation of the victim and act as

an extension of the domination, power, and potential hatred experienced by the perpetrator, as

seemed to be the case with Ebony. With respect to experiencing IBSA within the context of

IPV, one of the participants voiced that she entered a domestically abusive relationship

subsequent to IBSA. She stated he was physically, emotionally, and sexually abusive, and

that she had not had any issues with interpersonally-violent relationships prior to IBSA. In

this regard, my findings reveal that IBSA may be a precursor to entering interpersonally-

violent relationships and an antecedent to domestic violence vulnerability.

Conclusions

The current study employed an in-depth qualitative exploration to answer the

question: What is the lived experience and perceived consequences of IBSA for women? It

was largely found that the experience of IBSA can be profoundly negative and bear

significant and severe consequences for women. It was suggested in my findings that IBSA

sufferers experience eating and body dysmorphic issues as an antecedent to self-

objectification; engage self-injury and substance abuse to cope with the negative

repercussions; experience wide-ranging mental health effects; re-victimisation; poly-

victimisation; and other various forms of abuse, post image distribution.

Potential Clinical Implications

The occurrence of trauma symptoms and related consequences experienced by IBSA

sufferers in the current study suggests that individuals may benefit from a trauma-informed

therapeutic approach. Considering some individuals had been exposed to poly-victimisation,

extensive sexual re-victimisation, and subsequently, exhibited more complex trauma

symptom presentation, clinicians can benefit from the knowledge that IBSA sufferers may

develop complex PTSD as distinct from post-traumatic stress (Cloitre et al., 2005; Cloitre et

al., 2009). Additionally, clinicians may gain from being cognisant of themes that are

consistent with inter-relational disturbances and/or domestic violence vulnerability as

suggested by my findings.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Within the trustworthiness framework, the current study demonstrated credibility

through the use of member checking and triangulation; the homogenous varied sample

facilitated robust data and transferability of results, and this applicability was also

demonstrated through thick description, in-depth interviewing; confirmability was

strengthened through the use of audit trails and reflexivity; and the value of the current study

along with representing all interpreted realities of the participants' experiencing enhances

authenticity (Billups, 2014).

Narrative Analysis (NA) takes into account social contexts and would have also been

an appropriate epistemology to use. The scope of the current study has meant that other

important aspects of the participants' experiences, such as how they re-adjusted to life post-distribution, were not explored. With respect to participants whose images were non-consensually acquired, it was difficult to differentiate between the impacts associated with the distribution of the material, in contrast to how it was obtained. As the participants in the study were self-selected, individuals may have had an increased ability to be able to discuss the consequences of IBSA. They also might be more likely to have previously engaged in therapeutic services, which may have influenced the current study's findings.

Directions for Future Research

The first area of interest with respect to directions for future research include replication of the current study followed by a development of quantitative validation of findings with large representative samples of women who were subjected to IBSA. Secondly, encompassing the experience of IBSA for all genders. Thirdly, exploring the relationship between past and present experiences of victimisation would assist scholars in better understanding the nature of IBSA. A fourth area of interest entails obtaining additional details regarding the circumstances surrounding image distribution for sufferers. This would provide more thorough information on the distributors' gender and subsequent motivations. For instance, when reviewing participants' narratives, females seemed to be more likely to disseminate images in order to humiliate and degrade, whereas males seemed to be more inclined to distribute images to demonstrate their sexual prowess. As Drouin et al. (2015) purport, sexting coercion is correlated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and generalised trauma. Therefore, another important endeavour would be investigating the impact of the various methods of sexual image acquisition. This would assist scholars and clinicians in distinguishing between any associative harms. Another area of consideration would be measuring IBSA sufferers' levels of fear post distribution and studying if fear levels

have a significant impact upon symptom severity. This may contribute to the body of knowledge and assist in understanding any gender differences in this regard.

Within the interpersonal domain, exploring the relationship between IBSA and attachment may contribute to valuable information regarding the attachment styles of both sufferers and perpetrators. This may shed more light on the motivations for perpetration. In addition, it would be advantageous to explore the relationship between body dysmorphia, eating issues, and IBSA. It may be expedient for future studies to differentiate between participants who have previously engaged in psychological services regarding the event. Furthermore, assessing the efficacy of the various therapeutic modalities relative to IBSA is another important endeavour. As there is a paucity of research in regard to the consequences of self-objectification (Calogero, 2011), further research into this subject matter and exploring the relationship between experiences of sexual objectification, self-objectification, and IBSA, is another pertinent area of examination. As it is unclear whether participants' apparent change in self-concept in the current study is related to self-objectification or alternative influential factors, further research on this topic would contribute to the body of knowledge. As there is a dearth of research on sexual re-victimisation, subsequent to adult sexual assault, this is another essential research endeavour in the context of IBSA.

In conclusion, IBSA is a complex and multifaceted social issue that is informed by sociocultural norms and practices. IBSA occurs in innumerable contexts and has diverse psychosocial implications for sufferers. As there is a paucity of research on this phenomenon, the current study identified numerous previously unexplored consequences of IBSA: self-objectification; body dysmorphic issues; problematic eating; self-injury; specific interpersonal disturbances; sexual re-victimisation experiences; and potential domestic violence vulnerability. These themes, along with experiences of post-traumatic stress, are

consistent with the notion that IBSA and the associated repercussions are comparable to

sexual assault. Pervasive and institutionalised cultural attitudes concerning victim blaming

appear to contribute to the harms experienced by those subjected to IBSA, and subsequently,

produce significant barriers to the accessibility of adequate supports. In addition to providing

IBSA sufferers with sufficient social and institutional support, which includes efficacious

legal remedies, community based education and prevention based strategies are vital.

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Appendix A: Information Letter

Researcher:	Brienna Webb		ecuresearchproject2018@gmail.com
Supervisors:	Dr Eyal Gringart	08 6304 5631	e.gringart@ecu.edu.au
	Dr Madalena Grobbelaar	08 6304 5902	m.grobbelaar@ecu.edu.au

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Non-consensual Use of Technology: A Qualitative Exploration of Consequences for Women

The current study aims to inform support services and contribute to law reform by exploring the lived experience of women who have had intimate media distributed to third parties without consent. This research has been approved by the ECU HREC and is a requirement of an Honours Post Graduate Degree in Psychology.

Eligible participants are to be female; fluent in English; above the age of 18 when the initial event took place; are not currently engaging in psychological therapy; and at least 12 months has passed since the incident. Any participants who are close friends of the researcher will not be able to participate in the study. Participants are required to sign a consent form to partake in the study. All information is bound by confidentiality. Participation is voluntary and no disadvantage will befall individuals who do not wish to take part. The interview will be conducted over a one hour period at ECU Joondalup during business hours. If this meeting place is problematic, the participant and researcher will decide on a mutually convenient location. During the interview, questions will be asked regarding participants' experiences of image-based sexual abuse. Handwritten notes will be taken and the interview will be audio recorded so it can be transcribed and analysed for recurring themes. Participants may be asked to read over a summary of the themes and the findings may be published in academic literature.

Participants have the right to ask questions, decline to respond to any questions, as well as withdraw consent or participation at any anytime, without consequence, by contacting the researcher directly. If withdrawal from the project occurs, all relevant interview material will be destroyed. Participants can request a summation of the findings at the completion of the project in Nov 2018 by emailing the researcher. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used and all information de-identified. All interview data will be kept in a locked safe at the researcher's place of residence and only the researcher will hold the key. Transcripts will be kept on a USB and the investigator's computer is password protected. Audio recordings will be destroyed after analysis, and de-identified transcripts will be held in a secured location at ECU indefinitely. Signed consent forms will be scanned, put onto a USB, and the originals destroyed after the interview. This USB will be held in a locked cabinet at ECU for the compulsory seven year period, after which the data will be destroyed. The de-identified transcripts may be used in future research projects pertaining to image-based sexual abuse or related topics.

As this study entails the disclosure of sensitive information, we appreciate that this has the potential to cause discomfort/anxiety. The investigator will stay attentive to the participant and if discomfort arises then the researcher will pause the interview, give the individual some time, and do a check-in with how the participant is feeling. If the participant continues to feel discomfort, then the interview will be ceased. A list of support services are enclosed in the event that the participant requires further assistance. The benefits of participating in the study include aiding in professional's gaining a better understanding of how to better assist image-based abuse sufferers. Participating in the research will benefit the wider community by contributing to community based education and awareness, and potentially aid in the criminalisation of image-based abuse in WA.

Participants recruited from the ECU research participation scheme will be given 1 credit point (1% course credit) toward completion of their psychology unit. Participants recruited from any other forum will be presented with a $15 Westfield voucher to thank you for your time. If you would like to speak to the ECU Honours Coordinator, please contact Guillermo Campitelli on 08 6304 5736 or on g.campitelli@ecu.edu.au.

If you have any concerns or complaints about the research project and wish to speak to an independent person, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer at Edith Cowan University:

Phone: (08) 6304 2170   Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au   Address: 270 Joondalup Dve, Joondalup WA 6027

Thank you for taking the time to consider partaking in the current research. Please feel free to refer any potential participants who may wish to take part in this research opportunity. **Please contact the researcher if you would like to participate in the study or have any further questions.**

Lifeline	13 11 14	Beyond Blue	1300 224 636
Crisis Care Helpline	1800 199 008	1800 RESPECT	1800 737 732

Appendix B: Consent Form

Contact Details

Researcher: Brienna Webb

Telephone: (08) ██████

Email: ecuresearchproject2018@gmail.com

Supervisors: Dr Eyal Gringart   e.gringart@ecu.edu.au

                Dr Madalena Grobbelaar   m.grobbelaar@ecu.edu.au

School of Arts and Humanities

Non-consensual Use of Technology: A Qualitative Exploration of Consequences for Women

I have read and understood the Information Letter and Consent Form related to the research project "Non-consensual Use of Technology: A Qualitative Exploration of Consequences for Women". I have had the opportunity to ask the researcher any questions and they have all been answered to my satisfaction. Should I have further queries, I feel comfortable and I am aware to contact the researcher. Participation in the research entails partaking in an interview, approximately one hour in duration, and I consent to the process being audio taped. After completion of the research I understand that these audio tapes will be erased. I am aware that the researcher may take handwritten notes and I will choose a pseudonym as transcripts will be de-identified to protect my anonymity. I understand that I may be asked to look over a summary of the main themes that the researcher has identified to ensure that the information is representative of my views. All information will be treated confidentially and will be used in accordance with the proposed research. I am aware that de-identified information may be published in academic literature, and de-identified transcripts will be kept by ECU indefinitely and potentially used in other research projects. I have been given a list of support services that I can access should discomfort arise. I understand that I can ask questions and refuse to answer any questions that I do not feel comfortable responding to. I freely consent to participating in the aforementioned research and I am aware that I can withdraw at any time without consequence or explanation.

Name: ....

Signature: ....

Date: ....

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

<u>Research Question:</u> "What is the consequences of IBSA for women?"

1) Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your experience with image-based sexual abuse?

    <u>Probing Questions</u>

- How long ago did this occur?

2) Tell me about how this event has impacted on your life?

    <u>Probing Questions</u>

- Tell me a bit about how this has affected your personal relationships?
- Has this impacted your mental health?
- Has this impacted your physical well-being?
- In what ways has this impacted upon your sense of safety in the world?
- What are some of the things you do now to help yourself feel safe?

3) How did you cope with this experience?

    <u>Probing Questions</u>

- Tell me about what supports you have sought to assist with the issues that have arisen?
- Out of your friends and family, who have you been able to talk to about this?
- Did you feel they understood? Why/why not?
- What, if any, professional services have you engaged with regarding this?
- How was this helpful to you?
- What else, if anything, could have been done better?

4) Talk to me about what aspects of this are most difficult for you being a woman in society today?

5) Is there anything else you would like to add?

6) Age and ethnicity

Appendix D: Timetable

Table D1

Timetable for Research Project (2018)

Date	Action
February - March	Writing Proposal Writing Literature Review
March	Submit Proposal for Approval
March - April	Amendments to Proposal Submit Proposal to Ethics
18 April	Residential School Write Literature Review
May - July	Negotiating with Ethics
July - September	Data Collection/Interviews Transcribing Interviews Analysing Transcripts Writing Thesis
4 September	Residential School
October	Complete First Draft Thesis Amendments to Thesis Draft
5 September	Residential School Research Poster Presentation
September - October	Final Thesis Draft Submission Amendments to Final Thesis Draft
29 October	Submission of Thesis

Appendix E: Research Recruitment Flyer

<u>Ground-breaking Research Opportunity</u>

Are you a female who has had any images of yourself distributed to others without your consent?

Hi, my name is Brienna Webb and I am conducting a research project on the non-consensual distribution of explicit media to third parties for a BA Psychology Honours Degree at ECU. Image-based sexual abuse, also known as 'revenge pornography' is a common form of non-consensual use of digital technologies.

Image-based sexual abuse is becoming an increasing problem in contemporary society. People are progressively falling prey to having their nude images/videos shared with third parties without consent. This can be taken in the form of a selfie and given to someone you trust, it can be captured by someone else either consensually or non-consensually, or this media can be stolen via hacking etc.

My research project aims to recruit women who have experienced image-based sexual abuse to participate in a face-to-face interview for approximately 1 hour.

Participants will be asked to talk about their experience of image-based sexual abuse. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. All information will be de-identified and confidentiality maintained. This project has been approved by the ECU HREC.

This research hopes to educate the academic community and aid in helping individuals access adequate support services, as well as assist in appropriate law reform.

Please call or email me

Researcher: Brienna Webb   ecuresearchproject2018@gmail.com

Supervisors: Dr Eyal Gringart   08 6304 5631   e.gringart@ecu.edu.au

                        Dr Madalena Grobbelaar 08 6304 5902   m.grobbelaar@ecu.edu.au

If you would like to discuss the aforementioned research with an independent party, please contact Guillermo Campitelli (Psychology Honours Coordinator) at ECU on gcampitelli@ecu.edu.au or on 6304 5736.

Appendix F: Budget and Resources

Table F1

Estimated Budget and Resources Required for Research

Description	Cost (A$)	Funding
Digital Voice Recorder	N/A	Borrow From ECU Psychology Test Library
Gift Cards for Participants	51	Researcher
Stationary and USB	12	Researcher
Virtual Voicemail Number	40	Researcher
Poster Printing	64	Researcher
Book Binding	15	Researcher
Total	182	Researcher

Appendix G: IBSA Practices

Table G1.

Participant Age at Time of Event, Number of Events, Media Acquisition, Relationship, and Distribution Method

Information

Participants Age at Time of Event / No of Events *participant data excluded	Media Category	Acquisition Method	Media Capturer Details	Relationship to Participant (Distributer)	Distribution Methods #exact methods not obtained
Amy 18 (one event)	Images	Selfie (sexting coercion)	Interviewee	1. Ex-partner (m) 2. Past Friend (f)	#Secondary distribution to high school
Brittany 22 (one event)	Images	Selfie (sexting coercion)	Interviewee	Ex-partner (m)	#Online websites; secondary distribution to school friendship groups
Claudia 21 (one event)	Video Recording	Consensual	Interviewee & Partner (m)	Partner (m)	Video shared in person to a friend
Ebony 19 (multiple events not all identified)	Images & Video Recordings	Example 1: Non-consensual; surreptitiously Example 2: Rape	Example 1: Multiple Unknown Unfamiliar Persons (u) Example 2: Partner (m)	1. Numerous Unidentified Unfamiliar persons (u) 2. Partner (m)	Online websites, email, text messages & social media (Facebook, MySpace)
Finn 18 (one event)	Images	Selfie (non-consensual acquisition via Snapchat screen recording app)	Ex-partner (m)	Ex-Partner (m)	Social media (Facebook, Messenger Instagram & Snapchat)
*Katie 17 (one event)	Video Recording	Non-consensual; surreptitiously	Friends (u)	Friends (u)	#Group chat & distributed throughout hometown
*Kelly 17/18 (one event)	Images	Non-consensual; participant drugged	Partner (m) & Partners' Friends (m)	Partner (m)	Images printed and distributed to family, friendship groups & the wider community
Rebecca 63 (one event)	Images	Consensual	Partner (m)	Partner (m)	Facebook Messenger shared to one friend
Sarah 19 (one event)	Images	Selfie & Non-consensual; surreptitiously	Partner (m)	Partner (m)	Work-colleagues via text messages, hometown & men's magazine
*Susan 17/18 (one event)	Images	Selfie (sexting coercion & non-consensual acquisition via Snapchat screen recording app)	Friend (m)	Friend (m)	Text messages & social media (Snapchat, Facebook)

Note. Not all conclusive events for all participants were incorporated in the table and it only includes events that participants were certain occurred. The gender of capturer and distributer are marked as (f) for female, (m) for male, and (u) for unknown.