

ABSTRACT

Author: Jade Serrano
Title: Nonconsensual Intimate Imagery: Exploring Victimization In A Digital Landscape Focusing On The Erasure Of Public Stigma
Thesis Advisor: Brian Johnson
Department: Department of English and Honors College
Year: 2021

The nonconsensual release and dissemination of private sexually explicit imagery was recently criminalized federally in the United States under the SHIELD Act, an amendment added to the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act in early 2021. Despite this legal update, the public perception of this problem continues to be characterized by stigma, apathy, fetishization, and sensationalism—all of which is magnified by the pervasive mislabeling of the problem as “revenge porn” in the media. Referring to leaked content as “revenge porn,” or “porn” at all, distorts and diminishes what victims of nonconsensual exposure actually go through during and after their digital and sexual privacy is violated. The “revenge porn” label is neither descriptively accurate nor compassionate towards victims, who oft face depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress as a result of their exposure. In my study, I rely on a different, more fitting, coinage: “nonconsensual intimate imagery” (NCII, NC-double-I) ditches the harmful implications and connotations of the “revenge porn” colloquialism, and captures what the problem is actually about, which is consent and privacy, not vengeance or arousal. This study looks at existing research and five unique cases of digital abuse in order to demonstrate that NCII is more complex and variable than the misnomer “revenge porn” suggests. I emphasize the need for enhanced victim sensitivity and rhetorical reform, in order to combat the forces of victim-blaming and oversexualization.