



Without consent

Exploring image-based abuse in relationships

About Revealing Reality

Revealing Reality is a multi-award-winning insight and innovation agency. We enjoy working on challenging projects with social purpose to inform policy, design, and behaviour change. This includes exploring how digital services and platforms are shaping people's behaviour – across relationships, gambling, financial products, the health service, and more.

We frequently conduct detailed qualitative and quantitative research to build in-depth understandings of digital behaviours and observe how people really experience technology. This has enabled us to become thought-leaders in online media habits and behaviours.

Our work includes uncovering areas of insight that we feel are under-researched to draw attention to issues, prompt action, and begin necessary conversations. Recent examples of this include understanding how digital products shape the lives and experiences of children for the 5Rights Foundation¹, exploring how nude image-sharing is playing out in relationships in our self-funded work in collaboration with the PSHE Association², talking to young people about why they use porn for BBFC³, and bringing user perspectives to testing how to measure online harms for Ofcom⁴.

Visit www.revealingreality.co.uk to find out more about our work or to get in touch.

This report was published in February 2023.

The funding for this research was provided by the Home Office under the Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Research Fund 2021/22.

The views reflected in this report are not necessarily those of the Home Office.

¹ [Pathways: How digital design puts children at risk](#). Revealing Reality.

² [Not just flirting – The unequal experiences and consequences of nude image-sharing by young people](#). Revealing Reality.

³ [Young people, pornography, and age verification](#). Revealing Reality.

⁴ [How people are harmed online: testing a model from a user perspective](#). Revealing Reality.

Contents

Executive summary	4
Introduction	7
Defining image-based abuse.....	9
The creation of nude images without consent.....	12
The sharing on of nude images without consent.....	16
Coercive behaviour and image-based abuse	28
Grooming and image-based abuse.....	32
Unsolicited sending of nude images	36
Sending nude images as part of a pattern of self-destructive behaviour.....	39
Conclusion	40

Executive summary

As young people's digital, romantic, and sexual lives are becoming increasingly intertwined, and relationships often begin or take place online, it has become more important to understand how technology is being used in this aspect of people's lives and how it might be shaping behaviour.

This project focuses on the use of technology specifically to create and share nude images and explores what it looks like when these behaviours become abusive.

In a previous research project focusing on nude image-sharing among teenagers, Revealing Reality found young people didn't always regard consent to nude image-sharing as equivalent to consent to physical sex⁵. We also found instances of image-based abuse that shared some characteristics with other forms of domestic abuse, such as more coercive and controlling behaviours using the threat of sharing on nude images. But the role that nude image-based abuse has in relationships is less well understood than other forms of domestic abuse, and merits further investigation.

This research explored from the perspective of both victims and perpetrators the contexts and scenarios when nude image-related behaviours become abusive. These include different types of abusive nude image-related behaviours, the motivations, drivers, and consequences of these behaviours, and the types of relationships in which they happen.

Following interviews with respondents and analysis of a range of behaviours, this research defines image-based abuse as a situation when nude images are used or created in a way that is different from what the person in the image intended, expected, or consented to.

The specific research objectives included:

- to understand the drivers behind different abusive image-sharing behaviours;
- to understand some of the links between image-sharing and other abusive behaviours;
- to produce actionable recommendations for reducing the prevalence of non-consensual and harmful behaviour in young people and their relationships.

The research findings are based on evidence from interviews with 37 young people and adults aged 16-30 about the role nude image-sharing played in their relationships and their experiences of image-based abuse.

Key findings

Within relationships, image-based abuse included the creation or sharing on of images without consent, or their use in coercion

Behaviours that this research defines as image-based abuse which were happening within relationships included:

- **The creation of nude images without consent** – Images or videos that had been taken without the knowledge or consent of the subject, either digitally (e.g., taking a screenshot) or in person. These images were nude and/or sexual in nature.
- **The sharing on of nude images without consent** – Images that had been shared without the subject of the image being involved in the decision to distribute it, or made aware of the distribution

⁵ [‘Not Just Flirting – The unequal experiences and consequences of nude image-sharing by young people’. Revealing Reality.](#)

of the image (though some were made or became aware afterwards). These images were nude and/or sexual in nature and could be images that the subject had taken themselves or those that had been taken without the knowledge or consent of the subject.

- **The use of nude images to coerce people** – People being coerced into creating or sending nudes due to threatening or abusive behaviour or being coerced into behaving a certain way due to the threat of having their nudes shared on.

Image-based abuse was rarely considered ‘domestic abuse’ by those involved

Though often not recognised as such by young people, these behaviours appeared to share some characteristics with behaviours more widely considered to be domestic abuse and which aligned with the UK government’s definition of domestic abuse⁶. Respondents themselves were more likely to reference laws around the creation and distribution of child sexual abuse material (CSAM). Laws around domestic abuse or consent were rarely mentioned.

Frequently, image-based abuse occurred alongside other forms of domestic abuse, such as physical violence, the threat of physical violence, or emotional manipulation. In some cases, we heard from young people who had seemingly been groomed as children by what appeared, in retrospect, likely to be adults online. In these instances children had been persuaded or coerced into sharing nude images.

However, some behaviours, for example, non-consensual sharing or non-consensual creation by ‘screenshotting’, were also reported within relationships in which there didn’t appear to be any other form of abuse and were unlikely to be considered ‘domestic abuse’ by the victim.

Men and boys were more likely to feel they ‘owned’ images they had been sent

This report outlines many reasons why someone might send a nude to someone else. In general, there appear to be differences in motivation between men and boys, and women and girls, although this is not always the case. In most cases, men and boys reported being driven to exchange nude images for sexual gratification or wished to exchange nudes in the hope of receiving an image in return. Women and girls tended to report sending nudes in the hope of receiving compliments or validation, to make their partner happy, to do what their partner wanted, or to build intimacy in their relationship.

In general, men and boys in the sample had a more transactional attitude towards the exchange of nudes, and typically viewed the image as theirs to possess and use (e.g., for sexual gratification) once it had been sent to them. Women and girls tended to see nude images they had shared as being ‘on loan’ for the duration of the relationship – and therefore expected the recipient to delete and ‘not use’ images anymore if the relationship ended. These differences in motivations to send, and assumptions around use and ownership, may go some way to explaining why men and boys were more likely to have shared a nude image on and felt they were able to justify the behaviour.

The research also found evidence of other harmful image-based experiences

This research also heard about other image-related experiences reported by respondents that did not take place within relationships and were therefore considered out of scope for this report. Nevertheless, these are important to document due to their potential to cause harm, and in some instances, the ways in which they were related to existing illegal behaviours. These were:

⁶ The UK government defines domestic abuse as abusive behaviours between two people, aged 16 or over, who are personally connected to one another. These behaviours might include physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviours, economic abuse, or psychological, emotional, or other abuse.

- **People sending nude images without asking if this was what the recipient wanted** – We heard about experiences where perpetrators had sent ‘unsolicited’ images that the recipients did not ask for. These photos were nude and/or sexual in nature.
- **People sending nude images as part of a pattern of self-destructive behaviour** – We heard from a small number of women who described sending nude images to large numbers of strangers online during periods of severe mental health challenges, and where the behaviour was contributing to their mental distress. Two women described these behaviours as a form of “self-harm”.

Conclusions

Many of the people (mostly women and girls) in the sample who had been victims of image-based abuse felt aggrieved that their images had been used in a way they had not intended or consented to. Some of the perpetrators of this behaviour; both those who were interviewed and those described to us by victims, did not appear to worry about the consequences of their actions.

It appears from this research that the person who is the subject of a nude image is expected to exert their rights over those images; to complain, ask for images to be deleted, and even to potentially comply with a blackmail request to avoid their nudes being leaked.

Until the social and legal expectation is consistently on the possessor or distributor of nude images to ensure and demonstrate they have consent to use them in a given manner, this type of abuse is likely to continue with relative impunity.



This report contains sexually explicit language and descriptions of content, experiences, and allusions to topics that some people might find distressing. These include research participants' experiences of domestic abuse, violence, sexual violence, coercion and grooming.

Introduction

How and when does nude image-sharing become abusive?

Revealing Reality has conducted numerous projects researching nude image-sharing and young people's use of social media, exploring its role in young people's lives and relationships. Through these projects, we have witnessed the risks that young people are exposed to online and the potential harms that can occur as a result.

Our recent research into nude-image-sharing among children aged 14-18, '[Not Just Flirting](#)'⁷, showed the prevalence of nude image-sharing in young people's relationships. This research highlighted cases where nude image-sharing was having a negative impact on young people (particularly those who were more vulnerable) and the part that nudes were beginning to play in the occurrence of abusive behaviours in young people's relationships. Of the girls surveyed for that project who reported having shared a nude or nearly nude image of themselves, 16% reported having an image taken of them without their permission. Girls were also more likely than boys to have had a nude image of them shared on or shown to other people without their consent.

Having identified image-based behaviours which were causing harm to some young people and did not seem to form part of healthy relationships, further exploration into image-based behaviours which could be considered abusive was needed.

Instances of image-based abuse witnessed in previous research shared some characteristics with other forms of domestic abuse. As young people's digital, romantic, and sexual lives are becoming increasingly intertwined, and relationships increasingly begin or take place online, it has become more important to better understand how technology is being used in this aspect of people's lives and how it shapes behaviour. The role that nude image-based behaviours play in abusive relationships is less well understood than other forms of domestic abuse, and merits investigation.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales identified that 2.3 million people between the ages of 16 and 74 experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2020⁸. In addition to its growing role in domestic abuse, technology has increasingly been used by abusers against victims in a variety of other contexts – a recent example included the use of Apple AirTag for stalking⁹. Four in 10 millennial women have been sent an unsolicited nude image, meaning that someone sent the woman a nude image of themselves without her consent¹⁰. This is a growing phenomenon, especially common among younger people. These are only a few examples of how domestic abuse can be perpetrated through the use of technology.

In this context, this piece of work was commissioned to explore when nude image-based behaviours become abusive. The specific research objectives included:

- to understand the drivers behind different abusive image-sharing behaviours
- to understand some of the links between image-sharing and other abusive behaviours
- to produce actionable recommendations for reducing the prevalence of non-consensual and harmful behaviour in young people and their relationships.

⁷ '[Not Just Flirting – The unequal experiences and consequences of nude image-sharing by young people.](#)' [Revealing Reality.](#)

⁸ '[Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2021.](#)' [Office for National Statistics.](#)

⁹ '["I didn't want it anywhere near me": how the Apple AirTag became a gift to stalkers.](#)' [The Guardian.](#)

¹⁰ '[Four in ten female millennials have been sent an unsolicited penis photo.](#)' [YouGov.](#)

The sample includes a wide range of perspectives, including those of witnesses, victims, perpetrators, and some who had been both a perpetrator and a victim of image-based abuse. As such, these interviews have provided insight into the behaviour, motivations, and attitudes of those who are committing image-based abuses, as well as the perspectives of, and impact on, the victims.

While the research was initially designed to understand the drivers behind abusive behaviours and identify any potential connections between image-based abuse and other abusive behaviours, a wide range of abusive behaviours were reported. Some of these abusive behaviours are less common, and others are becoming so commonplace that their occurrence was increasingly seen as 'normal' by respondents.

This report will describe both the variety of these behaviours and detail the more common abusive image-based behaviours that appeared frequently in the research.

Defining image-based abuse

What is nude image-based abuse?

This research explored the contexts and scenarios when nude image-related behaviours become abusive. This included different types of abusive nude image-related behaviours, the motivations, drivers, and consequences of these behaviours, and the types of relationships within which they happened.

‘Nude images’ here refers to any nude or nearly nude pictures or videos. For ease, the report refers to ‘images’ to cover both pictures and videos.

Through interviews with respondents and further analysis on a range of nude image-related behaviours, this research defines image-based abuse as a situation where nude images are **used or created in a way that is different from what the person in the image intended or consented to**. This includes:

- Images being created non-consensually
- Images being shared on non-consensually
- Images being used coercively

During the research, there were other behaviours, including the unsolicited sending of nude images and what appeared to have been grooming of young people involving nude images, which do not directly sit under this definition. Nonetheless, these are serious behaviours that warrant discussion. These have therefore been included in discrete sections of the report, even though they are not its core focus.

How are we defining a relationship?

In this research, image-based abuse occurred across a wide range of relationships. Throughout this report, a broad definition of ‘relationship’ has been used, including examples from a very casual and brief interaction online to more committed and long-term relationships.

For example, some respondents had been talking for only a week online, whereas others had been in long-term relationships for a number of years.

There were also a wide range of different relationship dynamics or ‘stages’, including from early ‘talking’ phases, dating, and committed relationships. There were examples of relationships that started in person, started online, or in some cases existed completely online.

Some spoke of “situationships” or contexts where a formal relationship was not recognised by either or both individuals, and others described being in a longer-term, more committed relationship.

How are we defining domestic abuse?

The UK government defines domestic abuse as abusive behaviours between two people, aged 16 or over, who are personally connected to one another. These behaviours might include physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviours, economic abuse, or psychological, emotional, or other abuse.¹¹

¹¹ [Domestic Abuse Act 2021, ‘Definition of “Domestic Abuse”’. Legislation.gov.uk.](#)

How does image-based abuse appear to relate to domestic abuse?

This research set out to explore the relationship between abusive nude image-related behaviours and domestic abuse. For example, exploring whether image-based abuse may be a precursor to other forms of domestic abuse.

The abusive image-related behaviours documented in this research appear to have similarities with other forms of domestic abuse, although it's worth noting that many respondents didn't see these behaviours as domestic abuse or similar to other forms of domestic abuse. Respondents also raised experiences of abusive image-related behaviours which had fewer similarities to domestic abuse.

Image-based abuse was reported in a range of relationships; some in which image-based abuse was the only abusive behaviour identified in the relationship, and others in which abusive image-sharing behaviours occurred alongside other forms of domestic abuse, such as sexual, physical, and economic abuse.

Who did we speak to?

This research involved capturing 37 young people's perspectives on, and experiences of, image-based abuse.

- Participants' ages ranged from 16 to 30, with a focus on experiences of image-based abuse that took place between the ages of 16 and 24
- A range of locations and socioeconomic backgrounds
- A range of sexual orientations

Recruitment was based on people who reported direct negative consequences and/or harm from image-based incidents and abuse. As such, this research cannot speak exactly to the prevalence of such behaviours. Fewer perpetrators of image-based abuse were interviewed during the research due to the difficulties in identifying and recruiting these individuals. As a result, there is less data available on this perspective of image-based abuse.

The research methods included a mixture of in-depth remote and face-to-face interviews to ensure the research was carried out in a way that made the participants feel the most comfortable. Throughout the research, the wellbeing and safeguarding of participants was prioritised. This included gaining consent from all participants, taking reasonable steps to ensure that those taking part understood the nature and implications of their participation, and ensuring respondents were aware they did not have to answer any questions or talk about topics they did not want to.

In this report, we have included all respondents' ages and have assigned each one a socio-economic grade (SEG). However, all real names have been replaced with pseudonyms and personal identifying information has been removed to protect participants' identities of the participants.

The SEGs are based on the standard National Readership Survey definitions, which have been used by the research industry for more than 50 years. There are six groups, but as is standard practice, we have combined some of the smaller groups to create four grades:

- AB – Higher or intermediate managerial and professional
- C1 – Supervisory, clerical, junior management
- C2 – Skilled manual workers
- DE – Semi-skilled, casual, unemployed

The interviews explored participants' experiences in relationships in a broader sense, before moving to discussion of the role that nude image-sharing played in their relationships and their experiences of image-based abuse.

We also spoke with professionals working with young people and/or in the area of domestic abuse to ensure this research was built upon previous knowledge, understanding, and trends in domestic abuse and image-based abuse. The professionals interviewed included those working in schools and pupil referral units (e.g., safeguarding leads), domestic abuse charities, and other domestic abuse support services.

What image-based abusive behaviours did we observe?

Although this research initially aimed to analyse the drivers of image-based abuse and its links with domestic abuse, respondents raised a wide range of image-related behaviours and related-experiences. This report details these behaviours and experiences.

Some of these behaviours could be considered image-based abuse, where nude images are **used or created in a way that is different from what the person in the image intended or consented to**. These include:

- **The creation of nude images without consent** – Images or videos that had been taken without the knowledge or consent of the subject, either digitally (e.g., through taking a screenshot) or in person. These images were nude and/or sexual in nature. *Details of this behaviour can be found on page 12*
- **The sharing on of nude images without consent** – Images that had been shared without the subject of the image being involved in the decision to distribute it or made aware of the distribution of the image (though some were made or became aware afterwards). These images were nude and/or sexual in nature and could be images that the subject had taken themselves or those that had been taken without the knowledge or consent of the subject. *Details of this behaviour can be found on page 17*
- **The use of nude images to coerce people** – People being coerced into creating or sending nudes due to threatening or abusive behaviour or being coerced into behaving a certain way due to the threat of having their nudes shared on. *Details of this behaviour can be found on page 29*

This research also heard about other image-related behaviours reported by respondents that did not take place within relationships and were therefore considered out of scope for this report. Nevertheless, these are important to document due to their potential to cause harm, and in some instances, the ways in which they were related to existing illegal behaviours. These were:

- **People sending nude images without asking if this was what the recipient wanted** – We heard about experiences where perpetrators had sent ‘unsolicited’ images that the recipients did not ask for. These photos were nude and/or sexual in nature. *Details of this behaviour can be found on page 37*
- **People sending nude images as part of a pattern of self-destructive behaviour** – We heard from a small number of women who described sending nudes to large numbers of strangers online during periods of severe mental health challenges. This behaviour was contributing to their mental distress. Two women described these behaviours as a form of “self-harm”. *Details of this behaviour can be found on page 40*

The report is structured by these behaviours, and gives a detailed, wide-ranging picture of the landscape of image-based abuse. Not all behaviours came up in interviews as consistently as others, but they are illustrative examples of behaviours that are imagined to be happening more widely in relationships.

The creation of nude images without consent

This behaviour is a clear example of image-based abuse, involving the creation of nude images in-person without the consent of the person within the image, and in some cases without their knowledge. There were also examples of people screenshotting images without the permission of the person in the image, where images that were created consensually were then copied or stored non-consensually.

Some victims had nude images taken of them in-person without their consent or awareness

A small number of respondents reported having photos of them taken in-person when nude or nearly nude without their consent. In some cases, victims were unaware at the time that the image was being taken. Examples of these behaviours occurred more in long-term relationships when there were instances of other kinds of manipulation and abuse.

Charlotte (19) met her boyfriend Ryan when she was 14, and she was with him for over a year. During this time, Ryan took photos and videos of her during sex without her knowledge or consent. Charlotte only discovered he had taken these when he used them to threaten her to keep quiet about her pregnancy. She remembered when the images and videos were taken as the experience had been painful.

“Yeah actually, Ryan took a photo of me and him having sex without me knowing and it was so bad... we were just having sex from behind and he was like pulling my hair and I remember it being really sore and I just wasn’t enjoying it too much and then he took a photo of it. Because he’s behind me I couldn’t see anything, so I didn’t know, he didn’t put flash on or anything like that, and it just makes me wonder if he was doing it more and he didn’t send any more of that?”

Charlotte, 19, C1/C2

This behaviour is a clear example of image-based abuse, as Ryan took the image without Charlotte’s knowledge or consent.

Ameer (23) described a year-long relationship that he had when he was 20, in which he took a nude image and video of his partner asleep in a hotel room with her face in it. Ameer explained that he took this image and video in response to his partner threatening to share on a nude image of him when he told her he wanted to break-up. Ameer described feeling that he had to stay in the relationship until he felt safe enough to leave, which involved having an image of her as “collateral”.

“I unfortunately had to stay for three or four months for them [his girlfriend] to get everything deleted... or that I have something on them just in case, because I know what certain people can be like... but I knew that there was nothing I could do... I had to stay with her for three months, I thought ok, I’m going to get something on her, I was in the hotel room, she was naked, I had a picture of her with the face... well she was sleeping, she was just naked on the bed, and then obviously I had a picture... she didn’t know but I knew”

Ameer, 23, C1

Ameer’s girlfriend then deleted the images she had of him but Ameer felt the need to keep one of her in case she had lied. In this instance, Ameer taking an image without his girlfriend’s consent was driven by a desire to regain power in a situation where he felt he could not leave.

Khalil (29) described different instances when his friends shared nude images that had been taken without the women’s consent on a group chat. These were girls that Khalil’s friends had brought back to “have sex with” after a night out, so were more casual, short-term situations than Ameer and Charlotte’s relationships.

“It would be situations like ‘Look what I brought home, look what I did. I got these two girls in the shower’. It might be a situation where he’s had sex with the girls and then because it’s been so good, they’re both sleeping now, and he’s

taken a picture of them in the bed sleeping, saying you know, 'I did them the business' kind of thing."

Khalil, 29, C1

While Ameer had taken the image with the intent of his girlfriend finding out and caring that he had the image, Khalil believed that the girls would not care and reasoned that it should be "expected" in scenarios such as those.

"Yeah of course it's non-consensual in that respect [taking photos of someone whilst sleeping], but – I don't want to say like selling your soul – but if you've literally gone to some random guy's house, just because he's got XYZ money, you can't expect him to respect you – it sounds bad to say that, again, but to respect you in the way that he cares about what you think. Because you've already given yourself to him for what he thinks is petty change, so you've sold yourself short and sweet."

Khalil, 29, C1

Khalil reasoned that become women had "bought into" the night out and spending time with his friends, that they should expect to receive little respect.

"You bought into it. You could've said no the whole time, no one forced you to out the club, forced you into the car, forced you into the hotel. It's not like that, you've come all the way here yourself on your two feet. You've left your house, I would've thought to go home to your house, but no you've gone looking for a rich guy instead, and this is the outcome. So you just take what comes with it so to speak, otherwise just go home."

Khalil, 29, C1

Many people had their nudes screenshotted without their consent

Screenshotting without consent was another example of non-consensually creating nude images. There were more examples of this behaviour and it seemed to have occurred more than in-person non-consensual creation of images. What separates the two behaviours is the level of awareness on the part of the victim, and the role that they play in the creation of the image.

In examples of images being created non-consensually in-person, the victims neither consented nor were aware of the images being taken. However, due to the tools available on social media, especially with platforms like Snapchat that alert users when their photo has been screenshotted by the recipient, people tended to be more aware if their nude images had been screenshotted. There were also examples where perpetrators found a way round this.

In cases on screenshotting, victims had consensually created and sent the initial image, unlike in-person non-consensual creation. However, they did not consent to the 'recreation' or 'duplication' of that image in the screenshot.

This behaviour seemed to be more common across the sample and perpetrators often saw it as less problematic and did not see the behaviour as creating a nude image without consent.

Some screenshotting of images appeared to be expected or was normalised

There were some instances where screenshotting appeared to be expected. Katy (24) described seeing a man casually on and off until she was 21 years old, where screenshotting would occur. She reported being okay with it as their relationship was mostly long-distance, and as a result, sending nudes and having phone sex were a more integral part of the relationship.

"Only one particular guy had screenshots of me, but I didn't really take too much of an issue with it because I'd known him for a long time, so I kind of trusted him to a degree."

Katy, 24, C1/C2

While consent was not explicitly given for screenshotting, Katy was at ease with the behaviour. She felt their relationship was fairly established, mostly online, and she reasoned he had kept previously screenshotted nude images to himself, which made her trust him.

Brett (23) regularly screenshotted nude photos he received on Grindr¹², but he did not see this as a problem.

"I think pretty much everyone does it [screenshotting nudes on Grindr]. What they then do with that is very dependent on the person. I mean, I'm sure a lot of people then go and share those pictures themselves with other people. And I'm sure I've had pictures of myself disseminated without my consent or knowledge, statistically almost certainly."

Brett, 23, C1

The phenomenon of screenshotting nude photos received on Grindr without asking was so common for Brett, that he was under no illusions about whether this might have happened to him. This also made him feel at ease with screenshotting nude images himself. He did not consider this as 'abusive'.

Aled (25) spoke about screenshotting within the wider culture of nude image sharing. He said that quite often, things that had started out as a "bit of fun" with seemingly no harmful intent could quickly get out of hand.

"Someone might get sent something, and they might say 'Oh my god, I've been talking to so-and-so, and his dick is massive' or 'I've been talking to so-and-so and their tits are huge' and they'll screenshot just as a bit of banter. But then they might give in to peer pressure and be like 'I'll send it to you, but you cannot send it to anyone else', and then obviously they do the same, and before you know it, it just gets spread and everyone's got it. I would say initially it's banter but then it probably just gets out of control straight away."

Aled, 25, C2

While Aled described screenshotting as a normal part of image sharing culture among his friends and people he had grown up with, he also reflected that it was a breach of trust.

On other occasions screenshotting of images was more purposeful

There were circumstances where screenshotting people's nudes could be considered as more calculated, where the perpetrator had a specific purpose for doing it.

Ameer (23) considered sending nude images a big part of dating. Usually, they would be sent soon after initial interactions on Tinder or Instagram, to "hype you up" for meeting in-person. He also reflected that it would make meeting up more comfortable as people know what each other look like. He noted that "as soon as there's tits and a bra" he will screenshot these without the sender knowing. He also felt it was safer to get the girl to send images first, because it is a "very dangerous world out there" with lots of fake profiles. For Ameer, screenshotting without the person knowing was both to have them to 'use' later for his own pleasure and to "protect himself".

Some perpetrators took measures to avoid detection of non-consensual screenshotting

Whilst many of the victims were aware their images had been screenshotted, quite a few victims in the sample were unaware that this had happened until they later found out another way.

Jen (20) sent an image of herself in a bra to someone she was seeing and realised he must have screenshotted it when she found out that he had sent the photo to the boys' group chat he was in.

"I think he took the picture from an iPad, because I didn't know it had been screenshotted, and on Snapchat it tells you if it's been screenshotted."

Jen, 20, C1/C2

¹² An online dating application targeted towards members of the LGBT community, popular with gay men

Similarly, Mia (20) had her nudes screenshotted several times without her initially knowing. When she was in Year 9, she was talking to someone casually on Snapchat, and they exchanged a few nude images. She was then told by other people that he had screenshotted them.

“The reason I found out is that someone randomly added me on Snapchat, and asked, ‘is this you?’ and he sent me a photo of my boobs. I obviously denied it and said, ‘no what the fuck,’ but he said ‘these are really nice boobs, they are yours.’ A lot of people added me around that time from the same area, and then I found out from one of the guys that [her ex-boyfriend] had sent them. I didn’t even know he screenshotted. I think he used another phone and took a picture.”

Mia, 20, C1/C2

Another of Mia’s ex-boyfriends told her it was common for boys to take photos of nude images they had been sent to avoid notifications alerting girls that it had happened.

“I know a lot of people do that, which is quite scary. I asked my ex ‘why do guys even screenshot nudes?’ And he said they don’t screenshot, but they use an external app or another device to take a picture.”

Mia, 20, C1/C2

Victims of these behaviours felt betrayed, embarrassed, and lost trust in their partners

Whether the nude image had been taken in-person or screenshotted, victims lost considerable trust in their partners. In both cases nude images were being created without the consent of the person in the image, and in some cases, without them even being aware it was being created.

Charlotte (19) felt “betrayed” by her ex-boyfriend when she found out he had taken the photos of them having sex without her consent.

“I was so embarrassed, like so so embarrassed, because when you’re really intimate with someone you trust and he’s asking me to do things that I necessarily wouldn’t really want to do – it’s not like he raped me or anything like that, but like not anything that I’m really getting any sexual gratification out of – but he was enjoying it and then he takes a photo of me doing that... it’s things like that that just made me lose trust in a lot of people and made me stop wanting to have like relationships with other people.”

Charlotte, 19, C1/C2

Amy (22) still regrets the fact that her partner was able to screenshot the image she sent, and with hindsight, she feels it was far riskier than having sex with her partner.

“We were 15, 16, and neither of us had had sex or really done anything, so I guess it seemed like the low stakes alternative, which is funny because having sex is so much less risk than sending a picture of yourself, but I didn’t really think about that. If you have sex with someone, the worst thing they can do is tell people that they had sex with you. People can’t physically see it. It’s not degrading in the same way. Even now, I’m still terrified of those pictures getting out and me not being able to get a job because of it.”

Amy, 22, C1/C2

In some cases, perpetrators appeared to be aware they were betraying their partner’s trust

In many of the examples of images being created without consent, there were aspects that implied the person creating the image knew it was going against the intent or wishes of the person in the image. This might include taking photos using another device or using additional apps to circumvent Snapchat’s screenshot notifications.

The next section of this report looks at the behaviour of sharing someone’s image on without their consent. Some of this non-consensual sharing on of images occurred using images that were created non-consensually, as discussed in this section. However, many of the images that were shared on non-consensually were created and shared with the recipient consensually, but then used in a non-consensual way.

The sharing on of nude images without consent

Throughout the research, there were many examples of nude images being shared on by people who had received them when the sender had not intended, requested, or consented to this happening. In some cases, the initial sender may even have been unaware that the image had been shared. As previously mentioned, this included instances both where the original image had been created consensually and non-consensually.

It was possible to speak to people who had non-consensually shared on images, more so than the other forms of image-based abuse. It is therefore more feasible to detail their perspectives and motivations.

Broadly, there were differences in the ways that men and women initially sent nudes in consensual circumstances, this has been documented in previous work including Revealing Reality's recent work, *Not Just Flirting*¹³. These different attitudes and expectations around the initial sending and receiving of nudes shaped how people felt about the ownership and use of nude images. In some cases, this seemed to explain some of the reasons and motivations for them non-consensually sharing on an image.

This behaviour was seen across a range of relationship types but was most often observed in relationships that were more 'casual' or less committed. In these more casual relationships, image-based abuse was usually the only abusive behaviour in that relationship, and instances of non-consensual sharing did not seem to align with other abusive behaviours.

Men and boys in casual relationships seemed to be more likely to share on nude images without consent

Predominantly, nudes were shared on non-consensually by men and boys who were in more 'casual' relationships, described as relationships that were perceived to be shorter term or less 'serious.' Many respondents who had shared on nudes in this situation reflected that one reason was because they felt that these relationships were less likely to continue on for any length of time.

According to Khalil, it was more likely guys would share on nudes they had been sent by women in more 'casual' relationships because it was not as "intimate" and you "don't expect the situation to last."

"My mate started dating this girl when he was like 18 or 19 – they're still together now – but he showed me nudes of her in the first month, when he thought that maybe it would just be a quick thing. He wouldn't send it again. I guess he's hoping that I've forgotten, because he's been with her 10 years now."

Khalil, 29, CI

Finn (17) gave a similar perspective when reflecting on two different examples of non-consensual sharing on from his school. In one instance, a boy had shared on the nude of a girl he had been 'talking to' for a week. This image was then shared on multiple times and spread throughout their school. He described how there was some praise for the boy and shaming of the girl. This was different to when another boy shared on the nudes of his ex-girlfriend, when they ended the relationship after three years. In contrast to the more casual relationship, this time other students were "disgusted" by his behaviour and thought it was "shameful" that he could have broken the trust of someone he had been with for a longer period of time.

¹³ ['Not just flirting – The unequal experiences and consequences of nude image-sharing by young people'. Revealing Reality.](#)

Examples of non-consensual sharing on during or after longer-term relationships were less common throughout the sample.

Women and girls tended to be the victims of non-consensual sharing on

Given that men and boys were usually the perpetrators of this behaviour, women and girls were overwhelmingly the victims. In the sample, many of them had experienced their nudes being shared on without consent. Many also had examples from their friends or wider social network.

Liana (19) said that she saw non-consensual sexual content shared on social media very regularly, and that this was especially true at university, where boys would share non-consensual explicit content on their own personal accounts.

“Really popular boys who have loads of views on Snapchat, like 500 views on Snapchat, they’ll post videos of them and their ex-girlfriend doing things. Sometimes it will be on private stories as well... Every other week there is someone being leaked on social media... It’s mainly in-person ones, people sleeping with each other. Usually they’re in doggy, and she can’t see the recording, but he’s recording her. Or she’s giving him head, and she’s so occupied with what she’s doing, she can’t see the recording. Sometimes you can tell they are being recorded because they are looking at the camera, but I guess they didn’t sign up to the sharing of it.”

Liana, 19, C2

Nude images were often shared on non-consensually via social media and messaging apps

The non-consensual sharing on of nude images tended to be online. Many of these nudes had been initially created and sent with the consent of the person in the image. Often these were then shared on to group chats on WhatsApp or social media platforms, like Snapchat.

Several perpetrators of non-consensual sharing admitted that they and their friends had regularly shared on nude images on group chats with their friends.

Khalil (29) had gone home with a girl after a night-out and had consensually filmed himself and the girl having sex. However, he then sent this video on to his friends in a group chat, to “prove” that it had happened.

“To prove that it happened, I put it in the group chat... She didn’t know I sent it.”

Khalil, 29, C1

A man Molly (20) had been dating for a couple of months had screenshotted a nude she had sent without her consent or awareness. She found out he had shared it on to a group chat with his friends when he sent her a screenshot of the chat, saying his friends thought she was really attractive.

“I’d sent a picture, and he sent it to his group of friends, and been like ‘look how fit she is’, and they’d replied ‘ah she’s so fit, blah blah blah’. And then he sent me a screenshot of that and said ‘my friends think you’re really attractive.’ And he’d not asked me to send it to them, nor if he could even screenshot it in the first place.”

Molly, 20, A/B

There were also examples of nude images being uploaded to social media.

Liana (19) had seen sexually explicit video content being shared on people’s personal profiles, in some cases as a way to “build up a following.” She reflected that it often seemed the content was created non-consensually as well.

Several respondents reported seeing nudes shared to public, anonymous Snapchat profiles. These were often linked to a specific local area.

Noah (18) described an anonymous nude posting account on Snapchat that was active for a couple of years under several different account names. No one he knew had ever worked out who was in charge of the account.

“It started in Year 10. It would be an account not just for one school, but for a whole area. It was called [Location] Bait, or something like that. And it would be an account of so many different people’s nudes getting leaked. People you knew,

people you didn't know, people you had mutual friends with."

Noah, 18, C1

People from that area would send nude photos to the account that they had been sent. These nude images would then be shared publicly by the account, while also tagging the Snapchat username of the person in the image.

It was common that new nudes would get posted each day, sometimes even multiple times per day. Despite the volume of images, Noah says that it was widely spoken about at his school each time one was shared and that often someone would know of the person in the image.

Charlotte (19) had her nude image shared on non-consensually on an anonymous Snapchat posting page for her local area by her boyfriend, Ryan. After they broke up, he shared on one of her nude images to the account, which then posted it. When she saw the nude image, she was shocked, but thankful that they had tagged a different girl's name against the image. As it didn't have her face in it, no one was able to attribute the image to her.

There were multiple Snapchat accounts sharing nudes in her local area and she reported that often content would be duplicated between the accounts.

"It went on 1 page, but from that, it went on 3 or 4 other pages. So every couple of months, I'd just see it pop up."

Charlotte, 19, C1/C2

Nude images were also shared on websites

There were also examples of nude images being shared on pornographic websites without the consent of the person in the image.

Katy (24) and her friend had sent nude images of themselves together to two men they were "talking to." Later, when her friend's relationship with one of the men had ended, she told Katy that he had posted their nude images on several websites and had sent her a screenshot of the post as proof. He had used the images to create an account posing as the two women, giving out her friend's phone number and arranging to meet up with people. Her friend reported this to the police, and he was arrested.

"She told me that one of them was a swingers site, locals in the area, basically. And he posted, made an account and posed as us, and put those pictures on that site. Another one, it had been submitted to some sort of pornographic site, and he was pretending to be us posing in the pictures and then talking to people as us."

Katy, 24, C1/C2

Some nude images were shared on non-consensually in person

As well as non-consensually sharing nudes online, there were also examples of nude images being non-consensually shown to others in-person.

Finn (17) described being shown girls' nudes by people at school, which he knew was without the girls' consent and awareness.

"Any nudes I've seen I shouldn't have seen. I think that's happened maybe seven or eight times. Sometimes it's been people I've never met, never since met, didn't know, but they go to school of someone I know."

Finn, 17, A/B

Similarly, Tim (16) has been shown many nudes non-consensually by his friends at school and has non-consensually shown nudes he had received himself. He had started talking to a girl on Snapchat's Quick Add feature who then sent him a nude, which he then showed to his friends.

"I've shown a nude at school once. It was a similar scenario as with other guys who do it – I went up to one of my friends and said, 'hey look at this'."

Tim, 16, B

Some non-consensual sharing on of nude images seemed to be driven by how it might increase the perpetrator's social status

People who had shared on nude images non-consensually reflected that it was often a way to gain social status. Whether online or in-person, perpetrators said that there was a competitive element with friends, and that by sharing nudes, it was possible to gain “bragging rights”.

Finn (17) described a situation when someone at his school shared on a nude of the girl he had been speaking to for a week. The reaction this got was that it was “fair play to him” and praise for him managing to get a nude so quickly.

Similarly, Tim (16) spoke of times when a friend would show a nude they had received, and because it was happening to his friends, it would be a “cool” thing to engage in.

“When it’s one of your friends [showing you a nude], you feel happy for them... If it’s someone you’re not friends with, showing you someone you don’t know, it’s so uninteresting – it’s totally unrelated to you. But when it’s one of your friends, it’s a bit cooler.”

Tim, 16, B

He also expressed that it was much more exciting seeing nudes of people you knew, and that this would be a motivating factor to ask to see nudes of other people in-person.

“[If it’s a girl in school] The reaction is pretty big. A bunch of people will ask the guy to send it or ask where he got it. It’s because it’s someone they know, someone they might be attracted to... You can find random nude images online, But the fact that you know them makes it more attractive. Just the fact that if you know someone and you have pictures of them like that, it makes them more attractive, because you know them, you’ve seen them, and you know what they’re like, and I guess if it’s someone you’re attracted to, you’ve thought about stuff like that before, and now you have an image of it, and that makes it more attractive than just some random person online, where you have no idea who they are.”

Tim, 16, B

Tim also shared on a nude he received to some of his friends. When asked how he thought about it, he said it felt “really good” to show the nude he had received to his friends, and that it gave him a real sense of social standing.

“I was pretty proud... it’s something that guys want, so when it happens, it’s nice that it’s happened to me, not them.”

Tim, 16, B

Khalil (29) admitted that the reason he shared the video of him having sex with a woman he had “hooked up” with was to prove to his friends that he had done it when they didn’t believe him. He reflected that proving this to them gave him an “ego boost”.

“It was just pure ego, pure ego... They [his friends] just applauded. ‘Ayy, that’s your man. You can lead the pack.’”

Khalil, 29, C1

Noah (18) also felt cool showing his friends nudes which he had received and said that he had probably shown his friends 50% of all nudes he had received.

“It [sharing on nudes] makes you feel good in a way, it makes you seem cool, like ‘Ah you’re getting nudes from loads of girls.’ or ‘Ah that’s a really hot girl.’ It just makes you seem cool.”

Noah, 18, C1

Some reported a competitive element to sharing on nudes

Ameer (23) had a similar experience, saying that at age 17-18, there was a lot of competition on group chats as to who was “getting some.” He reflected that he and his friends would send nude images to group chats to show off and to “prove you were getting some”, and because he “didn’t like to lose”, it was a way to “shut people up”.

“At around 17, it was mainly on a Snapchat group chat, and you might say ‘Have you seen her? I went out with her – look at her!’ Or someone else would send it, and a lot of people might know.”

Ameer, 23, C1

Similar to Ameer, Aled (25) described experiences of sharing nude images for the purpose of bragging. He and his friends would send selfies or videos after or even during sex to his group chat, as proof of their “conquest”.

“For example, say I pulled some bird on a Liverpool night out and then I take a selfie and send her into the group chat if you were one of my close friends. Then they'd be like ‘Waheyy look who I pulled’, trying to get a bit of bragging rights for a competition... I would say I've seen most things over the years. I would say more commonly, it's after sex, like you only see the lad's top half and the girl's top half, like face and like tits or whatever. But I've seen people when they're drunk and taking someone from behind and filming it.”

Aled, 25, C2

Non-consensual sharing in group chats could be ‘banter’ or a way of flirting

Some people who had shared on images non-consensually saw it as light-hearted and enjoyed the experience of sending them to friends. In these instances, it was less about showing off to their social circle, and more about engaging in what they saw as a humorous activity.

Aled (25) said that he and his friends would share sexual content with each other on group chats for “a bit of banter”, and that both the sexual content itself and the comments from the friendship group would often be in jest. The comments would centre around how attractive the person was in the image, and whether they were rated highly by the rest of the group.

“If someone's pulled someone absolutely stunning, then it's all like ‘Ah bloody hell, well done. Have you wifed her?’ sort of thing. You know what? I would sort of, you know, sort of thing. And if it's someone who's a bit of a wrong'un I suppose you'd say around here, then it's a bit more like, ‘Oh my fucking god, get to the doctors, go and take your tablets’ sort of thing.”

Aled, 25, C2

Tommy (16) and his friends would engage in similar activities, sometimes while together in person. He said that if he and his friends were bored and looking to amuse themselves at someone's house when staying over, they might ask girls they knew or vaguely knew for nudes and see what results they would get.

“It probably happens once every couple of weeks... Say there's four of you and you're bored, and you play truth or dare, and they dare you to do that [ask girls for nudes], and it would happen then.”

Tommy, 16, A/B

In some cases, it seemed that the non-consensual sharing on of images was not seen as abusive and had been normalised to the point that it garnered a positive response from both boys and girls who saw it.

Ameer's friendship group, as well as non-consensually sharing on nudes to each other to show off, also shared them as a way of flirting with girls who were in these same group chats. Guys would share pictures or videos of them having sex with girls, and girls would respond with comments such as “I could do a better job than that,” to which guys might reply saying “well you'll have to wait and see yourself.” This sort of non-consensual sharing on was, therefore, not only a way to brag to male friends, but also a way to flirt and build sexual tension with girls that they might be interested in.

Victims could experience serious consequences from their nudes being shared on without their consent

Despite there being some backlash for the perpetrators who engaged in non-consensual sharing behaviours, the consequences for the victim were nearly always far worse. At best, the victims – who tended to be women and girls – would feel social shame and intense embarrassment in their peer group and wider social circle. At worst, these sorts of experiences could trigger more serious consequences in their lives.

Many victims felt shame and embarrassment

People who had their nudes shared on without their consent felt a sense of public shame. Sometimes this led to feeling socially isolated or that their reputation had been tarnished.

When talking about one of his peers at school who had shared on a girl's nude, Finn (17) acknowledged that the guy received *"nothing but praise"* for his actions. Another nude of hers also got sent around the year, which he stated, *"didn't help her reputation."* This led to her being called a "slut" and being messaged on Snapchat by boys who would ask for nudes. Finn thought that sometimes this was probably people *"trying to be funny"* but was also partly people trying to get a nude from someone that had been labelled as *"easy"*.

Mel (22) reflected that there was pressure for girls to share images from an early age and that she and many of her friends were sending nude images. They all worried that their images would be shared around – which happened *"quite a few times"*. She said that girls were often shamed for having their images shared, but the boys would show the picture to each other and laugh.

When 20-year-old Molly's nudes were shared by her abusive ex-boyfriend to his friend's group chat, she admitted to feeling completely appalled by the experience because of the total betrayal of trust.

"I was horrified, because there was absolutely no permission at all for sending it, and he hadn't even mentioned that he was going to. He just had done it and not told me."

Molly, 20, A/B

The social stigma attached to having their nudes shared on also meant victims struggled to speak about their experience. Charlotte (19) said when her nudes were shared, she was too ashamed to speak about it.

"I just felt too ashamed [to speak to anyone]. I wish I had because he probably would've got caught. But no, I didn't tell anybody."

Charlotte, 19, C1/C2

When asked what advice she would give to her younger self, she was very firm about the risks of sending nudes.

"I'd say don't send nudes. It's hard though, because I do understand the pressure you get from guys to do it, but unless you're willing to have your reputation ruined, I wouldn't do it, to be honest."

Charlotte, 19, C1/C2

Having their nudes shared on without their consent impacted some victims' mental health

For some who had experienced their nude images being shared on without their consent, this affected their pre-existing mental health issues. Some in the sample attributed this to the intense social shame the victim was experiencing.

One of 21-year-old Tristan's best friends had her nudes shared on when she was 19, which he said influenced her recovery from her eating disorder. He had tried to comfort her, as he had experienced having his own nudes shared on.

"That did upset her because she's obviously very self-conscious about her body. She's got an eating disorder, so she stopped eating as well for a couple of days. So it had quite a physical effect on her, she was actually only eating to live."

Tristan, 21, C1/C2

Similarly, Amina (18) had her nude images shared in a WhatsApp group that included some of her peers at school when she was 14 years old. She described how people at her school were talking about the nudes, including talking about her body in a negative way. Amina reported that this caused her problems with eating and led her to *"starve"* herself for a period of time.

Some people who's images were shared had to take time off or leave their school or job

Other victims of non-consensual sharing on faced consequences such as having to take time off school.

Tommy (16) spoke of a number of occasions where people from his school had taken a long time off, and sometimes never came back, as a result of having their nudes shared on without their consent.

"If that happens, it's like the end of the world... People either don't go into school, or they stay away from you, don't talk to you... They either won't come in for the whole of school or they won't come in for a year or two... Some people

just fully don't go into school, they don't go back, they just leave school or move school. Because it would be awkward wouldn't it, seeing people they know who have seen your nudes."

Tommy, 16, A/B

There was also one example where someone felt they had to leave their job.

CASE STUDY: Lily (29, C1/C2) felt she had to leave her work after one of her co-workers found her nude images of her that had been shared without her consent on Twitter

Lily had been "talking on and off" with Kyle online for around 10 years from the age of 13. He was 23, much older than her. Over the 10 years, they would talk intensively for periods, being flirtatious and sharing nudes, before losing touch for a few months.

When they were talking a lot, Kyle would ask for pictures nearly every day. These would sometimes be non-sexual images such as selfies, but he often asked for nude images. Lily reflected that at the time she liked the attention and sending nudes gave her a feeling of validation. She also found the fact he was older than her exciting.

At the time, Lily was happy to send photos with her breasts in them, but Kyle asked for increasingly sexual images such as pictures of her masturbating using various objects. This made her feel "grotesque," but she felt she couldn't say no because she said he'd make her feel guilty.

At work one day in her early twenties, Lily was sent a link to a Twitter account by a friend. On the feed were all the nudes she had sent to Kyle from age 13. She reported the account to the police and Kyle ended up getting a fine for "obtaining and sharing child pornography".

One of her co-workers said he had searched for the account on Twitter and had found it. She reported this to her boss, but said she felt blamed for the images being shared in the public domain. She ended up leaving her job.

Consequences were often perceived as less severe for men and boys whose nudes were shared on without consent

While men and boys who had their nudes shared on without their consent experienced negative effects as well, many saw it as less harmful than for girls and women. Generally, respondents reported that boys' nudes being shared on non-consensually was often more likely to be seen as "amusing", without the same level of social stigma as when a girl's nude images were shared on.

Some respondents thought this might be because the nude itself was of less interest and therefore less likely to be kept by people. There were also fewer examples of men's or boys' nudes being shared on social media platforms where they might be 'recycled' through various accounts and keep resurfacing in the future.

Noah (18) described several times that boys' nudes were leaked at school, but said generally they were not shamed in the same way a girl would be.

"I feel like a girl sharing a nude is more like it's meant to be something that shouldn't be seen by other people. Should be very secure. Same with a guy, but I feel like it's just different. Girls send it because a guy asks most of the time. But with a guy, it's just a guy sending back, it's just him having more control over the situation. So if his stuff is getting leaked, it's seen as a bit funny, a bit stupid, but it's different if a girl's is getting leaked."

Noah, 18, C1

Tim (16) mentioned that boys topless photos or dick pics had been leaked at school several times, but said this was generally seen as a "funny" experience. He reflected that often people would see the boy as "having put himself out there", which might be embarrassing but not shameful in the way it might be for a girl.

"Quite a few times, people have posted topless pictures of someone, which is just embarrassing for them. That will get sent round everywhere, everyone will suddenly have the picture of that guy topless. If it's showing other stuff [e.g. dick pics], it will circulate, but no one is going to keep it on their phone, because that's weird. Everyone's probably going to see it, and it's circulated, but it's not something people will have for a while."

Tim, 16, B

But, there were some instances when males were the victims of non-consensual sharing and faced a similar sense of social shame or embarrassment.

Jamie (19) at age 14 sent a picture of his penis next to a large McDonald's cup as a size comparison. This was shared around his school and Jamie was bullied about it for the whole academic year and given a nickname.

"In hindsight I should have expected it to an extent... I wouldn't say I wouldn't send nudes again... It builds you as a character... people rinsed me for six months... Now I'm more resilient to what people say."

Jamie, 19, C1/C2

Perpetrators often didn't regard their behaviour as abusive

For some, the non-consensual sharing on of nude images was seen as normal and respondents didn't always see the behaviour as abusive. While most knew it was an immoral thing to do, they justified their behaviour in a range of ways.

Tom (19) did not think his ex-girlfriend *"would mind that much"*. He had been unsure of his sexuality growing up, and at age 15, he used his ex-girlfriend's nudes to pose as her online and talk to two guys he fancied from his school, with the aim of getting nudes from them. Despite knowing that it was wrong, he expressed that he didn't believe she would blame him and that she would understand that he was going through a difficult time while coming out. He also didn't think that sharing her pictures was *"that bad"* because *"everyone has a pair of boobs"*.

When people shared on nudes in group chats, some of them believed that not including the victim's face protected their identity, and therefore justified the non-consensual sharing on. As much as protecting the victim's identity, it also served to allow the perpetrator plausible deniability, as even if it was shared on further, they would be able to deny that it was who people claimed.

"Because you can't tell it's her, maybe she'd be ok with it. Maybe she might be annoyed. But her face isn't in it, so I could say it's anyone, realistically. Let's say she walked in now and saw the video on my phone, I can just say it's not her. Even if she recalled the night, I would just say, 'How do you know it's you?'"

Khalil, 29, C1

One respondent thought people would expect their nudes to be shared on

When talking about his friends non-consensually sharing on girls' nudes after a one-night stand, Khalil (29) thought the girls should expect this sort of behaviour. He gave a specific example of a friend who had shared naked photos of girls he had met on a night out.

"To him it's random girls that saw he had a Lamborghini, and he got them in the car, and now they're here, so it's like, why not, you know? And I doubt they would've cared if I'm honest with you. Not to sound rude, but if that's what enticed them in the first place, a nice Lamborghini and a house."

Khalil, 29, C1

Some people justified sharing on nudes in-person as they thought no one else would find out

Some people justified sharing on nudes in person as they thought the person in the nude image would never find out. At times, people made an effort to make sure that no one would find out they had shared nudes on. For some, this was achieved by only 'sharing on' or showing others in person which was often linked to worries about a lack of control over the image when it was sent to someone else.

Noah (18) acknowledged there would be bad consequences if girls in school found out their nudes had been shared on. But he used the fact that he did not think they would find out if they were shared only in person as a justification for doing so.

"Um, they would feel a bit like, disrespected [if they found out]. They feel a bit insecure, like, 'oh, why are you showing these other guys what I sent you?'. They'd feel like betrayed. They feel like they would lose trust for that guy because, yeah, because I feel like it's known that you shouldn't show another girl's nudes to people. Even, like, even though they

do. These guys show other girls' nudes yeah, but it's known that you're not meant to do that because like, it's just like disrespectful towards a girl".

Noah, 18, C1

Tim (16) had the same justification for non-consensual sharing on, but thought instead that girls were still likely to find out if they went to the same school. For that reason, in his experience, most nudes that were shared on were of girls from other schools.

"Usually, guys will show each other without the girl knowing, because they go to a different school... Inside of school, if the guy starts showing it to everyone, the girl will find out, because he's the only one who's had it. That's way more likely to cause drama."

Tim, 16, B

Khalil (29) justified sharing on in-person because it meant that the photo itself would not spread. Whilst people could talk about it, he would still retain control of the actual image in question.

"It's one thing showing someone else, but if you send it to another person's phone, you can't control what they do with their phone. So even if I did show someone on my phone, I don't see it – well it is bad – but I don't see it as going to be the worst situation, because I have control of it still. They can't show anyone else, they can't crop it, whatever they're going to do."

Khalil, 29, C1

Tim (16) said that there was no difference morally between sharing on online or in-person, but that online sharing on of a girl's photos felt more "objectifying".

"With girls, it feels worse [sharing them on online], it feels like you're objectifying them. Whereas with the guys [nudes being leaked online], there is a sense that they brought it upon themselves, and then people send it around because it's funny, because it's their friend. If it's a girl, it feels a bit creepy to have it."

Tim, 16, B

Noah (18) made the distinction between sharing online to anonymous accounts and sharing on personal social media channels, which he saw as more unpleasant. For example, when reflecting on anonymous Snapchat accounts that posted nude images, Noah found it less problematic because he didn't know who had done it.

"[When leaking to an anonymous account] your reputation wouldn't get damaged because you're sending it to an anonymous account, and an anonymous account is leaking it for you. Leaking a nude yourself would be seen as very, very bad. If you did it yourself it's very bad, it's very disrespectful. But sending it to an account it'd be seen as really funny. Obviously, you wouldn't say you're doing it. You just send it to the account, the account would leak it and then you just talk with your friends about it like, 'Oh, my God, look at this.'"

Noah, 18, C1

Other people said they did not care if the person in the image found out

However, in some cases, people said they didn't care whether the victims found out or not. This was most commonly seen in shorter-term, more casual relationships where people felt less emotionally invested in the relationship. In these cases, some people felt less concerned about sharing images online.

In a few more extreme examples, people actively wanted the victim to find out their nude image had been shared on without their consent. Often this was guaranteed through screenshots sent as evidence of the sharing on. This seemed to happen mostly after the end of a relationship, when the sharing on was done out of spite or to cause distress to the person in the image.

One of 19-year-old Jamie's friends had non-consensually shared on the nudes of his ex-girlfriend. Jamie suspects this was in retaliation for her having accused him of sexual assault. His friend shared on many nude images of her, mostly to his friends via direct message. In this instance, he was not concerned about his ex-girlfriend finding out or about there being "evidence" of what he had done.

"Anyone [the guy] would retaliate, anyone would be angry... She humiliated him, he humiliated her."

Jamie, 19, C1/C2

Male and female respondents had different motivations for sending nudes

This and previous research have outlined many reasons why someone might send a nude to someone else. Broadly, it seems that these motivations are different for men and women. Many men and boys expressed that the primary motivation for them to send nudes was to get one in return and many said they would ask directly for nudes. Men and boys also typically described having more sexually driven motivations for wanting to exchange nudes than girls.

“If it’s photos that you’re asking for, then it’s probably to have a wank.”

Khalil, 29, CI

Finn’s (17) friend had similar thinking: *“Any time past 10 o’clock on any given night, if you’re just talking to someone and you’re bored, you can ask, with differing success rate.”*

Noah (18) mainly asks for nudes because he is *“horny”* in the moment and thinks that some people want to see each other’s bodies before taking the relationship further.

Some respondents reported that nude image-sharing was often *“expected”* on certain dating apps, particularly citing Grindr as an app where this behaviour was common.

Brett (23), said nude image-sharing was a *“big part”* of Grindr, describing it as being *“written into the code of the app”*, with an expectation people would send an image within the first dozen messages. He explained that it was *“part of the script”* and claimed that it was just expected that either person would send an image, with no concerns about whether it was unsolicited or not.

Tom (19) had a similar experience on TikTok, on which he amassed 20,000 followers, posting *“thirst trap”* content – posts that aim to entice and provoke a response, usually of a sexual nature. He said he would have 50 people messaging him a day, and that he compiled a group of people online he would regularly trade nudes with. However, Tom only met up with one of these people offline.

“There was probably a group of 10-15 people that I would regularly do it with [exchange nudes] ... It got to the point where every time I had a wank it would be whilst sending and receiving nudes. Either sending videos, or photos, or whilst on FaceTime.”

Tom, 19, CI

Women and girls tended to send nudes to receive affirmation, appease someone, or build intimacy in their relationship

By contrast, most female respondents did not typically enjoy receiving photos in the same way as the male respondents did.

Mel (22) said that she doesn’t really use the videos shared between her and her boyfriend to *“get off”*, noting that they are mainly for his enjoyment. She instead views them as a way to build intimacy and to *“spice things up”* during the Covid-19 lockdowns when they couldn’t see each other. Once they could see each other in person again, they no longer had an interest in pictures, but instead began filming videos of oral and penetrative sex together. She said that she would rather he watched videos of them having sex than watch porn, as it is *“not realistic”*. Mel was able to set boundaries and felt that she could message him now to have them all deleted without him getting upset or annoyed with her.

Cleo (22) has never been interested in receiving nudes and has never asked for one. She said this is the same for her friends who *“aren’t fussed”* apart from one who *“thinks receiving a dick pic is hot”*.

Instead, most female respondents appeared to send nude images to receive affirmation, gain validation, and sometimes just to appease a boy or man. When boys and men asked, many women and girls felt they would be considered weird if they didn’t send images. Some felt obliged to send them to be intimate with or strengthen a relationship with a partner. In stark contrast to boys, often the girls weren’t sending nudes in the hope of getting nudes back and would sometimes even say no to receiving nudes in return.

Steph (23) now sends nude images much less often than when she was young. She reflected that now the only reasons she would send one would be feeling guilt tripped into it, if she really liked someone, or if she was drunk when they asked.

Mia (20) felt that nude sharing would often be instigated by boys and thought that girls would be more interested in the physical and emotional connection. She reflected that she never really enjoyed it but would do it for validation.

Katy (24) had been on a date when she was 16 years old with one of her brother's friends. During the date, she decided she didn't want to see him again, describing how he had come on to her too strongly. She also felt he was "obviously expecting stuff" from her. When he dropped her home, he was annoyed that she didn't invite him in, later using this as a reason that she should send him a nude image. He became very insistent, and Katy felt pressured, so sent him a nude image.

"He was like 'Well I didn't get anything from that so you need to send me something' ... I was a bit thrown by that – I didn't realise that there had to be some sort of exchange... he became very insistent... I sent something and I think this is the problem. I entertained it and felt really awkward about the whole thing. A little bit embarrassed, I suppose, and so I did [send a nude]."

Katy, 24, C1/C2

Differing motivations to send a nude sometimes seemed to shape people's expectations on how nude images would be used

There were a range of reasons that people initially sent nudes. These differing motivations seemed to shape people's expectations and assumptions surrounding how nude images were used and who owned a nude once it had been sent. In general, men and boys in the sample were more likely to see the interaction as transactional, with a total and permanent transfer of ownership of an image they had been sent. Women and girls, however, were more likely to view any nude they sent as something that the recipient was entitled to keep only within the bounds of the relationship. They therefore expected a recipient to delete or 'not use' an image anymore after a relationship ended.

These differences in motivations to send and assumptions around use and ownership may go some way to explaining why men and boys were more likely to have shared on a nude image or felt able to justify the behaviour.

However, there were few examples of these assumptions or expectations being spoken about within the relationship - most of these assumptions were implicit.

Amy (22) had a topless photo of her screenshotted by the boy she was seeing when she was in year 10, and although she asked him to delete it and he agreed, she later found out this had not happened.

"He'd send me that picture that he'd screenshotted and say things like 'Oh, but you look so good here.' And maybe he didn't intend for it to have that effect, but it felt very much like he was saying, 'Don't forget that I've got this dirt on you.'"

Amy, 22, C1/C2

Similarly, Charlotte (19) asked her boyfriend Ryan to delete nude images she sent to him, but he refused.

"He was so horrible. One time we had been sending nudes and he screenshotted it. I begged him to delete it, but he would not delete it. And when we split up, he actually put that photo on a Snapchat posting site."

Charlotte, 19, C1/C1

Mel (22) gave many examples of girls' nudes having been shared on non-consensually, especially being leaked on social media. This tended to happen after a break-up or if a partner felt they had been "slighted" in some way. Often, this was boys sharing on their girlfriend's or ex-girlfriend's nude images – however, she also noted examples when girls would 'leak' the nudes of other girls who had sent nudes to their boyfriend, as a way to shame the other girl.

The next section examines more coercive image-based abuse, in which nude images were leveraged by perpetrators through the threat of non-consensual sharing to control the victim's behaviour, actions, or in some cases to acquire more nude images. It also involved threats of other forms of violence to elicit more or

increasingly graphic images. Given that the impacts of non-consensual sharing on of images were so severe and, in some cases, appeared to be normalised, the threat of it seemed like a very real possibility. What separates these two behaviours, however, is that whilst non-consensual sharing on often happened in isolation in more casual relationships, separate from other abusive behaviours, coercive behaviours typically occurred in more complex relationships alongside other forms of domestic abuse. The following section, therefore, explores both the behaviour itself, and its links to other abusive behaviours.

Coercive behaviour and image-based abuse

Many victims described experiences of coercive behaviour in relation to image-based abuse. Coercive behaviour could involve threatening the victim, so they felt they had to create nudes or increasingly explicit images. It also involved perpetrators threatening to use nudes they already had of victims in a way they would not consent to in order to control the victim's behaviour or actions.

This type of coercive behaviour is a form of image-based abuse as it uses the threat of *non-consensual sharing* or other forms of coercion to apply pressure on a person so that they feel they have no choice but to behave in the way the perpetrator demands. This could involve forcing the victim to create and send an image of themselves non-consensually or forcing victims into other behaviours, such as performing certain sex acts or preventing them from ending the relationship.

Coercive control, by definition, is domestic abuse. This type of image-based abuse appeared to have the clearest links to other forms of domestic abuse, with examples where image-based coercion was present alongside other abusive behaviours. While the previous behaviours discussed in this report are abusive in themselves, they tended to have fewer connections to other abusive dynamics.

There were challenges in recruiting perpetrators of this behaviour, and therefore understanding of it is limited to the perspective of victims.

Some victims felt forced into sending nude images

There were some instances where threats or abusive behaviours were used to pressure people into sending nude images.

In some cases, coercion relating to nudes involved other abusive and controlling behaviours, or the threat of them. This might include emotional manipulation, physical violence, or the threat of physical violence. Within relationships where these types of abuse had already happened or formed part of existing patterns of behaviour, victims felt they had little choice but to do what their abusive partner wanted in that context. This was even if the abuse or threat of abuse was not specifically linked to the sending of a nude image at that time.

For example, Mia (20) was in an abusive relationship for four years. She left her family home when she was 17 to move in with her boyfriend and his family, becoming isolated and dropping out of college. During this time, Mia reported that her partner was physically violent towards her, sexually abused her, restricted her financially and was emotionally abusive. Mia described how her boyfriend would pressure her into taking photos of herself naked after he had physically or sexually assaulted her. She didn't know what would happen to these images nor want to take them, but thought it was "*easier to go along with it rather than get beaten up*" if she refused to take them.

Another research participant, Polly (16), was in a relationship with a boy whom she described as controlling. Polly reported that he dictated what she ate, wore, and who she was allowed to see. Polly also described instances of physical and sexual violence, where he would slap and strangle her. In addition, Polly described how he "*forced*" her to take nudes before she went to bed, threatening to do something extreme or unpredictable if she didn't.

Amina (18) had also been in a relationship where she experienced physical and sexual abuse. Her boyfriend sexually assaulted her when they met in person for the first time, and she described him as angry and controlling of where she went and who she saw. After being together for 6 months, her boyfriend told her that he would only stay with her if she sent him nudes, which she did.

Other respondents in relationships that otherwise were not described as abusive described facing threats if they did not send nude images.

For example, a boy that Mel (22) was talking to from her school would “suddenly turn really nasty” if she didn’t want to send nudes. At one point he threatened to “kill himself” or tell people at their school that she was “faking her bipolar” if she didn’t send one. Mel felt her best option was to send images to stop him from following through with any of these threats.

Another research participant, Rebecca (16), described how her boyfriend would start arguments with her, which would last hours, and then say the only way she could “make it up to him” or end the argument would be to send him nudes.

Other participants’ partners threatened to break up with them if they did not send nudes. For example, Amy’s (22) boyfriend said if she did not share nudes he would “go elsewhere”.

The threat of having a nude shared on was used to control the behaviour of some victims

Sometimes threats were also made involving nude images that perpetrators already had. Victims described that perpetrators had threatened to share their nude images on without their consent if they did not behave in the way perpetrators wanted.

Perpetrators threatened to share people’s nude images online, as well as directly to people’s friends and family

Threats to share nude images on included to people’s immediate social networks, to specific friends and family members, and more widely on online platforms or apps.

Some victims were threatened that their nudes would be shared online. This could include sharing via social media, as in Charlotte’s case when her then-boyfriend threatened to send her nudes on to the local area-specific Snapchat account, which would then post the images on the account’s ‘Snapchat Story’. It could also include less locally specific platforms such as pornography websites, as Mia’s boyfriend threatened when she tried to end the relationship.

Other victims were threatened with having their nudes sent to people they knew. This might be their friends, peers at school, neighbours, or their family.

For example, Tami (30) had an abusive relationship with a man she was having an affair with. He threatened to share her nudes with her family and those in her local area if she tried to end the relationship.

“This is where the revenge came, he was saying ‘I’m going to print out every picture, I’m going to put it around the supermarket, I’m going to put it around [her child’s] school, so everyone will know what a skank you are. You can’t end this”

Tami, 30, C1/C2

In some cases, the threat of sending a victim’s nude to their family or friends was made to feel more ‘real’ to the victim by sending screenshots of their family or friend’s social media profiles, or drafts of messages the perpetrator was threatening to send.

The threat to share nudes on non-consensually was not always explicit or said outright

There were examples of people being ‘reminded’ that someone had a nude of theirs or hinting that other people would like to see it.

Amy (22) was speaking to a boy from her school who refused to delete a nude of her that he had taken a screenshot of non-consensually. He then asked her to send more, and when Amy refused, he started saying things that made her fear he might share it on to other people. For example, “My friend would love to see this,” or “remember what I have on you,” and sending the image back to her.

For some, the threat to share on nudes was used to control what people were saying

These threats tended to be made to prevent the victim from speaking out about parts of the relationship, particularly after a break-up. Perpetrators would threaten to share on nudes that were sent consensually during the relationship if the victim told others about certain aspects of their relationship.

For example, when Charlotte (19) found out she was pregnant by her ex-boyfriend, she sent him a message about it, wanting to discuss whether to terminate the pregnancy. When he replied to her, he was angry, refusing to believe it could be his child, and threatened to share a nude image of her if she mentioned it to anyone again.

He told her, *“You better shut the fuck up or this will go about”* and sent her a photo he’d taken of her without her knowledge or consent while having sex. Charlotte thinks this was because he was worried about his then-girlfriend finding out that he had cheated on her with Charlotte. She felt humiliated and shocked that the image existed. She also thought about the other nudes she knew he had and felt very aware of the power he had over her.

Steph (23) was sent a nude she had sent an ex-boyfriend by one of his friends, who she was talking to at the time. He wanted her to *“change her tone”* and sent her a photo of the nude she had sent to her ex-boyfriend, asking if she remembered it and threatening to share it on through their school and to her family. Steph felt extremely worried and uncomfortable.

“I was like ‘what the fuck?’, and he was like, ‘I suggest you be a lot nicer to me, or the whole of your year at school will see this’. He was like, ‘It’s not really hard to find someone’s parents on Facebook.’”

Steph, 23, C1/C2

Cleo had sent nudes to someone in the year above her at school who she had a flirty relationship with, but they were never ‘officially’ together. He threatened her when he heard how she had spoken about their relationship and how he had treated her. During the relationship, his behaviour became more controlling, telling her who she could and couldn’t spend time with, and he tried to access her private password-protected folder on Snapchat, knowing that’s where she had saved previous nudes. Soon after they stopped speaking, he began talking to another girl from her school. Cleo told the girl that he could be quite manipulative and to be careful. When he heard about this, he messaged her, telling her if she didn’t *“keep out of his business”* he would share her nudes on to everyone at their school.

Cleo felt *“stupid”* when this happened. She worried people would judge her, thinking she should have known that having her nudes shared on was a possibility. As she was already being bullied at school, she felt even more nervous about the impact having her nudes ‘leaked’ would have for her socially.

“We had all these, like, weird, like, very intense assemblies of this girl who sent nudes and then everyone found out, and then she got bullied, and then she died. Literally, that’s the kind of story that we’ve got given in school... and obviously, like, that’s not really very realistic. But the general premise of it was I was very much in the wrong because I’d even sent them in the first place.”

Cleo, 22, C1/C2

In a few instances, image-based coercion was used to prevent victims from ending a relationship

The threat of sharing a nude on was used by perpetrators in a few instances to prevent the victim from ending a relationship.

Mia’s (20) boyfriend threatened to upload her nudes to a pornography website when she left him after a long period of domestic abuse, to try to convince her to get back together with him.

In cases where the threat to share on nudes was made when people had arguments or broached breaking-up, coercive behaviours may have been leading some people to stay in relationships they wanted to end. People felt concerned about what could happen at the end of a relationship.

For some, the better option seemed to be ‘phasing out’ sending nudes over a period of time as a way of extricating themselves from the relationship and pattern of behaviour.

After Tami (30) was threatened with her nudes being shared on to her family, colleagues, and neighbours if she tried to end the relationship, she decided she had to try and “fizzle out” the relationship by gradually speaking to her partner less and sending fewer nudes.

Threats to share on nudes were also used to get more, or more explicit, nudes

Beyond controlling what people said and prolonging relationships, there were examples of the threat of sharing on a nude being used to coerce people into sending more, or more explicit, nudes. This tended to be men and boys using the threat of sharing on nudes they had already been sent, to get more nudes from women or girls they were currently in a relationship with.

Many people who had experienced this felt stuck in a “vicious cycle” with no choice other than to send what was being asked of them.

“He would say that if I didn’t send more, he was gonna share them out, and that he’d been saving, and he would send me proof that he had saved them so he could share them... so it ended up being this, like, vicious cycle for me that I didn’t expect from him at all. It was really horrible.”

Mel, 22, CI

Similarly, when Tish (19) was 17 she was sent a photo of a nude she had sent to someone, which they had screenshotted without her awareness. He then asked her to send him more nudes when she had previously said she did not want to. He threatened to share the nude he already had with her parents if she did not oblige.

In some cases, the threat of sharing on less explicit nudes that had already been sent was used to get people to send more explicit images. This might include more nudity, different parts of the body, or specific positions.

For example, Molly (20) was talking to a 17-year-old boy when she was 14. He asked for increasingly revealing photos and videos that she did not feel comfortable sending, so she started to say no. He then threatened to share the nudes he already had of her to her friends and family if she did not send more nudes to him. He composed a Facebook message to send to Molly’s parents with one of her nudes attached, which he sent a screenshot of to Molly, in order to show his intention to share her nudes with her family.

This type of threat was not always explicit. For example, some people had their own nudes sent back to them as a way of being ‘reminded’ what another person ‘had on them’.

Grooming and image-based abuse

When talking to people about the ways that nude images have played a role in abusive situations, some people revealed they had experienced online grooming that included or led to image-based abuse.

Online grooming is defined as: “The process of establishing/building a relationship with a child either in person or through the use of the internet or other digital technologies to facilitate either online or offline sexual contact with that person.”¹⁴

There were only two people in the sample who appeared to have, or felt they had, been groomed. Given that experiences of grooming weren’t something sampled for in the research, the fact there were examples is notable.

From this and previous research, it’s clear that starting and developing relationships online is common, including sexual relationships where nude images play a role. This could be on dating apps, but also more informally through platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram, or Kik. In some cases, young people and children might even prefer starting relationships online, seeing it as less ‘risky’ to share nude images of themselves to someone who is not at the same school as them or from the same local area¹⁵.

At the same time, these online platforms are spaces where people, especially children and young people, are seeking attention, validation, and affirmation online.

For the two young people in the sample who had experienced grooming, these factors had come together to create scenarios where they had been at risk of being targeted online for sexual purposes, leading to self-generated child sexual abuse imagery being sent and shared.

There were examples in the research sample of young people who had been manipulated by groomers online

In some cases, groomers appeared to be successfully taking advantage of children seeking affirmation or validation online. These cases are inherently abusive from the start.

CASE STUDY: Tish (19, C1/C2) was using Kik from age 12, often sending nudes to men much older than her

Between the ages of 12 and 16, Tish would speak to people on Kik and Omegle. She joined one group chat that was made up of mostly young people who lived all around the world, some of whom she’s still friends with today.

Sometimes men would ‘find’ her on group chats and start messaging her privately. After speaking for a while, they would ask her for nude images, which she would often send to them.

“They made me feel mature, they really flattered my ego... I got hooked on needing the validation.”

Later, an anonymous Instagram profile sent her own nude images to her, so she knows that some of these nudes must have been shared on without her consent.

¹⁴ [‘Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse’. Interagency Working Group.](#)

¹⁵ [‘Not Just Flirting – The unequal experiences and consequences of nude image-sharing by young people’. Revealing Reality.](#)

At one point, when she was 12 years old, Tish was speaking to a man on Kik. She had sent him nudes. He then sent her a voice note revealing he had been lying about who he was and actually lived in the village next to hers. He had recognised the landscape in the background of one of her images.

He asked Tish to meet up with him to have sex and said if she didn't send more nudes, he would send her nudes to her classmates.

In one case, it's possible that existing CSAM was being used by groomers to pose as a child

One research participant reported sending nude images of themselves when they were a child to accounts they assumed were other children or young people. It is unclear whether these actually were children.

CASE STUDY: Holly (17) sent nude images to another girl when she was 12 – at the time, she assumed it was another child

Holly had sent nude photos and videos when she was 12 years old to a 'girl from America' on Snapchat, who said she was a few years older than Holly and would also send nudes back.

The 'girl from America' would ask Holly to send increasingly explicit photos and videos, and demand she sent them at various times during the day, telling her where to go to take one in private. Holly described not fully understanding what she was being asked to do in the videos.

"I'd just been introduced to this [sexual images and videos], I didn't understand what was happening so it would just be a video of my body. I wouldn't necessarily be doing anything because I didn't understand what it was, and then she'd be like, 'You should try this', and I did for the video, but it was like, what am I doing?"

After a while, another account added her on Snapchat who said they were a 'friend' of the girl she was messaging in America. This account also wanted to trade nudes with Holly, saying *"my friend said you'd be down for doing things like you do with her"*. At this point Holly realised that the girl she was messaging in America had shared her images with this 'friend' and blocked both accounts from Snapchat.

Holly now doesn't know for sure that the initial 'girl' or her 'friend' were who they said they were, or the age they claimed they were. It is possible that in this case a groomer was using nude images gained from another child to pose as that child and convince Holly to send images.

"It's awful... I think I was a victim of sort of grooming... so it's like, it's a bit of a tricky situation, but definitely I was like a victim of like some sort of situation. Whether I felt like a victim at the time is different... but I definitely was, like I understand that now."

After her relationship with the 'girl' ended, Holly described going on to seek out "validation" from people on Instagram. Holly said she would search for pornography accounts on Instagram and send direct messages to people who had left comments under the photos on these accounts. She would then trade nude videos and photos with these people. A few of them would share videos and photos of girls, whom Holly assumed had shared their nudes with them, and were being shared on.

"It made me want to do it again with other people, it made it to be not a big thing... [messaging accounts on Instagram] was me getting the validation that I did get from her [the girl in America] from other people."

Holly reflected that this was during a time where she would add everyone back who added her on Snapchat, even if she didn't know them. There had not been any lessons about nude image-sharing at school and at the time, Holly didn't think it was bad. She did reflect that she didn't tell anyone, potentially because she thought others would think it was wrong but also because she was sharing with a girl.

In other cases, CSAM was being used to blackmail or coerce the sender

Once a child has shared a nude, groomers can use this to coerce them into sending more images – using threats and blackmail, such as saying that unless they send more, the groomer will share them with people the child knows or tell people that they have acted illegally.

When Tish (19, C1/C2) was 13 years old, she met a man on Kik. They began sharing nudes and sexting when she was 15 over iMessage and Snapchat. This happened for around a year until she was 16, when she told him she didn't want to anymore. A year later, he sent her one of her own nudes, asking for her to send more to him. When she refused, he threatened to share her nudes with her parents, sending her screenshots of her parents' Facebook profiles. Her friend recommended that she call his bluff and ignore him, which Tish did. She received hundreds of texts insulting her, but ultimately, he didn't send the images to her parents.

When asked about the laws surrounding nude images, many respondents mentioned laws surrounding the creation and sharing of CSAM. This was often in reference to the person who had made it, and some people reported feeling that the law was mainly in place to discourage young people from sending nude images.

"Girls have this assumption that if you went to the police, you are going to get in trouble for sending images instead of the person having your image... even lots of girls I know now, they won't go to the police because they're scared they're gonna tell them off."

Mel, 22, C1

In some cases, this meant that young people who had their nude images non-consensually shared were put off or avoided asking for help as they feared they could be charged or even go to prison for the self-generation of child sexual material. When asked about the laws surrounding nude image sharing, many respondents referenced laws around the creation and distribution of CSAM.

When Amy (22, C1/C2) was 15 years old, she was talking to a guy on Snapchat who was the year above her at school. They began sending nude images to each other, but after a while Amy didn't want to send them anymore, so began sending fewer and less revealing images with the hope of it *"fizzling out."* She didn't feel comfortable asking her school for support as recent assemblies had seemed to put the blame on the sender and emphasised that they were guilty of creating and sharing CSAM.

In some cases, online relationships had opened children up to being taken advantage of

Young people and children can seek out attention and validation online, whether that is through likes, shares, or comments from people they know or from strangers. This is not always sexual, but it can be.

Tom (19), while having experiences of image-sharing online that he felt were positive, also found himself in more risky situations – seeking validation from strangers online. As previously mentioned, he began posting 'thirst traps' on TikTok when he was 16.

"It's quite addictive, the attention."

Tom, 19, C1

Of the 20,000 followers and around 50 people a day messaging him, many of them were also asking for nude images. He thinks many of these were older men, messaging him via the link in his TikTok bio.

Across the sample, there were examples of children and young people starting relationships online, including those that were romantic and/or became sexual. In many cases, people might not meet in-person, possibly ever, and be from different regions, or even countries.

Charlotte (19) had a 'boyfriend', Zak, online when she was 14. Zak lived in the USA and Charlotte met him on Instagram. They would often FaceTime, so Charlotte felt like she could tell he was *"legit"* – he was who he said he was and around the age he said he was. They never met in person and stopped talking after a few months. Overall, she feels fairly positive about the relationship, it was just someone she was talking to.

Within previous research, *Not Just Flirting*¹⁶, some young people felt it was safer to share nudes with people they didn't know. In these cases, people were weighing up the risks and sending to strangers on the internet felt less 'risky' than sending to someone from their local area or school, as it felt less likely to 'get shared around' in their local area.

However, these experiences online where young people didn't feel at risk or did not come to any harm, by normalising sexual image-sharing behaviours and receiving validation and attention through images, could make them more receptive to online interactions which were riskier.

Others had offline experiences that seemed to have made them more vulnerable online

Some respondents had other negative experiences as children that they described as lowering their self-esteem and potentially making them more vulnerable to being taken advantage of online. Some examples were more extreme, others less so.

At the more extreme end, Mel (22) was raped when she was 13 years old by someone a lot older than her, which she feels then affected the ways she saw relationships and sex.

"I was spiralling the whole of the school year, didn't know the right or wrong things to do at that age, kind of things you shouldn't do and the kinds of people you should avoid."

Mel, 22, CI

Mel reflected she felt she was not "innocent" anymore, and felt sex was just something "you did and had no meaning". Older men would message her on Facebook, asking to meet up with her, which sometimes led to sex.

Because of this she felt it was more normal for her to be receiving sexual requests from adult men online and did not recognise that this was wrong. She would not send nude images to these men, meeting up with them in person instead.

"I would allow myself to be, like, groomed because I didn't understand that you shouldn't, like, do that sort of stuff or that there's something wrong with them if they, like, want to engage with you like that."

Mel, 22, CI

In some instances, these past experiences seemed to put children at risk of being taken advantage of online.

¹⁶[Not Just Flirting – The unequal experiences and consequences of nude image-sharing by young people'. Revealing Reality.](#)

Unsolicited sending of nude images

In this report, image-based abuse is defined as when nude images are used or created in a way that is different from what the person in the image intended or consented to. Beyond examples of potential online grooming, there were two other image-based behaviours that are important to document. While these do not fall within the definition of image-based abuse as they often weren't happening in relationships, they still have potential to cause harm.

One of these behaviours was the unsolicited sending of a nude image, where an image was sent of the perpetrator without the recipient asking for it or even knowing they might receive it. Sending unsolicited nudes, also known as 'cyber flashing', is set to become illegal under the Online Safety Bill¹⁷. Many examples of this behaviour were on social media platforms, such as Instagram or Snapchat, or following conversations on dating apps. While receiving the images was unwanted, people tended to see it as "annoying" or just "part of being on dating apps". Few spoke of harm to the same extent as other image-based abusive behaviours, with many choosing to quickly block any accounts that sent them unsolicited nudes.

Recipients of unsolicited nude images tended to be women

Many of the women and girls in the sample and a smaller proportion of boys had received an unsolicited nude image. This was sometimes from a stranger, and sometimes from someone they knew, but more often than not, the sender would be a man or boy. There were very few examples of women or girls sending unsolicited nude images.

This behaviour generally didn't appear to correlate with other forms of domestic abuse, such as physical violence or emotional manipulation. The sending of unsolicited nudes tended to happen very early on in a relationship, during initial conversations between people.

This behaviour illustrates the different expectations around nude image sending and receiving more generally. Men and boys in the sample appeared to be more likely to instigate the exchange. Women and girls often felt less keen to participate.

Tom (19) described an example from when he was 13 years old. He had sent an image of a penis he had found online to a girl who people at school had labelled as a "slut". At the time, he thought he might receive an image back.

"When you're younger, you think that that's the thing to do... [I did it] probably so I could tell my friends she sent me nudes."

Tom, 19, CI

For some, receiving unsolicited nudes was an expected part of using social media platforms or dating apps

In some cases, receiving unsolicited nudes was an expected part of being on a platform. For example, for Brett (23), sending and receiving nude images was a normal part of how he and other people he knew used Grindr. Given that nude sending was so expected when using the app, nude images were not generally thought of as 'unsolicited' or not, as talking to someone on the app was very often perceived to go hand-in-hand with a nude

¹⁷ ['Cyberflashing to become a criminal offence'. Ministry of Justice et al.](#)

image being sent very early in the conversation. Receiving nudes in such a way was, therefore, not seen as 'harmful'.

Similarly, Tom (19) received numerous 'dick pics' on TikTok, as part of his 'thirst trap' account. Tom put his Snapchat handle and Instagram account on his TikTok profile, but he also got a lot of direct messages from people on the app. Tom estimated around 15% of the messages he got on the app would be directly asking for nudes without any other conversation, but this was not necessarily unexpected. When asked if he expected the types of sexual interactions he would have on the account when he started it, he said:

"I wasn't against it. Then I could be picky with who I wanted to talk to as well."

Tom, 19, CI

Tom saw the direct nature of the conversations as a way to filter out who he wanted to talk to or not. Unsolicited nude sending was a normal part of how he used the social media platform. He expected that he would probably receive nudes he had not specifically solicited and was not against it in any sense.

Many women and girls found receiving unsolicited nude images unwelcome and annoying

There were of course examples of unsolicited nude sending that were not as welcome, and these tended to be when women or girls were receiving the nude images. For many, they didn't feel 'harmed' by receiving the image but found it annoying or unpleasant.

Amy (22) estimated that one in four people she spoke to on Tinder would ask to add her on Snapchat and then immediately send her a nude. Sometimes they would first send a picture of them clothed or partially clothed with "bored" written on the photo, which she said was usually a sign that a nude would shortly follow.

Mel (22) described receiving numerous unsolicited nude images on Tinder and Snapchat especially, where boys would send her dick pics as a way of initiating conversation.

"People randomly on Tinder really like to send pictures of themselves instead of saying hello. I don't know why. I've had that a lot... They would send dick pics, or videos of them doing their thing. One of them sent me a video of them putting their thing [penis] in a watermelon, then asked me if I wanted to be fruity."

Mel, 22, CI

Some women and girls would navigate this by blocking or avoiding certain accounts on social media platforms

While people often felt uncomfortable when receiving unsolicited nude images, those in the sample did not report feeling particularly negatively impacted by the unsolicited nudes they received. It was common for people to have mechanisms in place to avoid interacting with the sender. Most recipients would block the account of the sender or ignore the images they received.

Jen (20) received several unsolicited one-off nudes from "randomers" online and would block them straight away. These would always be from people she did not know who would add her on Snapchat. When she was younger, she would always accept adds from strangers on Snapchat, but she does not do this anymore, and as a result receives fewer unsolicited nudes.

Steph (23) had been sent unsolicited dick pics on Snapchat as well. She feels like she "knows" the types of profiles that will send them or ask for nudes immediately, so she leaves their friend requests on pending instead of accepting.

Katy (24) described receiving unsolicited 'dick pics' on Snapchat, from both men she knew and was 'talking to' and from accounts she didn't know. She would even receive these in the middle of the day while she was at work. When she would respond asking them why they thought she would want to see that, she said they would always turn it round on her and call her "a slag". At that point she would just block them.

While many in the sample, especially women and girls, had experienced being sent an unsolicited nude, it generally did not appear to be perceived as particularly harmful. The interactions were usually brief and there

were ways that people felt they could stop accounts being able to send them. This was often by filtering the accounts they engaged with online or blocking those who would send the images.

It is worth noting that no one in this sample reported receiving an unsolicited nude in public, for example, by Bluetooth or Airdrop, and that the impact of this behaviour is likely to be different.

Sending nude images as part of a pattern of self-destructive behaviour

There were examples of people, particularly women, sending nude images when they knew there would be negative consequences and were seeking them out, anticipating, or intending harm to occur. We heard from two women who described sending nudes to large numbers of strangers online during periods of mental health challenges, where the behaviour was contributing to their mental distress. Both women described these behaviours as a form of “self-harm”.

This behaviour does not technically fall within this report’s definition of image-based abuse - where nudes are used or created in a way that is different from what the person in the image intended or consented to. As with unsolicited image sharing, examples of this were not seen within relationships. Nevertheless, it is important to document due to its potential to cause harm.

Respondents described their behaviour as a type of “self-harm”

This is a complex behaviour. It is worth noting that in both examples, respondents were suffering with low self-esteem and/or mental health issues, such as depression.

CASE STUDY: Sofia (17) sought out men on Reddit to send nude images to on Snapchat

Since the age of 12, during times when she’s felt stressed or sad, Sofia has sought out people on Reddit to send nude images to. Particular times have included her parent’s divorce, navigating the transition from male to female, and feeling stressed about her exams at school.

She would go through phases of posting on Reddit to see if anyone wanted to talk on Snapchat. She would then send nude images, mainly of her body, sometimes in her underwear. She imagines that most of the accounts were men but shared that she cannot be certain.

Part of Sofia thinks that it was a way for her to get validation, especially to “feel feminine” as she transitioned. However, she also reflected that doing this often made her “feel horrid” about herself.

“I always think about it as a kind of like digital self-harm... in the sense that I was, like, deliberately kind of seeking out something that made me feel terrible.”

Similarly, Holly (17) described sending nude images to people between the ages of 16-17 as a form of “self-harm”, partly choosing to send them because she knew that something bad could happen as a consequence.

“I sent them because I was severely depressed and for me that was a form of self-harm in a way... I did it knowing that there was an intention that something bad could happen out of it... in that moment, I knew I was, like, downplaying my self-worth because I knew of the consequences of this sort of thing.”

Holly, 17, A/B

Conclusion

This research defined image-based abuse as when nude images are **used or created in a way that is different from what the person in the image intended or consented to**. Through interviews with people about their experiences of image-based abuse, several behaviours that appear to be abusive within relationships were identified. These included:

- **The creation of nude images without consent** – Images or videos that had been taken without the knowledge or consent of the subject, either digitally (e.g. through taking a screenshot) or in person. These images were nude and/or sexual in nature
- **The sharing on of nude images without consent** – Images that had been shared without the subject of the image being involved in the decision to distribute it or made aware of the distribution of the image (though some became aware afterwards). These images were nude and/or sexual in nature and could be images that the subject had taken themselves or those that had been taken without the knowledge or consent of the subject
- **The use of nude images to coerce people** – People being coerced into creating or sending nudes due to threatening or abusive behaviour, or being coerced into behaving a certain way due to the threat of having their nudes shared on

Many perpetrators and victims didn't see these behaviours as domestic abuse

Though often not recognised as such by young people, either victims or perpetrators, these behaviours appeared to have some similar characteristics to wider behaviours more typically considered as domestic abuse and fall within the UK government definition of domestic abuse. When asked about the laws surrounding nude image-sharing behaviours, many respondents referenced laws around the creation and distribution of CSAM. Laws around domestic abuse or consent were rarely referred to.

In cases when nude images were being used in ways that the person in the image didn't intend or consent to, some perpetrators did not see this as harmful. For example, people rarely saw the non-consensual sharing on of a nude image as equivalent to creating a nude image in person without someone's consent. This was also true of the 're-creation' of nude images through screenshotting or the sharing on of images already shared without consent.

Some perpetrators justified these behaviours. Justifications included the belief that the victim would not mind, that their actions would not cause harm, or the subject of the image would never find out about the sharing on.

Image-based abuse can negatively affect the subject of the image in a range of ways. Often this included experiencing social stigma, embarrassment, bullying, shame, and negative impacts on their mental health. In some cases, victims of this behaviour had to take time off or even move school or workplace after an incident of image-based abuse.

These behaviours sometimes occurred alongside other forms of domestic abuse, such as physical violence, sexual violence, the threat of physical violence, or emotional manipulation. Some behaviours, such as non-consensual sharing on or non-consensual creation through 'screenshotting', seemed to be occurring more widely in relationships where it didn't seem there were other forms of domestic abuse.

Different motivations to send a nude image sometimes seemed to shape people's expectations on how nude images would be used

Generally, male and female respondents had different motivations for sending nudes. Many men and boys expressed that the primary motivation for sending nudes was to get one in return. They also seemed to have more sexually driven motivations for wanting to exchange nudes compared to girls. By contrast, female respondents did not typically report enjoying receiving nude images in the same way that male respondents did. They reported sending nude images to receive compliments and validation, appease someone, or build

intimacy in their relationship. Different motivations to send a nude image sometimes seemed to shape people's expectations and assumptions about how nude images would be used.

In general, men and boys in the sample saw the interaction as more transactional, involving a total transfer of ownership of the image for them to do what they liked with. Women and girls tended to see sending nudes as something that existed solely as part of the relationship – and therefore expected the recipient to delete or 'not use' the images after the end of the relationship. These differences in motivations to send, and assumptions around use and ownership, may go some way to explaining why men and boys were more likely to have shared on a nude image or felt able to justify the behaviour. The varied motivations, expectations, and assumptions around nude images may go some way to explain why some of these behaviours happen.

Understanding other forms of harm linked to nude-image sending and sharing behaviours

This research also heard about other image-related experiences reported by respondents that did not take place within relationships and were therefore considered out of scope for this report. Nevertheless, these are important to document due to their potential to cause harm, and in some instances, the ways in which they were related to existing illegal behaviours. These were:

- **People sending nude images without asking if this was what the recipient wanted** – We heard about experiences where perpetrators had sent 'unsolicited' images that the recipients did not ask for. These photos were nude and/or sexual in nature.
- **People sending nude images as part of a pattern of self-destructive behaviour** – We heard from a small number of women who described sending nudes to large numbers of strangers online during periods of severe mental health challenges, and where the behaviour was contributing to their mental distress. Two women described these behaviours as a form of "self-harm".

Recommendations for further research

This research has documented image-based abusive behaviours and outlined the motivations of these behaviours, as well as their consequences for victims. It also explored the perpetrator perspective on some of these types of image-based abuse, most notably on the non-consensual sharing on of nude images.

It is important more research is done in this area to document additional forms of harm linked to nude-image sending and sharing, and further unpack the factors that lead to these behaviours. Topics for further research might include:

- Further exploring different expectations and assumptions around consensual nude image sending.
- Building on the understanding of perpetrator perspectives outlined in this report – specifically including coercive behaviours and the non-consensual creation of images.
- Developing a more detailed understanding of the other types of harm linked with image-based behaviours that typically seemed to occur outside relationships – for example, the unsolicited sending of nude images and behaviours referred to as "self-harm" by respondents.

Revealing Reality will work with stakeholders such as domestic abuse charities, UK government departments, and representatives from the education sector to develop further actionable recommendations.