Revenge Porn: The influence of gender biases and Just World Beliefs on victim blaming among adults.

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Submitted to the National College of Ireland, April 2019

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my family and friends, especially my mom for providing me with endless support and continuous encouragement throughout my years of study and through the process of writing this research project. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them. Thank you.

I also wish to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Conor Nolan for his guidance and constant support throughout the course of this project. His patience and constant encouragement were pivotal for the completion of this research project.

Finally, I would like to thank all the people that took the time to participate on the study. This could not have been possible without you.

Abstract

Drawing on defensive attribution theory and gender-role stereotypes, this study examines the influence of Belief in a Just World (BJW) and gender biases in revenge porn victim blaming. Two research questions were addressed (1) Does gender and Just World beliefs have an influence on revenge porn victim blaming? (2) How do victim blaming levels in revenge porn differ across the observer's gender and perpetrator-victim sex. Participants were recruited through social media (N = 340). A 2x1 quasi-experimental design was used where participants were randomly assigned to one of two vignettes that portrayed a revenge porn case: one with female-victim and one with a male-victim. Then participants answered a Victim Blaming Scale and the Global Just World Belief scale. Results indicated that BJW and gender have a significant influence in victim blaming levels. Additionally, there was a negative association between BJW and victim blaming levels. Results also showed that males blame the victim to a greater extent than females and that perpetrator-victim sex does not influence victim blaming levels. Overall, results from the current study highlight the need for educational programs to avoid victims being assess on extra-legal factors.

Keywords: revenge porn, victim blaming, just world belief, gender.

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Introduction

New digital devices along with new practices of sharing intimate images between partners have given birth to a new phenomenon commonly referred to as "revenge porn". It has been described as the act of disclosing intimate imagery of another person without their consent onto social media platforms such as Facebook (Bambauer, 2014; Citros & Franks, 2014). This is shared with the intent to humiliate or harm the individual depicted in the image who is often the perpetrator's previous partner (Burris, 2014). According to many researchers revenge porn is a new form of intimate violence that has become a prominent issue in today's world (Citron & Franks, 2014; Henry & Powell, 2016 Parliament of Victoria, 2013). Recently, it was estimated that there were around 2000 websites worldwide created with the intention to victimize countless individuals, both males and females of all ages (Short, Brown, Pitchford & Barnes, 2017). As is the case with other forms of intimate violence, research shows that victims of revenge porn often face multiple negative consequences due to being victimized (Citron & Franks, 2014).

Research exploring these negative consequences has shown that victims of revenge porn experience public shame, humiliation and mental health problems (Powell & Henry, 2015). For instance, in a recent qualitative interview-based study conducted by Bates (2017) on how revenge porn affected female survivors' mental health, it was found that victims often present with multiple issues that include PTSD, anxiety and depression. Victims also presented low levels of self-esteem and confidence. Each of these symptoms is also often present among victims of harassment, rape and stalking (Gruber & Fineran, 2007; Ho, Dinh, Bellefontaine, & Irving, 2012; Weiss, 2010). Research also demonstrates that victims of revenge porn are negatively impacted in other domains of their life such as employment (Citron & Franks, 2014). Consistent with these findings, results from a representative survey

revealed that thirty-five percent of reporting employers discovered content online that prevented them from hiring a candidate and stated that provocative images were the main source of content (Ryan, 2010).

Victim Blaming

In addition to the aforementioned consequences, current studies suggest that there is a tendency to hold victims of revenge porn responsible for their own victimization. This phenomenon of victim blaming has been defined as "the extent to which members of society hold a victim responsible for his or her own victimization" (as cited in Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013, p.205). Literature shows that it is present in multiple forms of intimate violence, including but not limited to rape (Strömwall, Alfredsson, & Landström, 2015), stalking (Scott, Gavin, Sleath, & Sheridan, 2014), and domestic violence (Valor-Segura, Expósito, & Moya, 2011). Often it is suggested that victim blaming is one of the primary factors that contribute to the underreporting of intimate violence offenses such as rape (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Studies have also indicated that in many cases victims experienced post offense trauma as result of victim blaming (Yamawaki, Darby & Queiroz, 2007). Furthermore, in revenge porn scenarios this seems to be a highly prevalent issue since in many cases, the victims themselves were the ones who initially took the photo and shared it with a partner in the first place (Cecil, 2014; Citron & Franks, 2014). This phenomenon of victim blaming has been of great interest for researchers over the years, and a significant amount of empirical research has tried to determine the factors underlying victim blaming in other forms of intimate violence. Many concur that victim blaming in these scenarios can be explained by the concept that individuals are heavily influenced by a number of biases that are utilized when judging the situation (Bieneck, & Krahe, 2011; Grubb, & Harrower, 2008). Studies suggest numerous factors underlying this phenomenon. However, most researchers

exploring this phenomenon of victim blaming agree that two of the most influential biases associated with victim blaming are gender biases and beliefs in a just world (Landström, Strömwall, & Alfredsson, 2015).

Just World Beliefs

The Just World theory proposes that most individuals believe the world is a just and fair place and people deserve what they get. According to this theory, believing in a just world provides individuals with a sense of safety, that allow individuals to believe they are in control of their own behaviour (Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013). This sense of control allows individuals to maintain a level of confidence about the future because it makes their environment a predictable and manageable place (Lodewijkx, Wildschut, Nijstad, Savenije & Smit, 2001). With regards to victim blaming, researchers argue that victim blaming is a reaction individuals have when their just world beliefs are threatened (Valor-Segura, Expósito, & Moya, 2011). Many studies investigating the nature of the relationship between just world beliefs and victim blaming have provided significant evidence suggesting that individuals blame attributions are heavily influence by this measurable construct (Furnham, 2003; Landström, Strömwall, & Alfredsson, 2015). According to these studies, just world beliefs is a significant predictor of victim blaming in many types of intimate violence. For instance, strong relationships have been found between individuals' beliefs in a just world and the degree to which they blame rape victims (Murray, Spadafore & McIntosh, 2005; Pinciotti & Orcutt, 2017), whereby individuals with strong beliefs in a just world will attribute higher levels of victim blame and vice versa (Strömwall, Alfredsson & Landström, 2013; Van den Bos & Maas, 2009). According to theory, just world beliefs act as a psychological buffer against harsh realities, giving individuals a perceived control over their behaviour leading to lower risks of being the victims themselves (Furnham, 2003).

Furthermore, researchers suggest that these results are also due to the concept that individuals with strong just world beliefs hold the idea that they have control over their actions and therefore by avoiding the behaviour of the victim they won't be the victims themselves (Hammond, Berry, & Rodriguez, 2011).

Gender Biases

In relation to gender biases, studies of many forms of intimate violence have shown that observers' gender and perpetrator-victim sex have a strong influence on victim-blaming (Scott, Rajakaruna, Sheridan, & Gavin, 2015; Vandiver & Dupalo, 2013). With regards to observers' gender, research has demonstrated that males have a greater tendency to blame the victim than females (Cowan 2000; Grubb & Harrower 2009; Krahe, Temkin & Bieneck, 2007; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). For instance, Dunlap, Hodell, Golding and Wasarhaley, (2012) conducted a study using a mock juror paradigm related to stalking situations and results indicated that females are more likely to judge the perpetrator as guilty, and to view victims more positively and to view perpetrators negatively. Results from these studies can be explained with reference to the defensive attribution hypothesis (Grubb & Harrower, 2009; Scott & Gavin, 2018). According to this theory, attribution of blame in many situations depends upon two main factors. The first factor relates to the observer's perceived similarity to the victim, and the second factor is related to the observer's perceived probability of facing a similar situation (Grubb & Harrower, 2009). This theory suggest that negative victim perceptions will decrease as observer perceived similarity to the victim increases. According to the defensive attribution theory this acts as a defense mechanism to protect the observer from being blamed in the case they face a similar situation in the future (Grubb, & Turner, 2012). Researchers studying many forms of intimate violence have suggested that women are more prone to identify themselves with the victims because, often they are the ones that

experience these types of victimizations (Herzog, 2008; Scott, Rajakaruna, Sheridan, & Gavin, 2015). Despite the aforementioned evidence, not many studies have examined the influence of observers' gender in revenge porn victim blaming and results have been inconsistent. In a study conducted by Bothamley and Trully (2018), it was found that males show higher levels of victim blaming when compared to females, yet Morries (2017) found the contrary. Furthermore, other studies failed to find gender differences in levels of victim blaming (Gavin & Scott, 2018). In spite of the strong evidence indicating that males tend to blame victims to a larger extent than females in many forms of intimate violence and a dearth of research within revenge porn, one can argue that more research is required.

Another factor that seems to influence the likelihood of a victim being held responsible for the offense is perpetrator-victim sex. Numerous studies, using a vignette approach concerning multiple types of intimate violence such as rape, have shown evidence that male victims of female perpetrators are more likely to be blamed for the situation (Corbally, 2015; Gavin & Scott, 2016; Seelau & Seelau, 2005; Vandier & Lupalo, 2012). These results have been explained with reference to gender role stereotypes. According to early theorists within this field, individuals rely on multiple gender role stereotypes (cognitive shortcuts) to drive decision making and judgment in situations where they are asked to attribute blame in intimate violence offenses (Howard, 1984). Research shows that females are often portrayed as weak, vulnerable and more likely to be the victims, while males are presented as dominant, threatening and able to resist an attack when it is occurring (Dunlap et al., 2012; Gerber, 1991; Sinclair, 2012). Therefore, the findings indicating that males are more likely to be perceived as blameworthy can be understood in light of the incompatibility between the stereotypes about men and being a victim. That being said, in a study conducted by Gavin and Scott (2018) exploring the link between perpetrator-victim sex

and victim blaming in revenge porn scenarios specifically, the authors reported that perpetrator-victim sex did not in fact influence perceptions of responsibility. Yet no other study has been carried out to support this result and the sample used was very limited. Arguably, there is more empirical evidence supporting the idea that women are held less responsible when compared to men.

The current study

One in ten adults have been threatened with the release of intimate images by an ex-partner and 60% of them have been a victim of revenge porn (Eichorn, 2013). Often, victims of revenge porn not only faced multiple negative consequences but also are blame for their own victimization (Cecil, 2014; Citron & Franks, 2014). However, despite its growing prevalence and the negative consequences associated with it, the factors contributing to revenge porn victim blaming remain understudied. Nevertheless, years of research exploring the factors underlying victim blaming in forms of intimate violence other than revenge porn have identified a number of factors that seem to play a role when individuals are attributing blame or responsibility to victims and perpetrators (Bieneck, & Krahe, 2011; Grubb, & Harrower, 2008). As previously mentioned, the two most salient factors are gender biases and individuals' beliefs in a just world (Landström, Strömwall, & Alfredsson, 2015). Studies often report that individuals with strong beliefs in a just world tend to blame the victim, more often with the intent to restore some justice in the world (Furnham, 2003; Van den Bos & Maas, 2009; Strömwall, Alfredsson, & Landström, 2015; Valor-Segura, Expósito, & Moya, 2011; Scott, Gavin, Sleath, & Sheridan, 2014). With regards to gender biases, studies show that males blame the victims to a larger extent than females (Cowan 2000; Grubb & Harrower 2009; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010) and this is often explained through the defensive attribution theory. Furthermore, numerous studies have shown that female victims are

attributed less blame than male victims (Corbally, 2015; Gavin & Scott, 2016; Seelau & Seelau, 2005) and these results are often associated with gender role stereotypes. In light of the dearth of research in the area of revenge porn and in consideration with the factors that have found to influence victim blaming in other forms of intimate violence, it is of interest to investigate whether similar factors contribute to victim levels in revenge porn. Consequently, this study aims to narrow the literature gap in this form of intimate violence by conducting empirical research to assess the influence of observer gender, perpetrator-victim sex and beliefs in a just world in revenge porn victim blaming, and to assess gender differences in the attribution of said blame.

Two research questions will be addressed:

1) Does gender and Just World beliefs have an influence on revenge porn victim blaming among adults?

2) How do victim blaming levels in revenge porn differ across the observer's gender and victim sex?

Considering the available literature, it is hypothesized that: (1) gender and just world beliefs will significantly predict victim blaming levels in revenge porn; (2) higher levels of just world beliefs will be associated with higher levels of victim blaming; (3) males will significantly attribute more blame to the victim than females; (4) individuals will attribute more blame to male victims than to female victims.

Methods

Participants

The initial sample comprised of 473 individuals over the age of 18 drawn from a community sample. 125 individuals were excluded from the analyses because they had incomplete responses. Furthermore, due to the nature of the study, the analyses were restricted to participants who identified as male or female, therefore 8 non-dichotomized gender participants were excluded. The final sample then, comprised of 340 individuals (185 males and 155 females). Participants were recruited using an opportunistic snowballing sampling technique. A video and a poster with the link to the survey was distributed through the following social media sites: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn (See Appendix A). No incentive was used to recruit participants.

Measures

Demographics. Participants were asked to indicate gender (male, female or other).

Vignettes. The scenarios chosen for the present study were based on a previous research attempt to understand Revenge Porn Victim-blaming. Two vignettes, one with a female-victim and one with a male-victim were used. The vignettes involved a situation in which a couple broke up but while they were dating, the victim took a photo of himself/herself and sent the photo to their partner. After they ended the relationship, the ex-partner posted the photo online (see Appendix B and C). The scenarios were adopted from Bothamley & Tully, (2018) study in revenge porn victim blaming.

Belief in a Just World. The Global Belief in a Just World Scale (GBJWS) (Lipkus, 1991) was used to assess participants' general beliefs in a Just World. An example item from the scale is "I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves". This scale contains 7 items and responses are based on a 6-point scale (1 = strong disagreement, 6

= strong agreement). Scores range from 7 to 42 and higher scores indicate higher levels of

Just World beliefs. Combrach's alpha for the present sample was .82. The scale has been

shown to be stable and cross-culturally generalizable (Reich & Wang, 2015) (see Appendix

D).

      Victim Blaming. This four items scale was adopted from previous literature in

revenge porn victim-blaming (Morris, 2017). The scale assesses the levels of responsibility

for the offense assigned to the victim (see Appendix A and B). Participants answered

questions similar to "[Victim name] is at fault for what happened". Responses are based on a

5-point scale (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree). Scores range from 4 to 28 and

higher scores indicated greater levels of victim blame. Combrach's alpha for the present

sample was .99.

Design

      The current study used a quantitative approach. A 2x1 quasi-experimental design was

implemented using questionnaires containing vignettes and related questions. Prior to starting

the questionnaire participants were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental

conditions: The first condition involved a vignette portraying a female victim. The second

condition involved a vignette portraying a male victim. All participants answered the same

questionnaires.

      To investigate the first and second hypotheses a within-subjects design was used.

Gender and Just World beliefs acted as the predictor variables while victim-blaming levels

acted as the criterion variable. To investigate the third and fourth hypotheses a between-

subject design was used. Participants gender (male and female) and perpetrator-victim sex

acted as the independent variables

Procedure

      In the present study, a vignette taken from Bothamley & Tully, (2018) was altered. The initial vignette portraying a female victim of a male perpetrator was altered to portray a male victim or a female perpetrator. Only names and pronouns were changed. Prior to data collection, the vignette portraying a male victim was subjected to a pilot study. An opportunistic sample of participants (n=6) was questioned regarding their scenario comprehension (see Appendix E). Participants that took part in the pilot study were all over 18 years old and were provided with a written informed consent. Participants reported that the scenario was comprehensive.

      Participants in the current study were prompted with a post containing information about the study and a link to complete the questionnaire in their social media feeds (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram) (see Appendix A). Upon clicking in the link participants were randomly assign to one of two Survey Monkey questionnaires: One with the vignette portraying a female victim and the one with a the vignette portraying a male victim. Participants were randomly assigned using *Learning Statistic is awesome* random redirect tool. Then participants were presented with an information sheet detailing the nature of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to withdraw at any point prior to submitting their answers and the potential risk associated with taking part in the study (see Appendix F). This page was followed by the consent form where participants were required to confirm they were over 18 years old, that they wanted to take part in the study and that they understood their right to withdraw (see Appendix G). After proving consent participants moved to the first questionnaire where participants indicated their gender (male, female or other) and completed the GBJWS (see Appendix D). This was followed by the short vignette and the Victim Blaming Scale questionnaire (see Appendix A and B). Once participants completed the questionnaires, they were taken to a debrief page with the details

of the study and a mental health referral sheet with information on the available resources to diminish any distress caused by the survey (see Appendix H). In average participants took 4 minutes. Moreover, each page within the questionnaire remind participants of their right to withdraw at any prior to submitting their answers. Indicating that they could do so by closing the Survey Monkey Window.

Ethical considerations. Ethical approval was granted by the National College of Ireland ethics committee. However, there were major ethical concerns due to the sensitivity of the topic. There was a possibility that participants would feel distress and/or discomfort when completing this survey. To minimize this, participants were reminded at every step of the process of their right to withdraw without penalty at any point, prior to submitting their answers. Additionally, a list of available mental health resources was provided upon survey completion.

Results

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies for gender are presented in table 1. Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for continuous variables are presented in table 2. The current sample demonstrate moderate levels of just world beliefs and moderate levels victim blaming. The inspection of the histogram for all variable showed that the data is negatively skewed and therefore non-normally distributed.

Table 1

Frequencies for the gender in the current sample (N = 340)

Variable	Frequency	Valid Percentage
Gender		
Male	185	54.4
Female	155	45.6

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of all continuous variables

	Mean (95% Confidence Intervals)	Std. Error Mean	Median	SD	Range
GBJW	20.10 (19.46-20.74)	.33	20	6.02	7-37
Victim Blaming	12.38 (12.11-12.65)	.14	13	5.53	4-18

Three statistical tests were conducted to investigate the hypotheses in the present study. To investigate the first and second hypothesis a multiple regression analysis was performed. The aim was to determine how well victim blaming levels could be explained by two variables: gender (male or female), and just world beliefs.

Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. Correlations between the predictor variables and the criterion variable included in the study were examined (see Table 3 for full details). The two predictor variables were significantly correlated with the criterion variable, and these significant effects ranged from $r = -.16$ (GBJW) to $r = .23$ (gender). The correlations between the predictor variables were also assessed with a r values of -.10. Results indicated that there was no violation of the assumption of multicollinearity and that the data was suitable for examination through multiple linear regression analysis.

Since no *a priori* hypotheses had been made to determine the order of entry of the predictor variables, a direct method was used for the analysis. The two predictor variables explained 7% of variance in Victim Blaming levels ($F (2, 337) = 12.65$, $p < .001$). Both gender and JWB were found to uniquely predict Victim Blaming levels to a statistically significantly level: Gender ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$), and GJWB ($\beta = -.13$, $p = .012$) (see Table 4 for full details).

Table 3

Correlations between all continuous variables.

Variables	1	2	3
1. Victim Blaming	1		
2. GBJW	-.16**	1	

| 3. Gender | | | | .23*** | | -.10*** | | 1 |

Note. Statistical significance: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table 4

Multiple regression model predicting victim blaming scores

	R^2	Adj R^2	β	B	SE	CI 95% (B)
Model	.07***	.06				
Gender			.22***	1.10	.27	.57 / 1.62
GBJW			-.13*	-.06	.02	-.09 / -.01

Note. R^2 = R-squared; Adj R^2 = Adjusted R-squared; β = standardized beta value; B = unstandardized beta value; SE = Standard errors of B; CI 95% (B) = 95% confidence interval for B; N = 340; Statistical significance: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

As stated above, data was non-normally distributed and therefore non-parametric tests were carried out. To investigate the third hypothesis a Mann-Whitney test was perform to compare levels of Victim Blaming in Revenge porn scenarios between males and females. There was a significant difference in scores (U= 10412.50, p < .001) with females (Md = 13, n = 155) scoring higher than males (Md = 12, n = 185). The magnitude of the differences in the means *(Z* = 4.39) was small (Cohen's d = .24).

Finally, to investigate the fourth hypothesis an additional Mann-Whitney test was performed to compared Victim blaming levels between two conditions: male victim condition and female victim condition. There was a non-significant difference in scores (U = 13996.50, Z= -.51, p = .61).

Discussion

Victim blaming has been shown to be prevalent in revenge porn scenarios (Cecil, 2014; Citron & Franks, 2014). In light of this, the present study sought to understand the potential factors that might be contributing to this phenomenon. Based on previous research attempts to uncover variables affecting victim blaming in other forms of intimate violence, the current study investigated the influence of Beliefs in a just world, observers' gender and perpetrator-victim sex on victim blaming levels in revenge porn scenarios. Derived from the literature, four hypotheses were proposed. First, it was hypothesized that observers' gender and belief in a just world significantly influence victim blaming levels. Results from this study supported this hypothesis. Secondly, we hypothesized that higher levels of just world beliefs will be associated with higher levels of victim blaming. Interestingly, data from the present sample did not supported this hypothesis. In contrast, results from the current research indicated that higher levels of just world beliefs are associated with lower levels of victim blaming. Thirdly, it was hypothesized that males will attribute more blame to the victim than females. Findings from the current research did not support this hypothesis. Conversely, results indicated that females attributed higher levels of blame to the victim than males. Finally, it was hypothesized that individuals will attribute more blame to male victims than to female victims. However, the data for the current sample did not support this hypothesis. Results indicated that that perpetrator-victim sex does not influence victim blaming levels in revenge porn.

With regards to observers' gender and just world beliefs influence on victim blaming, literature shows that these are cognitive biases that influence peoples' tendency to attribute blame to victims and perpetrators of various types of crimes (Strömwall, Alfredsson & Landström, 2013; Van den Bos & Maas, 2009). Researchers have suggested that the two

most influential biases are observers' gender and their beliefs in a just world (Landström, Strömwall, & Alfredsson, 2015). Based on the literature, in the present study it was hypothesized that gender and just world beliefs will significantly predict victim blaming levels in revenge porn. Consistent with our hypothesis and previous research results from the current study suggest that individuals' gender and beliefs in a just world predict victim blaming levels in revenge porn. Findings suggest that revenge porn victim blaming is indeed influenced by some of the factors that contribute to victim blaming in other forms of intimate violence such as rape, stalking and domestic violence. Therefore, providing support for the notion that this form of intimate violence can be studied based on the literature available for rape, stalking and or domestic violence. Furthermore, it opens avenues for the construction of future models attempting to explain this phenomenon. Despite the perceived influence of gender and BJW in the current study, it is important to highlight that results indicated that observer gender and beliefs in a Just world only contributed to the victim blaming levels to a small degree. Thus, further research is needed to understand what other factors could potentially contribute to a greater degree, to revenge porn victim blaming. It is possible that the inclusion of other factors could result in observers' gender and just world beliefs being no longer significant.

With regards to the relationship between victim blaming and beliefs in a just world, literature in other forms of intimate violence have consistently shown that individuals' blame attributions are influenced by this construct. Studies have indicated that stronger beliefs in a just world will results in higher levels of victim blame (Strömwall, Alfredsson & Landström, 2013; Van den Bos & Maas, 2009). However, results from the present study showed that these two variables are significantly related, yet the direction of the relationship is opposite to what has been demonstrated. Higher levels of just world beliefs are associated with lower levels of victim blaming. A possible explanation for the direction of the relationship between

just world beliefs and victim blaming could be related to the applicability of the Just World

theory as a unidimensional construct. Some researchers argue that just world belief (JWB)

should be divided into two concepts: JWB-other and JWB-self, whereby JWB-other is related

to the belief that the world is a fair place to others and JWB-self is the belief that the world is

a fair place to the self (Bal & van den Bos, 2015; Begue & Bastounis, 2003; Sutton &

Douglas, 2005). In rape, studies have suggested that each concept is associated with different

levels of victim blaming. For instance, in a research conducted by Hayes, Lorenz and Bell,

(2013) it was found that strong JWB-self was associated with lower victim blaming attitudes

and JWB-other was associated with higher victim blaming attitudes. This could perhaps

provide an explanation for the results found in the current study, possibly participants from

the current sample were responding to the JWB questionnaire from the belief that the world is

a just and save place to themselves rather than to others. Indeed, Fetchenhauer, Jacobs, and

Belschak, (2005) affirmed that these results are not surprising within the notion of victim

blaming, particularly in the cases of sexual violence. That being said, it is worth noting that

the power of the association was significantly small and therefore results should be taken

with cautions. Additionally, it is important to highlight that there are many unidimensional

JWB scales and it is possible that different scales might yield different results.

Furthermore, literature has shown that males have a greater tendency to blame the

victim than females (Scott, Rajakaruna, Sheridan, & Gavin, 2015; Vandiver & Dupalo,

2013). In light of these findings the present study hypothesized that males will significantly

attribute more blame to the victim than females. Inconsistent with our hypothesis, results in

the present study indicated that females attributed higher levels of blame to the victim than

males. A possible explanation for the results going in the opposite direction to the hypothesis

could be related to the defensive attribution theory. This theory suggests that attribution of

blame and judgments of situations depends upon the observer's perceived similarity to the victim and the observer's perceived likelihood of experiencing a similar situation (Grubb & Harrower, 2009). In light of this, it could be argued that females in the present sample presented low perceived similarity to the revenge porn victim portrayed in the vignette. Perhaps, female participants in the study would not agree to share their private naked images with their partner in the first place, thus perceiving the situation as something unlikely to occur to them. This is a plausible explanation since studies looking at the prevalence of revenge porn have shown that males are more likely to be victimized than females (Gámez-Guadix, Almendros, Borrajo, & Calvete, 2015; Priebe & Svedin, 2012; Walker & Sleath, 2017). Perhaps these results suggest that males are more likely to identify with the victim because they are more likely to experience this type of victimization. However, it is important to highlight that data from the present study showed a marginal significance. It is therefore imperative to replicate these findings before drawing any strong conclusion.

Previous studies in other forms of intimate violence have indicated that, male victims are attributed more blamed when compared to females (Corbally, 2015; Seelau & Seelau, 2005). This relationship has been explained with regards to gender role stereotypes. Often there is an incompatibility between the male stereotype and being the victim. Based on these figures, in the present study, it was hypothesized that individuals will attribute more blame to male victims than to female victims. However, in contrast with the hypothesis, results from the present study indicated that perpetrator-victim sex does not influence victim blaming levels in revenge porn. These findings then align with Gavin and Scott's (2018) findings with regards to perpetrator victim-sex having a lack of influence on victim blaming levels in revenge porn particularly. Perhaps individuals in the current sample were not greatly susceptible to gender role stereotypes. Indeed, there is a growing body of research suggesting

that gender stereotypes are flexible and dynamic structures (Garcia-Retamero, Müller & López-Zafra 2011). Thus, providing support for the notion that the current sample might not have been as influenced by gender role stereotypes, as found in previous studies.

Findings from the current research have several implications. The current study contributes significantly to the small existing body of research surrounding revenge porn literature. First it provides support for the notion that revenge porn victims are indeed blamed for their own victimization, highlighting one of the similarities of revenge porn with other forms of intimate violence. It indicates that revenge porn victims are indeed perceived different base on extra-legal factors, which may result in poor victim treatment, biased investigation or unfair punishment. Thus, the present research highlights the need for educational programmes with the aim to increase understanding of the phenomenon of victim blaming, particularly in court settings. (Jurors, judges etc.). Another implication from the present study and possibly the most important is that it provided concrete factors contributing to victim blaming levels in revenge porn. Findings indicating that both observer gender and JWB influence victim blaming suggests areas to focus on when developing educational programs. Similarly, it provides policy makers with relevant information that can be used to ensure measures are put in place to guarantee victims of revenge porn received a non-judgmental, emphatic response not only when reporting the offense but also within court settings.

Even though the current study contributes to the literature in many ways, it is not free from limitations. First, although results in the present research were significant, it is important to note that effect sizes were arguably small. Therefore, the generalizability of the results is limited. Secondly, the vignettes used in the present study portrayed a hypothetical scenario and therefore the internal validity may be greater than the ecological validity due to

the fact that we cannot be certain on how individuals will respond in real life situations (Davies, Austen & Rogers, 2011). However, vignette methodologies had been regarded as the most valid and reliable method available to investigate victim blaming in light of the difficulties associated with studying a highly sensitive topic (Van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). Another potential limitation associated with the vignettes relates to the fact that variables such as race, the length of the relationship, or how the relationship ended were not controlled for. All of these variables have shown to have an influence in victim blaming levels (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; Pina, Holland & James, 2017). Thus, studies including these variables could potentially yield completely different results. Furthermore, as alluded earlier, the current study used a unidimensional just world belief scale. Future research should include a bidimensional scale to ensure further understanding of the influence of this construct in victim blaming levels particularly in revenge porn. It is noteworthy that in contrast with the majority of studies in victim blaming, the current study used a large community sample and not a student sample. Therefore, results from the current study could be regarded as having greater generalizability. However, demographic variables such as age, race, education or profession were not collected, consequently it is not certain that the current sample was representative of a community one.

In spite of the aforementioned limitations further research should explore the relationship of gender and JWB in revenge porn victim blaming by including either manipulating the vignettes to include variables like the mentioned above and measure JWB as a bi-dimensional construct with the attempt to help clarify the robustness of the results. Additionally, further research is necessary to determine whether findings can be extended to non-heterosexual revenge porn situations.

In summary, the current study reveals that victims of revenge porn are blamed for their own victimization to some extent. Moreover, it suggests that victim blaming levels in revenge porn are influenced by similar extra-factors than victims of other forms of intimate violence. Findings indicate that observer gender and belief in a just world impacts victim blaming levels in revenge porn scenarios. However, the nature of these relationships were different to what it was predicted. Interestedly, low just world beliefs were associated with higher victim blaming and males attributed more blame to the victim than females. Yet, the power of the results was small, with further research needed to assess the robustness of the findings. Nevertheless, the study raised a number of questions: Does increasing awareness of the biases contributing to the victim blaming decrease the likelihood of this phenomenon occurring? Are gender role stereotypes indeed changing to the extent to which perpetrator-victim sex does not longer have an effect in victim blaming levels? Furthermore, due to the growing popularity of this behaviour along with the interesting findings gather from this study future research should continue to explore factors contributing to victim blaming in revenge porn.

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Appendix A

Social media post to recruit participants

Appendix B

Female victim vignette

Please read the scenario below:

"Heidi and Jason had been dating for a short while. Throughout the brief relationship Jason and Heidi agreed that it would be fine for Jason to have some private naked images of Heidi on his mobile phone for him to view personally. After dating for a while the relationship came to an ended due to Heidi being unfaithful to Jason. Following this Heidi discovered that Jason had been posting the intimate photos of her online, with details such as her name and email address. Jason had posted the photos after his and Heidi's relationship had finished."

Victim Blaming Scale

Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about the scenario presented above.

1	2	3	4	5

Completely Disagree   Completely Agree

___ Heidi is responsible for the photo being online.

___ Heidi is to blame for the situation.

___ Heidi is at fault for what happened.

___ Heidi could have prevented the situation.

NOTE: You can withdraw from the study at any point prior to submitting your questionnaire answers by closing this window.

Appendix C

Male victim vignette

Please read the scenario below:

"Jason and Heidi had been dating for a short while. Throughout the brief

relationship Heidi and Jason agreed that it would be fine for Heidi to have

some private naked images of Jason on her mobile phone for her to view

personally. After dating for a while the relationship came to an ended due

to Jason being unfaithful to Heidi. Following this Jason discovered that

Heidi had been posting the intimate photos of him online, with details such

as his name and email address. Heidi had posted the photos after her and

Jason's relationship had finished."

Victim Blaming Scale

Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about the scenario

presented above.

 1   2   3   4   5

Completely Disagree   Completely

Agree

___ Jason is responsible for the photo being online.

___ Jason is to blame for the situation.

___ Jason is at fault for what happened.

___ Jason could have prevented the situation.

NOTE: You can withdraw from the study at any point prior to submitting your questionnaire

answers by closing this window.

Appendix D

Demographic Questions

Gender

- o Male

- o Female

- o Other

General Just World Beliefs Scale

Please indicate your level of agreement on the following scale with respect to how well each

statement applied to others and yourself.

1	2	3	4	5	6
strong disagreement					strong agreement

____ 1. I feel that people get what they are entitled to have.

____ 2. I feel that a person's efforts are noticed and rewarded.

____ 3. I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get.

____ 4. I feel that people who meet with misfortune have brought it on themselves.

____ 5. I feel that people get what they deserve.

____ 6. I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given.

____ 7. I basically feel that the world is a fair place.

NOTE: You can withdraw from the study at any point prior to submitting your questionnaire

answers by closing this window.

Appendix E

Pilot Study

Revenge Porn: The influence of gender biases and Just World beliefs in victim blaming among adults.

Participant,

This Study is to assess the vignette shown below is clear and suitable for the research.

By signing this consent form you are agreeing to take part in this pilot study. You have the right to withdraw from this pilot study at any time.

- o   I confirm that I am over 18

- o   I understand my right to withdraw at any point while answering the survey.

Vignette

> *"Jason and Heidi had been dating for a short while. Throughout the brief*
>
> *relationship Heidi and Jason agreed that it would be fine for Heidi to have*
>
> *some private naked images of Jason on her mobile phone for her to view*
>
> *personally. After dating for a while the relationship came to an ended due*
>
> *to Jason being unfaithful to Heidi. Following this Jason discovered that*
>
> *Heidi had been posting the intimate photos of him online, with details such*
>
> *as his name and email address. Heidi had posted the photos after her and*
>
> *Jason's relationship had finished."*

Please answer the following questions about the scenario presented above.

1. What was the gender of the individual in the nude photograph that was distributed online?

    a. Male

      b.   Female

2. What was the reason for the breakup between the couple?

      a.   Jason cheated on Heidi

      b.   Heidi cheated on Jason

      c.   No reason was provided

Appendix F

Participant information sheet

My name is Shirapta Huerta and I am currently conducting an undergraduate research project with National College of Ireland, under the supervision of Dr. Conor Nolan. Please read this information before conducting the experiment.

Title: Revenge Porn: The influence of gender bias and Just World beliefs in victim blaming among adults.

Voluntary participation: Your participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Purpose and procedure. The aim of the study is to examine the factors influencing victim blaming in revenge porn. If you agree to take part in the study a number of questions will be ask and it will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

Right to withdraw. You can withdraw from the study at any point prior to submitting your answer to the questions. Once answers are submitted it is not possible to withdraw data since the data collected is completely anonymous.

Benefits or Compensation. You may not directly benefit from this research; however, studies like this can make an important contribution to the literature in area.

Findings from the present study may be presented in national and international conferences and may be submitted for peer reviewed journals. Having said that, you will not be identifiable in any publication or presentation. No monetary or other forms or rewards will be given for the participation.

Risks. There are some risks associated with the participation in the current study. The topic may evoke some emotional feelings or discomfort. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you may withdraw from the study simply by closing your web browser.

Confidentiality. Participation is completely anonymous; no personal identifiable information

is required for you to complete this survey. Data will be stored electronically on a password

protected device and it will be retained for 1 year.

If you further questions you can contact my supervisor: Dr. Nolan conor.nolan@ncirl.ie

Thank you,

Shirapta

Appendix G

Consent Form

Factors influencing victim blaming in revenge porn.

Participant,

By signing this consent form you are agreeing to take part in the study. You are also confirming that you understand the right to withdraw from the study at any time before submitting your answers. Please be aware that you can withdraw from the study at anytime by closing the browser window.

- o I confirm that I am over 18

- o I want to take part in the study

- o I understand my right to withdraw at any point while answering the survey.

Appendix H

Debriefing and mental health referral sheet

Debriefing Piece

Thank you for taking part in this study. It was examining the influence of your gender and beliefs in a Just World and victim-sex in your tendency to attribute blame to revenge porn victims. If you feel upset or distress as a result of the questionnaire, please see below the resources available. Please seek for help is you need it.

Mental health Resources Referral Sheet

<u>Aware</u>

Aware offers a support line, email and nationwide (Ireland) support groups for people experiencing feeling of stress, anxiety and depression.

Support Line: 1800 80 48 48. Available Monday to Saturday from 10 am to 10pm.

Email Support : supportmail@aware.ie. Available 24 hr, every day.

Website: www.aware.ie

<u>Samaritans</u>

A listening service for everyone who wants to talk about whatever is in your mind.

Support Line: 116 123. Available 24 hours, every day.

Email Service: jo@samaritans.ie. Aim to replay within 12hrs.

Text service: 087 2 60 90 90 (non-free)

Website: www.samaritans.org

<u>SHINE</u>

Shine offers email support for individuals who are experiencing distress. Responses are made from trained psychotherapists.

Email: phil@shineonline.ie. Available 24 hrs Monday to Friday.

Website: www.shine.ie