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# The Malevolent Side of Revenge Porn Proclivity: Dark Personality Traits and Sexist Ideology

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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents a novel study, exploring a form of technology facilitated sexual violence (TFSV) known as revenge porn. Despite its emerging prevalence, little is known about the characteristics of revenge porn perpetrators. In the current study, a revenge porn proclivity scale was devised to examine participants' behavioural propensity to engage in revenge porn. One hundred adults, aged 18-54, were recruited online from a community sample. The correlational relationship between revenge porn proclivity and the self-reported endorsement of the Dark Triad, sadism, and ambivalent sexism was examined. Additional proclivity subscales of revenge porn enjoyment and revenge porn approval were also created. The study's main findings revealed a positive correlation between a greater behavioural propensity to engage in revenge porn and higher levels of the Dark Triad and ambivalent sexism. Moreover, endorsement of psychopathy was found to be the only Dark Triad trait that independently predicted revenge porn proclivity. The results suggest that perpetrators of revenge porn may have distinct personality profiles. Limitations and directions for future research are discussed.

## KEYWORDS

Ambivalent Sexism, Dark Triad, Nonconsensual Pornography, Proclivity, Revenge Porn, Sadism

## INTRODUCTION

Advancements in modern technology have enabled public access to a breadth of knowledge, facilitated by widespread communication that can reach both national and international audiences (Taylor, Fritsch, & Liederbach, 2015). However, the integration of communication technologies in our daily lives and intimate relationships (Klettke, Hallford, & Mellor, 2014) also provides additional opportunities for sexual exploitation and criminal victimization (Roberts, 2008). This is an emerging phenomenon of societal concern that has sparked research interest with a focus on the ethical dimension of technological advancement. The multidisciplinary domain of Technoethics is concerned with the study of moral, legal and social issues involving technology (Luppicini & Adell, 2008). One of these social and legal phenomena involving technology is that of 'revenge porn,' otherwise known as non-consensual pornography, currently sparking increasing media interest (BBC, 2016; Guardian, 2015). Whilst there exists a wealth of literature on perpetrators of traditional acts of sexual violence (Greathouse, Saunders, Matthews, Keller, & Miller, 2015), little is known of the characteristics of those who endorse and display revenge porn behaviour. An in-depth understanding of the psychological profiles of these individuals could benefit preventative and rehabilitative methods for reducing the prevalence of this crime (Gerhart, Ronan, Russ, & Seymour, 2013; Voller & Long, 2010). This paper examines the relationship between aversive personality traits and the behavioural propensity to engage in revenge porn behaviours.

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## THE GROWING PROBLEM OF REVENGE PORN: ETHICAL AND LEGAL ISSUES

Revenge porn is the act of sharing intimate, sexually graphic images and/or videos of another person onto public online platforms (e.g. Facebook) without their consent (Burris, 2014; Citron & Franks, 2014). These images are often either produced non-consensually (e.g. by means of surveillance or hacking) or consensually (e.g. by the victim in the context of either a private relationship or courtship) (Citron & Franks, 2014; Stroud & Henson, 2016). This is largely motivated by the malicious intent to harm and humiliate the victim, who is often the perpetrator's previous romantic partner (Burris, 2014; Citron & Franks, 2014). Not all acts are perpetrated for revenge, and can instead be committed as a means of blackmail, coercion, or for the enjoyment of causing torment upon others (Henry & Powell, 2016). For the purposes of this paper we will name all these acts revenge porn due to the intent behind the instigation of such events. However, the term non-consensual pornography is also frequently used in the literature to encompass all different facets of these behaviours (Citron & Franks, 2014).

Although revenge porn can affect individuals of all ages, sexuality and gender, it is predominantly perpetrated against, and severely negatively affects women (Citron & Franks, 2014; Poole, 2015; Salter & Crofts, 2015). Researchers have acknowledged that revenge porn reflects larger issues over women's social and interpersonal status, and can be seen as a form of hostility towards female autonomy (Citron & Franks, 2014; Poole, 2015) and policing women's sexuality, with large online communities (of males in their majority) enforcing the "bounds of appropriate femininity" by means of ridicule and harassment (Salter & Crofts, 2015, p.1). As Noah Berlatsky states: "the web has made it possible to crowdsource misogyny [...] and stalking" (2013, [www.digitaletics.org](http://www.digitaletics.org)).

While most people would consider sharing intimate images of themselves or other people online, without their consent, unethical, there are certain processes at play that make the perpetrators rationalize the act. These processes make the act seem more acceptable, and in some cases justified; such as the culpability of the victim in creating the images in the first place, or the victim's alleged infidelity against the perpetrator (Poole, 2015). Although these issues can, and do, affect men as well, it is female infidelity and display of sexuality that is punished and regulated to such a cruel degree (Poole, 2015).

The permanence and dissemination speed afforded by the internet can cause victims of revenge porn to endure great distress. This is often due to the difficulty in removing material published online, and also in preventing its re-distribution, due to legislation protecting free speech (Berlatsky, 2013; Dick et al., 2014). Furthermore, there are lucrative websites devoted to publishing revenge porn and displaying the victim's personal information linking them to their social media accounts (Stroud, 2014), profiting from victims' distress (Salter & Crofts, 2015). While these sites are protected under the Federal Communications Decency Act (1996; Berlatsky, 2013; Poole, 2015), where they cannot be prosecuted or held accountable for user-submitted content, the onus lies with the victim to sue websites requesting the names of the users in order to bring about lawsuits against them. Victims can seek (and have successfully sought) justice through tort law, suing for intentional infliction of emotional suffering (Citron & Franks, 2014). However, it is important to note that not all victims have the knowledge or financial resources to instigate civil suits against their perpetrators, and often, the confusion surrounding online harassment laws and lack of anonymity can act as a deterrent for both litigators and victims (Citron & Franks, 2014).

This severe lack of victim anonymity enables further harassment from others, both offline and online (Henry & Powell, 2015a). It is unsurprising that victims of revenge porn experience an array of negative effects, including the dissolution of relationships, problems with employment, and decreased self-esteem (Henry & Powell, 2015a). Some cases of revenge porn have even resulted in the victim committing suicide (Guardian, 2012; Independent, 2014).

Revenge porn has recently been acknowledged in legislation passed in England and Wales. As of April 2015, courts can prosecute individuals who non-consensually share sexual images or videos of another person (Criminal Justice and Courts Bill, 2015). Furthermore, those found guilty can be imprisoned for up to two years (Ministry of Justice, 2015). Within the first eight months since its criminalisation, police in England and Wales received 1,160 reports of revenge porn (BBC, 2016). Of additional concern is that a large proportion (61%) of these reports were not followed up due to victims no longer wanting to pursue an investigation (BBC, 2016). The lack of anonymity afforded to victims of revenge porn is seen as one of the reasons for these high attrition rates (Citron & Franks, 2014; Thom, 2015).

The aforementioned legal issues surrounding the legislation of the phenomenon, when linked with the ethical issues interwoven in this phenomenon, highlight the importance of further exploring this concerning societal issue to provide a more informed understanding of revenge porn and the motives of its perpetrators.

## **REVENGE PORN AS A FORM OF TECHNOLOGY FACILITATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

Whilst there is an absence of research devoted to revenge porn perpetration, there are aspects of revenge porn behaviour that can be found in research examining other forms of Technology Facilitated Sexual Violence (TFSV; Henry & Powell, 2016). These include cyber-dating abuse (Henry & Powell, 2015b; Martinez-Pecino & Duran, 2016), cyber-harassment (Woodlock, 2016), and the non-consensual sharing of sexual texts (Morelli, Bianchi, Baiocco, Pezzuti, & Chirumbolo, 2016). For example, sharing (or threatening to share) intimate images onto social media has been identified as a behaviour engaged in by perpetrators of cyber-dating abuse and harassment (Henry & Powell, 2015b; Woodlock, 2016).

Despite being in its infancy, research on TFSV has found support for the association between psychological characteristics and the perpetration of these acts. For example, Tang and Fox (2016) found that male participants who reported perpetrating sexual harassment online (e.g. issuing threats of rape) endorsed hostile sexism more than non-harassing participants. Furthermore, sexist beliefs have also been associated with greater levels of cyber-dating abuse, such as spreading false rumours about a partner online and sharing sexual texts received from a partner (Martinez-Pecino & Duran, 2016; Morelli et al., 2016). In addition, research has demonstrated a relationship between aversive personality traits and perpetrating forms of TFSV. For instance, endorsement of psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism have been associated with a greater propensity to sexually harass others (Zeigler-Hill, Besser, Morag, & Campbell, 2016), and greater enjoyment in doing so (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014). Moreover, a higher endorsement of these traits has been found to predict a greater likelihood to commit 'romantic revenge' after experiencing infidelity (Brewer, Hunt, James, & Abell, 2015). This is a particularly pertinent finding considering that revenge porn is largely perpetrated as an act of revenge. Furthermore, traits of psychopathy, such as high levels of impulsivity and irresponsibility, have been found to predict cyber-bullying behaviours, such as spreading private images online of another person (Kokkinos, Antoniadou, & Markos, 2014). Lastly, perpetrating online harassment was reported as most enjoyable by participants endorsing greater levels of sadism (Buckels et al., 2014). In summary, these findings present support for the association between psychological characteristics and the behavioural propensity to perpetrate an array of TFSV related to revenge porn. It would, therefore, be a reasonable assumption that research should examine the influence of the aforementioned factors in relation to revenge porn as well.

## Potential Factors Influencing Revenge Porn Proclivity

### *Sexist Beliefs*

TFSV is largely considered a form of gendered violence. It is argued that females are more likely to be victimised and they will experience greater negative impact, due to gender expectations rooted in societal norms (Henry & Powell, 2016). Sexist ideologies held towards gender roles, behaviours, and relationships in society are deemed an important factor in sexual violence, especially towards women (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2011). Furthermore, measures of sexist ideology, such as the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996), have recently been used to demonstrate the relationship between sexism and the perpetration of online sexual violence (Martinez-Pecino & Duran, 2016; Morelli et al., 2016; Tang & Fox, 2016). Therefore, it appears necessary that research also examines the relationship between sexism and revenge porn proclivity.

### *The Dark Triad*

The socially aversive traits of Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism are commonly studied in unison, and are referred to as the '*Dark Triad*' of personality (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The Dark Triad traits have been comprehensively reviewed (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013) and are characterised by high levels of callousness, egocentrism, low empathy, and a readiness to exploit others (Jones & Paulhus, 2011b, 2014). Despite their general overlap, the Dark Triad traits each have distinct properties. Psychopathy is most indicative of a severe lack of empathy for others and impulsivity, which may result in the abandonment of relationships with no concern for self-reputation (Hare & Neumann, 2008). Furthermore, psychopathic callousness is exercised with short-term action for immediate gratification (Jones & Paulhus, 2011a). This deficit in self-control is notably present in both criminal (Hare & Neumann, 2008) and non-criminal expressions of psychopathy (Hall & Benning, 2006). Both Machiavellianism and narcissism are also characterised by a callous affect which facilitates social manipulation, in addition to their unique factors (Jones & Paulhus, 2011b). Specific to Machiavellianism is a strategic orientation in which alliances may be built as part of ruthless manipulation (Jones & Paulhus, 2014). Instead, narcissists are identified by their self-perceived entitlement and grandiosity in which a driving motive behind callous behaviour is ego reinforcement (Bushman, Bonacci, van Dijk, & Baumeister, 2003). As stated previously, endorsement of the Dark Triad traits was found to predict a greater propensity to commit romantic revenge (Buckels et al., 2014), and greater enjoyment of tormenting others online (Brewer et al., 2015).

### *Sadistic Tendencies*

Sadism is often found to predict the infliction of suffering upon others, and is commonly associated with psychopathy and Machiavellianism (Buckels, Jones, & Paulhus, 2013). A sadistic personality denotes a person who purposely incites physical, psychological, or sexual harm upon others to demean and humiliate them, whilst motivated by their desire for enjoyment and power assertion (O'Meara, Davies, & Hammond, 2011). However, O'Meara et al. (2011) acknowledged that this definition rests on a continuum upon which levels of sadism can range from that considered 'everyday sadism' to 'pathological'. Nevertheless, everyday sadism has recently been found to predict sexual violence (Russell & King, 2016) and the enjoyment of online trolling (Buckels et al., 2014). It is also recommended that everyday sadism is measured in conjunction with the Dark Triad (Paulhus, 2014).

## THE CURRENT STUDY

Whilst progress has been made with regards to legislation and policy, the topic of revenge porn remains understudied. The current study is presented as the first to examine revenge porn proclivity and its association with particular psychological characteristics. Specifically, the objectives of this study were to: 1) assess the correlational relationship between the propensity to engage in revenge

porn and the endorsement of the Dark Triad, sadistic tendencies, and ambivalent sexism; and 2) provide a preliminary understanding of this phenomenon to eventually aid and benefit prevention, treatment, educational, and research efforts. In light of the current literature, it was hypothesised that revenge porn proclivity would be significantly related to: 1) higher levels of the Dark Triad; 2) everyday sadism; and 3) a greater endorsement of ambivalent sexism.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were recruited through advertising the study on social media (e.g. Facebook). The total sample consisted of 100 participants, comprising of 16 males and 82 females (two undisclosed). Due to the sensitive nature of the study's content, all participants were required to be aged 18 years and over. Participant ages ranged from 18-54 years ( $M = 25.81$ ,  $SD = 7.11$ ) and the majority of participants were British (87%).

### Measures

#### *The Short Version of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI)*

The short version of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) is a 12-item scale devised by Glick and Whitehead (2010). It is a reconstruction of the original 22-item ASI (Glick & Fiske, 1996), consisting of the items found to have the greatest factor loadings onto hostile sexism (six items) and benevolent sexism (six items). The items are presented as a series of statements regarding relationships between men and woman in society (e.g. 'women seek to gain power by getting control over men'). Participants were required to rate their agreement with each statement using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from disagree strongly (0) to agree strongly (5). An overall score was calculated by averaging the sum of all responses given by a participant. A higher ASI score is indicative of a greater endorsement of sexism. Extensive assessment of the short version of the ASI revealed good psychometric properties consistent with the full-length scale (Rollero, Glick, & Tartaglia, 2014). In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha of reliability for the short-ASI was  $\alpha = .70$ .

#### *The Short Dark Triad (SD3)*

The Short Dark Triad scale (SD3; Jones & Paulhus, 2014) contains 27 items and was implemented as an assessment of Machiavellianism (e.g. 'make sure your plans benefit yourself, not others';  $\alpha = .77$ ), narcissism (e.g. 'people see me as a natural leader';  $\alpha = .67$ ), and subclinical psychopathy (e.g. 'people who mess with me always regret it';  $\alpha = .71$ ). Each subscale contains nine items to which participants rated their agreement to using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). After relevant items were reverse coded, participants' average scores were computed for each subscale. Higher scores are representative of possessing greater levels of the trait. Extensive psychometric testing has been conducted on the utility of the SD3. Maples, Lamkin, and Miller (2014) found the SD3 to have adequate discriminant and criterion validity, as well as stronger convergent and incremental validity, than comparative measures available (e.g. The Dirty Dozen; Jonason & Webster, 2010).

#### *Comprehensive Assessment of Sadistic Tendencies (CAST)*

The Comprehensive Assessment of Sadistic Tendencies (CAST; Buckels & Paulhus, 2014) was used as a measure of everyday sadistic disposition to inflict harm upon others. The scale contains 18 items which measure three discrete types of sadistic tendencies: direct verbal sadism (e.g. 'I have purposely tricked someone and laughed when they looked foolish'; six items,  $\alpha = .75$ ); direct physical sadism (e.g. 'I enjoy tormenting people', five items,  $\alpha = .54$ ); and vicarious sadism (e.g. 'In video games, I like the realistic blood spurts', seven items,  $\alpha = .76$ ). Filler items were also intermixed in an attempt to

offset the negativity of the scale's items, as advised by Buckels and Paulhus (2014). Participants rated their agreement to these items using a 7-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). After relevant items were reverse scored, a composite variable of overall sadism was computed as an average of the three sadistic tendency scores. The overall CAST measure achieved adequate reliability ( $\alpha = .77$ ).

### *The Revenge Porn Proclivity Scale*

A proclivity scale<sup>1</sup> was created to assess the behavioural propensity to perpetrate an act of revenge porn. Proclivity scales have been effectively implemented among non-offender samples in research examining rape (Bohner et al., 1998; Bohner, Pina, Viki, & Siebler, 2010), sexual harassment (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2016), child molestation (Gannon & O'Connor, 2011), and animal abuse (Alleyne, Tilston, Parfitt, & Butcher, 2015; Parfitt & Alleyne, 2016). The use of these scales arguably provides an opportunity to detect offending behaviours among community samples that would otherwise remain unknown.

Consistent with other proclivity scales used within the literature (e.g. Alleyne, Gannon, Ó Ciardha, & Wood, 2014; Parfitt & Alleyne, 2016), participants in the current study were instructed to read scenarios in which they were the central character. In this study, participants read five scenarios, which each concluded with an intimate image of another person being shared onto the internet without consent. An example of the scenarios presented includes:

*'You and your partner have been together for a few years, but recently they have become distant with you. You try to do things to make them happy but they respond with little interest. A few days later, your partner arranges to meet up with you. Here they explain that they no longer want to be in a relationship, saying that they no longer love you. Afterwards you begin to think about all the lost time and effort you have invested into this ended relationship. Whilst going through photos on your phone, you come across a naked photo that your now ex-partner sent to you during the relationship. You then decide to upload this photo onto the Internet'*.

After each scenario, participants responded to a proclivity question (i.e. 'In this situation, would you do the same?') using a 5-point Likert scale. Response options ranged from 1 (definitely would not do the same) to 5 (definitely would do the same). This was followed by additional questions which gauged emotions of excitement, control, blame, amusement, anger, and regret towards the behaviours committed in the scenario (e.g. 'In this situation, how amused would you be?'). Again, participants rated their agreement to these items using a 5-point Likert scale (e.g. 1 = not at all amused to 5 = very amused).

A participant's proclivity score was computed by summing their ratings across all five scenarios to the question 'In this situation, would you do the same?'. Reliability for this proclivity scale was  $\alpha = .76$ . In addition, two further subscales were devised as exploratory components. A sum score for the responses to the questions on excitement, control, and amusement was computed to create a scale of revenge porn enjoyment. Secondly, the responses to the questions on blame, anger, and regret (reverse scored) were summed to form a scale of revenge porn approval. These subscales of revenge porn enjoyment ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and revenge porn approval ( $\alpha = .80$ ) also yielded high internal consistency.

### **Procedure**

The research was given ethical approval by the authors' university research ethics panel. The study was completed by participants online using Qualtrics and advertisements for the study were placed online, which included a link to the study's information sheet. Those who chose to participate were asked to provide their consent.



Participants were first asked to provide basic demographic questions (e.g. gender and nationality). Following this, they were presented with each questionnaire measure to complete, in the order of: the ASI; the CAST; the SD3; and lastly the series of five revenge porn proclivity scenarios. Participants were later debriefed and thanked.

## RESULTS

### Preliminary Analysis

Firstly, positive skewness was attended to by computing square root transformations for CAST, psychopathy and revenge porn enjoyment, and a log10 transformation was computed for revenge porn proclivity. All other assumptions of normality were met.

Consistent with previous research utilising proclivity measures (Alleyne et al., 2015, Gannon & O'Connor, 2011), only participants who emphatically stated their disagreement with the questions were regarded as presenting no endorsement of revenge porn. In using this method, it was found that 28.6% of participants presented at least some proclivity to perpetrating revenge porn (i.e. scored > 5 on the proclivity scale overall). In addition, 87% of participants reported some endorsement of revenge porn enjoyment (i.e. scored >15 on the enjoyment subscale overall), and 99% of participants expressed at least some approval of the revenge porn being committed in the scenarios (i.e. scored >15 on the approval subscale overall).

### Correlations

A Pearson's correlation analysis was computed including all variables to identify significant relationships (see Table 1). These findings were then used to inform the variables' input for a regression analysis, in order to further explain the prediction of revenge porn proclivity, approval and enjoyment.

Table 1. Pearson's correlation analysis of all variables

	Correlations							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1) ASI	—							
2) Machiavellianism	.43***	—						
3) Narcissism	.15	.32**	—					
4) Psychopathy	.09	.43***	.44***	—				
5) CAST	.14	.48***	.34***	.45***	—			
6) RP Proclivity	.21*	.32**	.29*	.36***	.16	—		
7) RP Approval	.28**	.34**	.09	.13	.02	.48***	—	
8) RP Enjoyment	.18	.19	.26**	.16	.06	.43***	.51***	—

Note: \*p < .05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001

As shown in Table 1, the CAST measure had a strong positive correlation with the SD3 measures of Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy, yet no significant correlation with revenge porn proclivity, approval or enjoyment. Endorsement of everyday sadism was, therefore, not related to greater revenge porn proclivity and so this hypothesis (2) was not supported.

However, higher levels of the SD3 and ASI were found to have a positive relationship with greater revenge porn proclivity, supporting the hypotheses made (1&3). In addition, the ASI and Machiavellianism each yielded a positive correlation with revenge porn approval. Lastly, higher levels of narcissism and Machiavellianism (although Machiavellianism is marginal,  $p = .06$ ) were both positively correlated with greater revenge porn enjoyment.

### **Predicting Proclivity**

The SD3 personality traits were entered together in a multiple regression as predictors of revenge porn proclivity. These variables significantly explained 18% of the variance in revenge porn proclivity,  $F(3,87) = 6.17, p = .001$ , in support of the hypothesis (1). However, only psychopathy remained an independently significant predictor of greater revenge porn proclivity ( $\beta = .23, p = .05$ ). In response to their strong correlation, ASI and Machiavellianism were also entered together as predictors of revenge porn proclivity. Together they explained 11% of the variance in revenge porn proclivity. Whilst significant,  $F(2,88) = 5.34, p = .006$ , only Machiavellianism remained an independently significant predictor ( $\beta = .28, p = .01$ ).

As this was an exploratory analysis, ASI and Machiavellianism were input as predictors of revenge porn approval. Together they significantly explained 14% of the variance in revenge porn approval,  $F(2,97) = 7.69, p = .001$ , however, only Machiavellianism remained an independently significant predictor ( $\beta = .27, p = .01$ ). In addition, Machiavellianism and narcissism were entered together as predictors of revenge porn enjoyment. Together they significantly explained 7.9% of the variance in revenge porn enjoyment,  $F(2,97) = 4.17, p = .02$ , although only narcissism remained an independently significant predictor of greater revenge porn enjoyment ( $\beta = .22, p = .03$ ).

## **DISCUSSION**

The current study is presented as the first to examine the behavioural propensity to engage in revenge porn and associated perpetrator characteristics. This study utilised a proclivity scale to measure a person's likelihood to perpetrate an act of revenge porn among an adult community sample. Additional subscales of revenge porn approval and enjoyment were subsequently devised and implemented with adequate reliability ( $\alpha > .75$ ). Secondly, the study examined whether a relationship exists between the endorsement of aversive traits and a greater propensity to engage in revenge porn. Informed by prevalent characteristics found in the reviewed TFSV literature, the traits included were the Dark Triad, sadism, and ambivalent sexism.

### **Interpreting the Results**

The magnitude of the revenge porn proclivity finding is difficult to comment on due to there being no previously published findings to compare to. Nevertheless, a greater likelihood to commit an act of revenge porn was found in some participants (28.6%). A more staggering finding was that a majority of participants presented endorsement of both revenge porn enjoyment (87%) and revenge porn approval (99%). This disparity suggests that whilst participants may be unlikely to commit an act of revenge porn themselves, they present an acceptance of this behaviour we now know is frequently occurring online. This can have significant implications, especially if one considers the facilitating role of online "bystanders" in the rapid dissemination of these materials.

It is plausible to suggest that revenge porn victims may be vulnerable to the same stereotypical myths held towards victims of rape (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler & Viki, 2009), such that individuals are blamed and considered responsible for their victimisation occurring (Maier, 2014). It is known

that these attitudes give leniency towards the perpetrator whilst attributing greater blame upon the victim (Bohner et al., 2009; Sleath & Bull, 2009). This finding is supported by recent research by Hatcher (2016) who found that rape myth acceptance and victim infidelity were predictive of revenge porn victim blaming. Moreover, endorsement of gender norms was found to be a mediator of revenge porn acceptance, whilst a bad relationship breakup was found to directly predict the acceptance of behaviours associated with revenge porn, such as spreading lies (Knieps & Hatcher, 2016).

The paper's second aim, and subsequent hypotheses, were partially supported by the current findings. Firstly, higher levels of ambivalent sexism, Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy were all correlated with a greater likelihood to perpetrate revenge porn. However, surprisingly, sadistic tendencies yielded no significant relationship with revenge porn proclivity. This finding is not consistent with recent research that implicates sadism alongside the Dark Triad in the perpetration of sexual assault (Russell & King, 2016) and online sexual violence (Buckels et al., 2014). This inconsistency may be due to the current study using a sample that largely comprised of female participants. Buckels (2012) found that sadistic tendencies were endorsed more highly by males than females. The unanticipated skewness in the gender ratio in the current study could, therefore, explain the low levels of sadism observed. However, each of the Dark Triad traits were found to have a positive correlation with revenge porn proclivity, a finding consistent with literature on sexual harassment proclivity (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2016). This firstly suggests that the trait of interpersonal manipulation motivated by a general callous affect, which is characteristic of the Dark Triad (Jones & Paulhus, 2014), is important in the perpetration of revenge porn. Conversely, only psychopathy retained independent significance in the prediction of revenge porn proclivity. This suggests that the endorsement of psychopathic traits, such as a deficit in empathy (Hare & Neumann, 2008), are of greater influence upon revenge porn proclivity than the unique traits of narcissism and Machiavellianism. This finding is consistent with research by Brewer et al. (2015) who found that, aside from the Dark Triad, only psychopathy was an independent predictor of committing romantic revenge. The strong positive correlation between ambivalent sexism and Machiavellianism indicates that these share a common factor, such that both increase in a relatively parallel manner. However, only Machiavellianism was found to retain significant independent prediction of revenge porn proclivity. This suggests that Machiavellian traits, such as a strategic orientation and ruthless manipulation, were of greater influence upon predicting revenge porn proclivity, than endorsement of sexism alone.

In the current study, proclivity subscales of revenge porn approval and enjoyment were also devised. Whilst specific hypotheses were not made about these scales, their inclusion allowed greater exploration of the psychological characteristics pertaining to those endorsing revenge porn behaviour. Unexpectedly, psychopathy retained no significant relationship with either revenge porn approval or enjoyment. This was somewhat surprising as the measures of revenge porn approval and enjoyment were positively correlated with revenge porn proclivity, with which psychopathy demonstrated a positive correlation. Instead, it was found that both Machiavellianism and ambivalent sexism held a positive correlation with revenge porn approval, such that higher endorsement of these traits was correlated with a greater approval of revenge porn being committed. However, only Machiavellianism was found to retain independent prediction of revenge porn approval. It could be surmised that the deceitful and strategic orientation found in both Machiavellian behaviour and revenge porn explains this relationship. The relationship between ambivalent sexism and Machiavellianism found here is in need of greater clarification in future research.

In contrast, whilst both narcissism and Machiavellianism yielded positive correlations with revenge porn enjoyment, only narcissism was an independent predictor. This suggests that narcissistic traits hold greater unique influence upon the likelihood of enjoying revenge porn (i.e. experiencing greater control, excitement, and amusement), compared to traits unique to Machiavellianism. Perhaps engaging in revenge porn fulfils a narcissistic individual's notion of entitlement, grandiosity, and need for ego reinforcement (Jones & Paulhus, 2014), which are all needs that are potentially prevalent after a relationship breakup.

## Limitations of the Current Study

Despite providing a novel insight into the relationships between psychological characteristics and revenge porn proclivity, the current study is not without its limitations. Firstly, the scale of revenge porn proclivity and the measures of sadism, sexism and the Dark Triad required participants to provide responses to personal and sensitive topics. Due to this, the findings could be vulnerable to social desirability bias. Whilst this effect may have been minimised by using online self-report, participants could either withhold or exaggerate their responses. Although, the use of online self-report did allow participation to occur in a less time-consuming and less invasive manner, it is still encouraged that future research should implement a measure of social desirability to control for this confound (e.g. Social Desirability Scale, Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). Secondly, it is imperative to acknowledge that the study's design does not allow for the conclusion that participants who endorse revenge porn will engage in these behaviours. In addition, as a community sample was recruited for this study, the self-reported likelihood to perpetrate an act of revenge porn was relatively low. This may differ when using a forensic or clinical sample, hence future studies should consider these populations.

Moreover, the cross-sectional design of this study means that caution should be made when inferring causality among significant relationships. To the researchers' knowledge, this is the first empirical study examining the psychological correlates of individuals presenting endorsement of revenge porn behaviour. Consequently, the current findings stand alone as support for these relationships, but in doing so, form a much-needed understanding of this emerging phenomenon. Lastly, but equally importantly, the sample acquired comprised of an unanticipated skewness in gender ratio, with a majority of female participants. Due to this, the influence of gender upon revenge porn proclivity could not formally be assessed. Findings were instead reported and discussed across the sample. It is important to note that since previous research (e.g. Citron & Franks, 2014; Poole, 2015; Salter & Crofts, 2015) has shown that the majority of perpetrators and disseminators of revenge porn are men, future research should replicate these findings using the proclivity scale with male samples or equal samples of males and females.

## FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSION

Whilst the current study has its limitations, it shows promise in exploring an emerging research interest. The findings highlight characteristics pertaining to the psychological profiles of people with a greater likelihood to perpetrate revenge porn. Nevertheless, it remains clear that additional research is required to increase our understanding of this phenomenon. For example, research could explore a greater array of psychological and social factors that may both enhance and inhibit the likelihood that an individual will commit this form of sexual violence.

Future research could use both community samples and apprehended offenders of revenge porn to further validate the scale. This valuable comparison could be used to examine whether the characteristics of community participants with a greater revenge porn proclivity reflect the characteristics of actual revenge porn perpetrators. This would allow well-versed prevention to take place among individuals considered most at risk of perpetrating revenge porn. Moreover, this highlights the need for education on respectful relationships, digital citizenship and online safeguarding in schools and workplaces as it would both reduce the acceptance as well as the occurrence of revenge porn, and provide people with an informed awareness on how to help protect themselves from being victimised.

Importantly, future research should also focus on victim impact so that support services, practitioners, police, and legal professionals alike are well informed on how to appropriately respond to victims. In summary, it is evident that revenge porn is a concerning, yet understudied, form of sexual violence, and thus warrants further research attention. Through increasing our knowledge of revenge porn, the characteristics of offenders, and victim impact, we can generate well-informed theory, education, prevention, and treatment.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Full scale is available from lead author upon request

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