

Scandal or sex crime? Gendered privacy and the celebrity nude photo leaks

Alice E. Marwick^{1,2}

Published online: 28 August 2017
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Abstract In 2014, a large archive of hacked nude photos of female celebrities was released on 4chan and organized and discussed primarily on Reddit. This paper explores the ethical implications of this celebrity nude photo leak within a frame of gendered privacy violations. I analyze a selection of a mass capture of 5143 posts and 94,602 comments from /thefapping subreddit, as well as editorials written by female celebrities, feminists, and journalists. Redditors justify the photo leak by arguing the subjects are privileged because they are celebrities; that the celebrities are at fault for failing to appropriately protect their information; and that the only person ethically responsible for the leak is the hacker. The popular press primarily took a feminist perspective, linking the photo leak to institutionalized sexism and misogyny. I argue that the Reddit participants frame the privacy violations within a context of geek masculinity, in which references to masturbation and pornography and casually misogynist language are used to signify a normative masculine self. Privacy violations are de-emphasized when the victims are women and gender or feminist concerns are rejected. Entitlement to viewing women's bodies and male sexual desire are prioritized over ethical concerns over privacy violations. The paper contributes to understanding how privacy violations are normatively gendered and reinforced by gender inequality.

Keywords Reddit · Revenge porn · Sexting · Celebrities · Gender and privacy · Online misogyny

Introduction: the fapping

On August 31, 2014, an anonymous user posted a large archive of digital images of female celebrities to the image-sharing website 4Chan. The pictures were mostly selfies, self-portraits taken with digital cameras, of some of the most famous women in the world, including the highest-paid actress in Hollywood, Jennifer Lawrence. They were personal, intimate; the settings were bedrooms and bathrooms, a few contained boyfriends or husbands, and in the vast majority of the photographs, the women were nude or partially-clad.

As it turned out, hackers had obtained the images by phishing, using remote access tools, forcing password resets, and using social engineering to access the email accounts and mobile phones of entertainment industry insiders (Cubrilovic 2014). These techniques were identical to those used by a robust underground network of image traders, who use darknet bulletin boards to share nude images of celebrities (Kaminsky 2014). Most of the images circulated within this subculture are never widely disseminated. In this case, however, an individual, who described himself as a “collector,” obtained a selection of images and posted them on the image board 4chan in exchange for the digital currency Bitcoin. Unsurprisingly, these salacious images of celebrities rapidly spread across the internet, creating a scandal in their wake. The media dubbed the event “Celebgate”; Reddit users, on the other hand, quickly created a subreddit called “The Fapping” (/thefapping, a portmanteau of “The Happening” and “fap,” an internet slang term for masturbation) to post, organize, and discuss the images. Within days,

✉ Alice E. Marwick
amarwick@gmail.com

¹ Department of Communication, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, CB# 3285, 115 Bingham Hall, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3285, USA

² Data & Society Research Institute, 36 W. 20th Street, 11th Floor, New York, NY 10011, USA

this group became the fastest-growing subreddit of all time, with more than 100,000 users (Massanari 2015a).

Fans and representatives of the women represented in the stolen photos, including actors Jennifer Lawrence, Gabrielle Union, and Kirsten Dunst, spoke out publicly against the leak and asked fans not to share or look at the photos. The users of /thefapping, in contrast, were beside themselves with delight. Early posts on /thefapping included hundreds of statements like “This is the best day of my life” and “This...This is just beyond our wildest dreams.” Reddit administrators, concerned about the rapidly worsening public outcry against the pictures, warned users that any links to leaked images of US gymnast McKayla Maroney or actress Liz Lee would be removed. The two were both under 18 at the time their photos were taken, making the photos legally child pornography.

A week later, after Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) requests from celebrity lawyers and a great deal of bad publicity, Reddit CEO Yishan Wong wrote a public blog post explaining the company’s decision to keep /thefapping up and running (yishan 2014). This post, titled “Every Man is Responsible for his own Soul,” stated that, because Reddit believed in free speech and individual responsibility, they would not delete subreddits for bad behavior. “Hard” policy, such as bans and rules, would only be used to prevent imminent physical danger or prevent the site from functioning properly. Instead, Reddit chose to encourage good behavior by highlighting more wholesome actors on the platform. Confusingly, on the same day the company shut down /thefapping anyway, claiming that DMCA requests had become too onerous to moderate (alienth 2014). Reddit’s statement suggests that the subreddit was not removed due to ethical concerns, nor to preserve the privacy of the women in the pictures. The Fapping community was instead taken down by reason of legal pressure, child pornography laws, and DMCA complaints—in other words, legal consequences that might harm Reddit the company. In fact, Reddit made enough money from the Fapping, both in terms of page views and premium accounts, to pay for its server costs for a month (Greenberg 2014). The pictures are still widely available online.

A fevered public debate over the ethics of not only leaking, but viewing and spreading the photos followed. In *The Atlantic*, feminist writer Jessica Valenti argued that people seeking out the photos were violating the women’s privacy just as much as the original hackers had done (Valenti 2014). Jennifer Lawrence herself told *Vanity Fair*, “It is not a scandal. It is a sex crime. It is a sexual violation... It’s disgusting... Just because I’m a public figure, just because I’m an actress, does not mean that I asked for this” (Kashner 2014). Such ethics of looking are similar to the public discussion that emerged around the beheading video of James Foley, a journalist captured by ISIS. James Foley’s cousin stated,

“Please honor James Foley and respect my family’s privacy. Don’t watch the video. Don’t share it. That’s not how life should be” (Parkinson 2014). While the ethics of spectatorship have been analyzed by many scholars (Chouliaraki 2006; Sontag 1977, 2003), most of this work focuses on the questionable ethics of distributing and viewing representations of violence, war, and suffering in a way that allows distance and disassociation. In the case of Celebgate, it is not the content of the photographs, but the circumstances of their distribution, that raises ethical concerns. Beyond celebrities, hacking phones or cloud accounts of non-celebrities to obtain private photos, and “revenge porn,” or posting private photos of people without their consent, is increasingly commonplace. Unlike many types of privacy violations that affect men and women equally, revenge porn is both more common for women and linked to misogynistic internet subcultures and sexism in general (Eikren and Ingram-Waters 2016; Fairbairn 2015; Marcotte 2014; Stroud 2014). What does Celebgate tell us about how interested internet users and the general public view the ethics of such actions? Moreover, can this event illuminate the gendered nature of certain privacy violations?

This paper explores the ethical implications of the celebrity nude photo leak within a frame of gendered privacy violations. By *gendered privacy*, I mean a type of privacy violation that is more likely to happen to a particular gender due to structural inequality. It is grounded in an emerging feminist literature on geek masculinity, gendered harassment, and misogynist subcultures online (Chess and Shaw 2015; Citron 2014; Nakamura 2012). I use critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2003) to examine how Redditors and journalists framed and made meaning of the nude photo leaks. Specifically, I analyze comments from /thefapping subreddit where the photos were leaked, organized, and discussed, as well as popular press articles written by female celebrities, prominent feminists, and journalists.

Literature review: revenge porn, Reddit and geek masculinity

Revenge porn

Revenge porn is an umbrella term that refers to “the act of non-consensually sharing an intimate image of another person” (Eikren and Ingram-Waters 2016). While the term “revenge” suggests an intent to shame and humiliate the subject of the photograph, an image can be considered revenge porn whether or not this is true, as long as it is shared without consent (Eikren and Ingram-Waters 2016). Many images circulated in this way were produced and shared consensually, as part of intimate relationships (so-called “sexting”); in such cases, it is not the production but the non-consensual

distribution of images to other contexts which is problematic (Hasinoff 2015; Henry and Powell 2015). In other cases, sexual imagery can be used by “perpetrators of domestic and family violence... as a tool to threaten, harass and/or control both current and former partners,” such as threatening to show sexual images to family members or coercing partners into taking such photographs (Henry and Powell 2015, p. 113). The dynamics of revenge porn are deeply gendered, since most victims of revenge porn are women, while most perpetrators are men (Lenhart et al. 2016). Thus, feminist legal scholars and sociologists frame revenge porn as part of a continuum of structural sexism and sexual violence against women (Citron 2014; Fairbairn 2015; Franks 2012), what Henry and Powell label “technology facilitated sexual violence” (Henry and Powell 2015).

Within a feminist framework, revenge porn is understood as sexual violence connected to social and cultural misogyny (Eikren and Ingram-Waters 2016; Fairbairn 2015). For instance, in their study of sexting practices among young people in London, Ringrose et al. found that sexting was embedded within a culture of taken-for-granted sexual harassment and normalized sexism (Ringrose et al. 2012). Both boys and girls in their sample shared “the deeply rooted notion that girls and young women’s bodies are somehow the property of boys and young men,” reflected not only in the nature of sexual images exchanged, but the prevalence of sexual insults, groping, and even sexual assault in young women’s lives (2012, p. 28). Such experiences are hardly unusual, as they take place within a culture of normalized sexism. According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, in the United States, 1 in 5 women will be raped during her lifetime, and 1 in 2 will experience sexual violence (2016). Street harassment is so common as to be a “routine manifestation of the continuum of sexual violence” (Gray 2016), with empirical studies of the United States and Canada showing from 81 to 100% of women had been harassed in public places (Vitak et al. 2017). A recent study estimates that one in 25 Americans has been the victim of revenge porn, and that 10% of women under 30 have experienced threats to share images nonconsensually (Lenhart et al. 2016).

Women are also particularly susceptible to *online* harassment and sexual violence as the result of social media’s networked properties, particularly women of color and queer women (Lenhart et al. 2016a; Vitak et al. 2017). Online harassment covers a spectrum of behaviors including pejorative language and insults; “doxing,” or publicizing personal, private information; “dogpiling” or “brigading” (coordinating attacks on particular people or targets); social shaming; cyberstalking; and so forth (Lenhart et al. 2016b). While both men and women undergo online harassment, women are more likely to face its more serious forms and describe their experiences as harassment, to the point where young

women may face pervasive harassment online and see it as an everyday part of internet interaction (Lenhart 2016b; Vitak et al. 2017). Thus, online harassment has a chilling effect where women and LGB individuals are less likely to contribute content and more likely to self-censor.

Feminist legal scholars and political theorists have been intimately involved in the debate over the dichotomy between public and private realms (Kelly 2003; Landes 1998; Pateman 1988). While liberal political traditions conceptualize the private sphere as domestic, intimate and free of state interference, while the public sphere is associated with culture and politics, this has historically corresponded to a male/female dichotomy in which the public is male-gendered and the private female-gendered (Landes 1998). Feminist scholars argue that women’s confinement within the private sphere excluded them from public and civic participation and facilitated domestic and sexual violence, with the effect of supporting and reinforcing structural inequality (Hawkesworth 2007; Kelly 2003, p. 33). Privacy writ large is thus both a value normatively accorded to men and conceptualized around male-gendered behaviors (Allen and Mack 1989), with many feminists questioning the utility of maintaining such a dichotomy at all. However, research also recognizes women are more susceptible to certain types of privacy violations, from online consumer profiling to video voyeurism and revenge porn (Bartow 1999; Citron and Franks 2014). As a result, as political scientist Susan Gallagher summarizes, “feminists have stressed that sexual equality will not be achieved until there is general recognition of the role of gender in defining both the general concept of privacy and the traditional divisions between the public and private spheres” (2007, p. 247). Thus, revenge porn, a contemporary issue that is both deeply gendered and a gross violation of privacy, allows a closer examination of how gender functions in popular privacy discourse.

Reddit and geek masculinity

Reddit is a social media site organized into a multitude of “subreddits” or “subs,” communities focused on particular topics such as /knitting or /personalfinance. Some are quite esoteric, as there are 975,056 subreddits as of November 2016 (Redditmetrics 2016). Each subreddit is moderated by volunteers (Matias 2016). Users submit content, including text posts, links, and images, which are then commented upon and upvoted (approved/liked) or downvoted (disapproved/disliked) by other users. As a result, Reddit affords lengthy threaded discussions and it is not unusual for popular posts to have thousands of comments. Reddit is a popular site, but is only used by 4% of online adults in the US, according to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center in February 2016 (Barthel et al. 2016). Reddit’s userbase is young, male, and leans politically liberal/libertarian:

amongst Reddit's core demographic of US male internet users 18–29, 15% use Reddit (Barthel et al. 2016; Duggan and Smith 2013).

In the 1980s, Raewyn Connell theorized that there is no singular concept of masculinity, but multiple masculinities which vary across contexts. At any given time, the most revered form of masculinity gives its practitioners great privilege, which Connell named *hegemonic masculinity* (Connell 1985, 2005). Masculinity involves not just power relations between men and women, but relationships between men, as different masculine identities are policed and bounded (Carrigan et al. 1985). For instance, as boys are socialized into acceptable masculine practices, they must present themselves as “heterosexually active” to signify a masculine self, such as exhibiting sexual desire for women, viewing pornography and seeming to be sexually knowledgeable (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, p. 282). To teenagers, this often involves sexual harassment, rape jokes, and homophobic insults to mark the boundaries between feminine and masculine behavior (Pascoe 2007). Such behavior continues into adulthood, as men publicly sexualize women to challenge their authority and protect themselves from homophobic abuse (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009).

Adrienne Massanari, who studies Reddit, argues that the site's culture is characterized by *geek masculinity*, a type of middle-class, white masculinity that privileges technical expertise and command of pop-cultural knowledge, while narrowly circumscribing proper “geek” identity within a raced and gendered framework (Massanari 2015b, pp. 128–129). Geek or nerd masculinity is both hegemonic and subordinate. On one hand, nerds or geeks are typically considered outsiders. They may have been bullied as teenagers, lack physical prowess and appear sexually undesirable to women. In her study of the tech message board Slashdot, Eva Zekany argues that geek masculinity acknowledges these forms of subordination but claims masculine identity by asserting a monopoly on “rationality” and “mastery of technology” (Zekany and Cerwonka 2011). While investigating a public controversy over sexism in a game-related comic strip, Salter and Blodgett argue that the “gaming public”—people who define themselves as gamers and discuss gaming on the internet—collectively reinforces a type of masculinity that is marked by outsider-ness (geeks, nerds) but also an exaggeration of masculine cultural stereotypes such as aggressiveness and sexism. In gaming culture, overt sexism and hostility towards women and femininity police who “counts” as a gamer and, most importantly, who is able to criticize gaming culture (Salter and Blodgett 2012). Genre entertainment, fandom, and technology in general are likewise constructed as masculine and carefully policed (Kohnen 2014). Geek culture is thus framed as a (white) boy's club in which women are outsiders who lack technical competence (Nakamura 2012). This allows geeks to claim

masculinity by carefully policing gender expression and voicing hostility to women, despite not fitting into hegemonic masculine norms.

In the last decade, several high-profile incidents, including the online harassment of tech blogger Kathy Sierra and the targeted harassment of female Yale Law students on the AutoAdmit message boards, have raised questions around the limits of online free speech and the prevalence of explicitly sexist commentary on the internet (Banet-Weiser and Miltner 2016; Citron 2014; Massanari 2015a). These issues were brought into wider public consciousness by an incident known as GamerGate (Chess and Shaw 2015; Jhaver et al. 2016). Gamergate is a more-or-less anonymous activist movement, whose participants “allege that there is corruption in video games journalism and that feminists are actively working to undermine the video game industry” (Chess and Shaw 2015, p. 210). GamerGate participants used networked technologies to harass journalists, feminists, video game critics, and a wide variety of others caught up in the controversy (Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández 2016). These efforts were strategically planned and coordinated on Twitter, the subreddit Kotaku In Action, 4chan, 8chan, and Google Documents, where participants created wikis, FAQs, historical archives and various guides for newbies (Trice 2015). Thus, the same properties of social media that facilitate activism and cultural participation can, in such cases, enable networked abuse and targeted intimidation.

Massanari argues that the corporate ethos of Reddit and the site's technical affordances and platform politics (Gillespie 2010) enable a site-wide acceptance of sexism. As Massanari writes, while the most virulent anti-feminism on Reddit is found within specific subreddits such as /theredpill (pickup artists) and /mensrights, their misogynistic views do not simply stay put in those subreddits; they become part of the larger Reddit culture—informing the ways in which women are discussed and treated on the rest of the site (2015b, p. 138). The vocabulary and beliefs of men's rights activists, such as “misandry” (hatred of men by women) and “SJWs” (social justice warriors, a pejorative term), have infiltrated many internet spaces, especially those which privilege geek masculinity (Massanari 2015b, pp. 128–129).

Indeed, Reddit has a history of high-profile instances in which certain subreddits and/or redditors engaged in sexist or oppressive behavior; for instance, Violentacrez, a popular Reddit user, maintained communities promoting racism, misogyny, and nonconsensual photography of underage girls (including /chokeabitch, /n*****jailbait and /creepshots). Among Redditors, there was a widespread perception that the company was protecting Violentacrez. Although many users had complained about the subreddits that he maintained, some of which had been shut down, he was not subject to repercussions until he

was doxed by Gawker in response to his actions (Chen 2012a). In 2014, /beatingwomen, which featured graphic depictions of violence against women, was removed by Reddit administrators for doxing its users (Alfonso 2014). More recently, Reddit has come under heavy criticism for subreddits devoted to Donald Trump and the so-called alt-right that promote neo-Nazi beliefs and white supremacy (Menegus 2016).¹

Internet communities like 4Chan and Reddit share a strong belief in free speech and view the regulation of online participation as censorship (Reagle 2015). Such classic liberal values of the internet in practice frequently privilege combative or openly biased community members over the comfort of female members, leading to male domination even in high-minded online communities like Wikipedia (Reagle 2012). Members of online communities, particularly those framed as *open* or *participatory*, often explain gender gaps in membership as a matter of individual choice, rather than systemic bias. Thus, aggressive online speech, whether practiced in the profanity and pornography-laced environment of 4Chan or the loftier venues of newspaper comments sections, frequently positions sexism as an issue of freedom of expression and normalizes sexist, anti-feminist language. Former Reddit CEO Yishan Wong acknowledged the issue of hate speech on the site, but clarified that while such content is distasteful, “We stand for free speech. This means we are not going to ban distasteful subreddits” (Chen 2012b). This policy was discontinued under succeeding CEO Ellen Pao, who banned a variety of “hate” subreddits and implemented a new policy. Reddit users retaliated by flooding the site with sexist and racist memes about her (Massanari 2015a).

Given that Reddit provides a male-gendered context for understanding a female-gendered privacy violation, it may help us understand how gendered privacy violations are justified and maintained. Given this context, and using popular media as a counter-example, I ask two questions:

RQ1: What are the ethical understandings of the celebrity nude photo leaks by those who viewed them on Reddit?

RQ2: What are the ethical understandings of the celebrity nude photo hacks in the popular media?

¹ Reddit is not the cesspool of misogyny that this paragraph might suggest. It is comprised of thousands of subreddits, each with its own culture, norms, and demographics. There are subreddits devoted to sports, technology, parenting, popular culture, politics, etc. that strictly moderate content considered hateful or insulting. There are subreddits mostly comprised of women. There are progressive and liberal subreddits that brigade, insult, and attack others. However, amongst the 50 default subs (which appear on the site automatically for new users and people without an account), there is often a sophomoric, male-normative attitude.

Method

This paper analyzes selections from a mass capture of 5143 posts and 94,602 text comments from reddit.com/r/thefapping posted between 8/31/14 and 9/6/14. Since /thefapping was a public subreddit, we were able to capture all the available content on the subreddit by querying Reddit’s public API. While Reddit had already shut down the subreddit at this point, the data was still available in the API which we accessed through /redditanalytics, which archives 30 days of data. To the best of our knowledge, this is a fairly complete archive of all comments on the subreddit (neither Google’s archives nor the Internet Archive have a complete copy of the subreddit). On Reddit, a parent “post” spawns a number of “comments” which are collectively a “thread.” Data collection included information about each post or comment, including the title of the post, parent comment, the body or textual content, ID number, timestamp when the post was made, author alias, link or URL (if included), and the author id. While we were unable to collect upvote and downvote information for individual comments, Reddit obscures this information in the public API to prevent spam, so it would not have been possible to get accurate counts (Reddit 2016). After data was collected, it was imported into Excel and cleaned. We used Excel to find basic information about the data, such as number of posts and comments, number of posters (30,131), and threads with the most comments (Table 1).

Due to the prohibitively large number of comments, we selected a sub-section for analysis. We chose the ten posts with the most comments as representative of the subreddit, and read all the top-level comments and sub-threads (Table 1; these ten threads had 22,813 comments in total). This immersion allowed new insights to emerge, specifically in identifying categories of responses to the photo leak, such as “personal responsibility” and “analogies to the NSA,” as well as interesting moments in the data. All comments on the most popular post (11,531 comments) were read and manually coded according to these categories. Individual comments were selected for critical discourse analysis based on two criteria: comments that best represented a recurring theme in the data, or comments that illustrated moments of conflict over norms.

Reddit uses persistent pseudonyms which are rarely linked to a “real name.” However, because most of the Fapping posters still maintain Reddit accounts, usernames and all potentially identifying information have been removed for the sake of privacy. In certain cases, we have assigned pseudonyms to users to excerpt particular conversations. Because there is no complete public archive of /thefapping, users cannot be identified by searching exact text strings on Google. Thus, user comments are exact quotes.

Table 1 Threads with the most comments

Rank	Number of comments	Thread title	Date
1	11,531	New Celeb leaked pics. All in ONE place!	8/31/14 4:30 PM
2	2016	Prostate Cancer Foundation returns donations from Reddit	9/2/14 4:12 PM
3	1849	NEW JLaw	9/1/14 7:40 PM
4	1407	Not only are we worse than cancer, but people dying to thirst as well. Water.org has officially closed our donation page	9/3/14 12:21 PM
5	1403	[META] Effective immediately: any images/galleries/torrents/mega dumps/etc containing McKayla Maroney or Liz Lee will be immediately removed due to the fact that they were underage (<18) in the photos taken	9/2/14 1:08 PM
6	1058	Victoria Justice has finally responded	9/2/14 6:51 PM
7	903	Seth Rogen's Reaction to the Leak	9/1/14 8:59 PM
8	897	Looks like Emma Watson doesn't like The Fapping	9/1/14 4:37 PM
9	885	Mod post about nude celebrity leaks and how this subreddit will be shaping up for the next 24–48 h	8/31/14 8:45 PM
10	864	William Shatner defends Reddit on Twitter	9/2/14 10:20 PM

These comments are augmented by a discourse analysis of 21 editorials and popular press articles, and two articles in which celebrities responded to the photo leaks (Table 2). The corpus was constructed by searching for keywords “celebgate,” “celebrity photo leaks” and “fapping” that appeared in articles on Google News between 8/31/14 and 10/31/14. Articles chosen for analysis were 500 words or more, contained some discussion of ethical consideration, and posted on a major news site. They were coded in Atlas.ti using an emergent system of coding, beginning with mapping the major ethical debates found through analyzing the Reddit data and adding to them as we went along. Note that these articles are overwhelmingly from left-leaning sites like *Slate* and *The Atlantic*; possibly such publications were more likely to examine the ethical implications of the hack than their right-wing equivalents.

Reactions from Reddit

The Fapping subreddit began with threads devoted to hacked pictures of actresses Jennifer Lawrence, Kirsten Dunst, and Victoria Justice. Early posters on these threads expressed joyful excitement over seeing the naked bodies of celebrities, particularly Jennifer Lawrence, who is not only a high-paid Oscar-winning actress, but a Reddit favorite (Massanari 2015a). Most messages posted to the subreddit are characterized by glee, happiness, and camaraderie.

This...This is just beyond our wildest dreams (8/31/14 15:50)

Holy sh*t. Can we nominate the guy for a pulitzer or a nobel prize for doing humanitarian work. I love you. (8/31/14 17:05)

call me crazy but i like this sense of community. we are all united by the overload of nudes from celebs we have been jacking off to for years. it's like we all had our perverted celebrity wishes come true, like this is the closest Jennifer Lawrence will come to doing porn and we have all accepted that with open arms and lowered pants constantly refreshing just hoping there is a new picture with her showing off dat ass. (9/1/14 12:25)

The use of “our” and “we” indicates a homosocial solidarity in which the Redditors recognize each other as men enjoying a common experience. Throughout the corpus masturbation to pornography is framed as an everyday practice. Simultaneously discovering each “new picture” functions as male bonding (“Let’s fap together!”). This solidarity and the excitement and positivity of the messages are consistent throughout the comments.

The first messages expressing concern appear about two hours after the subreddit opens, once a thread is posted containing pictures of *Game of Thrones* actress Maisie Williams, who was under 18 at the time. Users expressed concern over legality and that underage photos—which are legally child pornography in the US—might jeopardize the subreddit’s future.

She’s 17 you pedophile (8/31/14 16:40)

cmon dont post cp [child pornography] you’ll get the whole sub banned (8/31/14 16:40)

Bro no. She’s [Maisie Williams] underage. You do this and you may ruin our chances of getting the other wins (8/31/14 17:22)

These comments do not express concern that the pictures are unethical, but fear that child pornography will hurt their chances of getting access to other nude photographs,

Table 2 Popular press articles analyzed

Date	Title	Author	Publication
August 31, 2014	If you click on Jennifer Lawrence's naked pictures, you're perpetuating her abuse	Van Badham	The Guardian
September 1, 2014	What's Wrong With Checking Out Stolen Nude Photos of Celebrities: The ethics of looking away	Jessica Valenti	The Atlantic
September 1, 2014	Those Jennifer Lawrence Pictures Aren't Scandalous	Anne Helen Peterson	Buzzfeed
September 1, 2014	Jennifer Lawrence Nude Photo Leak Isn't A 'Scandal.' It's A Sex Crime	Scott Mendelson	Forbes
September 1, 2014	Where Are All the Hacked Pics of Men?	Sarah Miller	Time
September 2, 2014	Jennifer Lawrence's Leaked Nude Photos Remind Us How Crappy The Internet Can Be For Women	Emma Gray	Huffington Post
September 2, 2014	Don't Take Nude Selfies,' Shrug It Off, and Other Gross Advice for Hacked Celebs	Amanda Hess	Slate
September 2, 2014	Everyone Needs to Stop Blaming Jennifer Lawrence and the Other Celebs for the Nude Photo Scandal	Jenna Mullens	E!
September 2, 2014	It's Not Just Jennifer Lawrence: Women In Pop Culture Are Under Attack	Todd VanDerWerff	Vox
September 2, 2014	This isn't about iPhones. This is about women being shamed, objectified, and treated like property	Kelsey McKinney	Vox
September 2, 2014	Stop Blaming Jennifer Lawrence and Other Celebrities for Taking Nude Photos in the First Place	Megan Gibson	Time
September 2, 2014	You know who's not to blame for Jennifer Lawrence's Nude Photo Leaks? Jennifer Lawrence	Lily Karlin	Huffington Post
September 2, 2014	The naked celebrity hack: An outstanding example of sexism	Hadley Freeman	The Guardian
September 3, 2014	The fapping has revealed a new type of pervert	Roisin Kiberd	Vice News
September 24, 2014	Misogyny Is Not Human Nature	Eric Michael Johnson	Slate
September 30, 2014	The Great Naked Celebrity Photo Leak of 2014 Is Just the Beginning	Roxane Gay	The Guardian
October 8, 2014	Open Letter to Jennifer Lawrence	Danielle Citron	Forbes
October 10, 2014	Jennifer Lawrence, it's time for a reality check	Carla Hall	LA Times
October 10, 2014	Jennifer Lawrence doesn't strengthen her argument with those racy Vanity Fair photos	Charlotte Allen	LA Times
October 10, 2014	Good for Jennifer Lawrence for speaking up, not remaining the silent object of the male gaze	Susan Rohwer	LA Times
October 10, 2014	Let's reserve the "sex criminal" label for actual sex criminals	Jon Healy	LA Times
November 2014	Both Huntress and Prey (<i>cover story on Jennifer Lawrence</i>)	Sam Kashner	Vanity Fair
November 5, 2014	Gabrielle Union: "My Nude Photos Were Stolen, and I'm Fighting Back"	Gabrielle Union and Abigail Pesta	Cosmopolitan

or "wins." There is a shared understanding of the US age of consent as normative, as many comments suggest that anyone who might enjoy a nude picture of a 17-year-old is a pedophile, while looking at pictures of naked 18-year-old women is a common and healthy part of male heterosexuality.

The most comprehensive ethical discussion takes place in a thread titled "New Celeb leaked pics. All in ONE place." As the most popular thread in the subreddit with 1138 comments (see Table 1), it appeared at the top of the page for many users, making it a convenient place to voice general opinions. It also had enough upvotes to appear on /all, referred to colloquially as "reaching the front page." The /all view of Reddit aggregates the most popular posts across the entire site, is the default view for any visitor without an account or who is not logged in, and is often browsed by regular Redditors to find newsworthy or interesting links. Thus,

posts on /all attract a lot of attention, including people unfamiliar with the context from which a particular post originated. (For example, when a /r/HillaryClinton post made the front page during the 2016 election, it was inundated by negative comments from posters who did not support Hillary Clinton and were not familiar with the norms of the sub.) Because the "New Celeb leaked pics" thread was posted before Celebgate was discussed in the mainstream media, it may have been the first place that many Redditors heard about the leaks. The thread became a space where people outside /thefapping community could weigh in with their general opinions on Celebgate.

Before the thread reached the front page, however, ethical concerns had already emerged:

Probably the first to say it but I feel guilty and bad that this happened to [Jennifer Lawrence] and the others,

it seems more enjoyable to guess as compared to ok boom there she is (8/31/14 16:53)

This user indicates personal guilt and regret about looking at the images and expresses empathy for Jennifer Lawrence, but frames it within a personal framework of entitlement—that it is “more enjoyable” for him to “guess” what her body looks like rather than having it displayed in front of him. He also implies that his bad feelings are unusual on the subreddit.

The second negative comment, which is the first to specifically reference “privacy,” appears shortly after:

User Y: This is sickening. The people who invade others’ privacy to do this are horrid excuses for human beings. I hope they get put in jail for a very long time. And all of you on this thread encouraging it are almost as bad. (8/31/14 17:02)

Reply 1: Why are people downvoting this person? He/she speaks the truth. Y’all bitch and moan about the NSA, but when something like this happens it’s okay? Fucking pathetic and hypocritical.

Reply 2: It really is disgusting to see how little empathy these people have

User Y suggests that the leaks are illegal and may lead to a jail sentence for the perpetrator, but also holds the Fapping posters accountable for inciting further leaks. Once the thread hits /all, this comment garners a few supportive responses. Replies 1 and 2 express solidarity with User Y and denigrate the Fapping participants as “pathetic” “disgusting” and “hypocritical.” However, User Y’s comment is mostly met with insults and jeers:

Reply 3: Says the person who found the link to this sub deep in the comments from where it was originally posted, and came all the way here just to say that. You go, dude.

Reply 4: It’s reddit. Shut up!

Reply 5: lol shut the fuck up you cancerous cunt

Reply 6: Thank you, I’m so glad you told us how superior your sense of morality is.

Reply 7: Fuckoff loser.

Reply 8: fuck you

Reply 9: They made their choice by photographing themselves nude.

Reply 3 makes fun of the poster for taking what s/he characterizes as excessive effort to criticize the subreddit, implying that User Y had a prurient interest in the pictures which caused he/she to seek them out. Reply 6 sarcastically suggests that the poster’s ethical stance is arrogant and patronizing. Replies 5, 7 and 8 demonstrate the intensity of their feelings by using taboo words “fuck” and “cunt” to both criticize the poster and dismiss his or her concerns. Reply

9 justifies looking at the pictures by stating that the celebrities were asking for it by taking nude photographs. As these posts demonstrate, the primary response to criticism of / thefapping is to attack the poster, rather than contending with his or her argument.

While most of these naysayers only post once or twice and then leave, one particular person (User X) posts 62 comments and argues with respondents throughout:

User X: It’s really sad that distributing stolen property is considered a good thing to do. (8/31/14 17:24)

Reply 1: It’s really sad you don’t realize their entire careers and livelihoods revolve around public adoration. So, fuck off.

Reply 2: Digital images aren’t property.

Reply 2 takes issue with User X’s contention, namely that digital images can be property. Reply 1 justifies looking at the pictures because the subjects are celebrities, not regular people (more on that later).

User X: Anybody with a conscious knows that this sort of thing is wrong. These threads are all being upvoted by guys with Dicks in their hands who care a lot more about seeing a pair of tits than personal rights. It makes me really sad.

Reply 1: Le Reddit White Knight Army is here.

The term “white knight” is an internet slang term with origins in gaming and Men’s Rights communities. In this context, a white knight is a man who comes to a woman’s defense or espouses feminist views solely to score romantic points by helping a damsel in distress. The term is intrinsically misogynist since it suggests that any man holding anti-sexist views, or even wanting to befriend a woman, would only do so to curry favor, implying that feminist principles are so ridiculous that a man could not possibly hold them. It also suggests that any man who stands up for women is not a “real man”.

Reply 2: I know it’s wrong. But I have fapped. Of course, once you’ve fapped, it does feel really shitty for all the celebs involved. This is like Jlaw’s first ever leak, and it’s so so damaging. As a hunger games fan, I’m just happy that they’ve finished shooting ages ago.

The second poster states that he felt bad about the privacy invasion once his sexual feelings passed. This point of view appears throughout the corpus. It allows the poster to both adhere to normative masculinity on the sub by proclaiming his sexual desire for women and his enthusiastic masturbatory habits, while simultaneously claiming to have empathy and distancing himself from the more misanthropic

participants. It also supports the idea that male sexual desire is so overwhelming that it overcomes common sense and moral judgment.

Reply 3: *Conscience, but yeah. Still, I think the rule applies to EVERYONE that if you don't want to risk someone seeing nude pics of you, don't take them!

Reply 4: The violation of rights is the fun part.

In the third reply again we see the blame-the-victim mentality prevalent throughout the thread. The fourth response suggests that the photos are more enticing because they were obtained without consent, insinuating sexual pleasure taken from the humiliation of women. While such an overt statement is not common, it should not be discounted either, as there are similar comments in the thread like "it is the forbidden tit that is the sweetest." Ultimately, User X is met with waves of arguments and resistance and very few supportive comments.

Most of the ethical concerns on the first day of the Fapping were expressed by outsiders to the community, while subscribers primarily expressed positive, excited feelings. When responding to criticism, Redditors justified viewing the pictures in several ways.

They're celebrities, so it's ok

This perspective holds that the celebrity leaks are justified either because the victims are celebrities and rely on positive publicity for their careers, or because the subjects of the photos are famous and wealthy. For instance, one user wrote:

If you profit off public imagery of yourself, then it is fair game for the public to access any and all images of you in existence, with only some limits, like medical imagery. These people profit off seeking our attention. They cannot then cry privacy rights. (8/31/14 17:55)

According to this viewpoint, celebrities court publicity when it is convenient for their careers, but decry it when it is detrimental. This is generally why most people have little sympathy for celebrities when they lobby for enhanced anti-paparazzi laws or protection for their children (DeCew et al. 2000), since they otherwise rely on public attention. While the quote above may be extreme in calling for public access to all images—something there is no support for either normatively or legally—it illustrates the perception that celebrities, particularly celebrity women, are considered public property rather than people accorded the same human dignity as the audience.

Other users compared the privilege accorded to celebrities with that of Reddit users, who frame themselves as "regular joes":

I and a lot of other people have a hard time sympathizing with people who have millions in the bank and

live amazing fucking lives. All we have is rubbing our c**** and making jokes about it, so we will be damned if we don't make the most out of it! (9/3/14 3:14)

The celebrity royalty are paraded as sex objects, like a carrot on a stick, to the American serfs. If anything Hollywood is just upset that some of their assets have been devalued. So no, you shouldn't feel bad. Their t**** and asses are shoved in our faces 24/7. (9/3/14 9:45)

Celebrities have "millions in the bank" and "amazing lives," compared to the average Reddit user, an "American serf" who has only masturbatory fantasies about celebrity women to make up for his otherwise unfortunate lot in life. To these users, women are objectified in mass media and used as economic assets to manipulate spectators; an undercurrent of resentment suggests that they deserve anything that they get, or at least that their privilege mitigates any negative experiences their fame might bring.

It's their own fault

The most common justification for looking at the pictures was to blame the celebrities, either for taking the pictures in the first place, or, more commonly, for storing them in the cloud. Often it was implied that taking nude pictures was vain, narcissistic, or slutty:

It's wrong that this happened to them, but you don't see people like Emma Watson being the victims here because she knew better than to take naked pictures on her phone. You're acting as if taking nude photos is as normal as stepping outside of your house. It's not. (9/1/14 8:26)

i think its ridiculous not to expect this to happen, they literally had it coming once they took those photos also, what vanity.. disgraceful (9/1/14 11:58)

if they wouldn't have been sluts and gotten naked then none of this would've happened. who are we to blame for watching them pay for their mistake? (9/3/14 7:10)

Such "slut-shaming" implies that women taking nude pictures is unusual and immoral; however, nowhere in the corpus is criticism of men for *looking* at such nude pictures. Far from it, since looking at pornography is framed in / thefapping as intrinsic to masculinity. Such monitoring of female sexuality is indicative of a traditional double-standard towards acceptable behavior for men and women (Hasinoff 2015).

A few men argued instead that taking nude photos is a normal part of modern life by asserting their sexual experience:

Maybe it's just me, but the amount of nude photos these people take comes off as extremely narcissistic. Also, take nude photos of yourself and keeping them on your phone is dumb. I do honestly feel sorry that this happened and I have looked at all the pics, but people need to tone down on the self-worship. (9/1/14 7:46)

Reply: seriously man?? you must not be up on today's day and age... have you ever sent or received nude pics? Obviously not, with today's technology it's awesome getting nude pics from your S/O or girls you are flirting with (9/1/14 10:00)

No one here thinks they're sluts. Nearly everyone takes nudes for their partner(s). (9/6/14 12:36)

These commenters also implied that those criticizing women for taking naked pictures were inexperienced (note that they also acknowledge men's role in sexting rather than suggesting that it is entirely the responsibility of women). Similarly, a few visitors to the subreddit scorned the participants for being sexually inexperienced and socially inept ("Comments like 'This day will go down in history' are so fucking creepy HURR HURR TODAY WAS DA DAY I GOT TO SEE NAKED WOMANS Fucking mouth-breather!"). Rather than the geek masculinity expressed on the sub, which takes frequent masturbation as a point of pride, such comments reflect a more hegemonic masculinity that implies that the participants are not real men because they are satisfied with pictures of naked celebrities rather than actual sex.

While overt slut-shaming was met with pushback, more common was judgment over proper security practices, namely, using remote storage for cellphone photos.

People don't think it's right that this stuff is posted but it has been posted. There is a lesson to be learned: don't store nude images on a cloud server and don't send them to people. Is it wrong that we have to assume that everything we do is being tracked and monitored? Absolutely. But that is the world we have created and people shouldn't expect sympathy when their carelessness bites them in the ass. (8/31/14 21:42)

Such comments reinforce privacy as an important value, but also suggest that individuals have a responsibility to minimize privacy violations by avoiding practices that might make them susceptible. These assertions often spurred lengthy debates over online cloud security (such as the level of encryption in iCloud, whether Android phones were more secure, and whether pictures deleted from a cellphone still appear in cloud storage). An addendum to this argument was that because celebrities are more likely than the average person to be hacked, they should have taken special care with their pictures. Those who used iCloud or Dropbox to store

nudes were thus "stupid" "careless" "morons" who "should know better," in contrast to the technically-savvy Redditors. Participants thus reaffirmed their mastery of technical knowledge in contrast to female celebrities who deserved to be hacked because they lacked the proficiency to protect themselves.

There's nothing to feel guilty about

Throughout the corpus, Redditors debated what penalties might befall the hacker, the leaker, and the original 4chan posters. They also frequently argued that there was nothing to feel guilty about unless you were the hacker.

This is the internet, the floodgates have opened—we enjoying them or not enjoying them will make no difference on the fact they are never going back to being un-leaked. So might as well enjoy them (9/1/14 1:50) The only person who is guilty of anything is the hacker who broke into Apples servers. People looking at the photos are not guilty of anything. There's nothing wrong with looking at a digital copy of a digital photo. Of course they're trying to regulate photons but it's useless. (9/4/14 3:46)

The *ethics* of looking are not present in these comments; instead the question is whether looking is illegal. (One poster said tersely, "I said looking wasn't illegal. I didn't hack shit.") This point of view holds that only the hacker committed a crime, the pictures are widely available, and not looking at them will not "un-leak" them. In an informal interview elsewhere on Reddit, the creator of the subreddit agreed:

Kell08: Do you feel any guilt at all for creating this subreddit?

johnsmcjohn: No. I created it on a whim and just rode the wave as it went viral.

Kell08: So you have no regrets?

johnsmcjohn: My only regret is that the admins folded to legal pressure (johnsmcjohn 2014).

This point of view sidesteps all ethical and moral considerations in favor of a strict legal interpretation: illegal actions are wrong, but all legal actions are right, not because of a moral sense but simply due to their legality. Thus, viewing nude pictures of underage actresses is wrong because it is illegal; viewing, even collecting, nude pictures that were obtained illegally is not wrong because the crime was committed by someone else.

Ultimately, the happening adhered to a homosocial, heterosexual normativity that painted looking at pornography as a normal, natural part of masculinity and masturbation as a collective bonding experience. Some participants critiqued the bodies of the women in minute detail ("she looks

plain and fat” “Her body is so sloppy looking”), calling them “average” or “overrated,” or comparing them to porn stars. Others loudly called for leaks of their favorite actress, at times stating that it was unfair for celebrity women to wear tight clothing or appear in sex scenes but refuse to pose nude. In other words, the photo leaks were framed almost entirely as a benefit to men and as something they were entitled to, rather than a privacy violation for women. People who came into the sub to argue an alternate viewpoint were attacked; in the few instances where people brought up gender or feminism they were vociferously shouted down. Privacy was thus clearly gendered. Men valued their own privacy, but acknowledged that this could be guaranteed only by technical mastery (a skill considered masculine). As we will see, this is markedly different from the way that Celebgate was discussed editorially.

Popular press

The popular press primarily maintained that celebrities involved in Celebgate were victims of a crime, that their privacy had been violated, that they were not to blame, and that the hack was evidence of structural sexism. Two articles specifically called out thefappening for inculcating misogyny (in *Vice News* and *Slate*). Several stated that anyone who looked at the photos was equally complicit in the crime (in *The Guardian* and *The Atlantic*). The *LA Times* printed a panel of four editorials, three of which challenged this dominant frame (two argued that the photo leaks were not a “sex crime”, while the other said Jennifer Lawrence undermined her argument by posing for *Vanity Fair*). The only other article to provide an alternate viewpoint was by *Buzzfeed* writer Anne Helen Peterson, who argued that since sexting is a normal part of everyday life for young women, Jennifer Lawrence should be able to take advantage of the scandal rather than having it define her. The dominant frame taken by the press, then, was very different from that of Reddit.

Editorials in left-leaning publications primarily took an explicitly feminist approach to the photo leaks, linking the hacks to structural sexism and the objectification of women. In *The Atlantic*, prominent feminist writer Jessica Valenti wrote “In much the same way that misogyny tells men that women are there for male consumption, the public and media tell us that famous women are public property... The underlying premise is that these women have consented to being there for public entertainment—whether they like it or not.” In the *Huffington Post*, Lily Karlin commented, “The stealing of these photos, the audience that’s hungry for them, and the victim-blaming comments sweeping the web all emerge from a culture that endorses the idea that women’s bodies exist for public consumption.” And in *the Guardian*, feminist novelist and academic Roxane Gay wrote:

[The leak] is meant to remind women of their place. Don’t get too high and mighty, ladies. Don’t step out of line. Don’t do anything to upset or disappoint men who feel entitled to your time, bodies, affection or attention. Your bared body can always be used as a weapon against you. Your bared body can always be used to shame and humiliate you. Your bared body is at once desired and loathed.

Such articles drew clear lines between the celebrity leaks and a broader patriarchal culture where revenge porn, online harassment, and sexual assault are common. To such writers, the celebrity nude photo hacks exemplify attitudes towards women that reduce them to objects. This feminist lens was common and appeared in 15 out of 21 articles.²

Similarly, the editorials connected the privacy needs of the victims and the privacy needs of “regular women.” In *Vox*, Todd VanDerWerff wrote, “These women deserve to have private lives. They deserve to have that most basic, most human thing and share it with the people they choose, when and if they choose to.” In *The LA Times*, Susan Rohwer noted, “We live in a society that values the protection of personal information online. We take great pains to secure our banking information and medical records. And yet when it comes to the bodies of our celebrities, privacy is a privilege to which they are seemingly not entitled.” Celebrities, like all people, deserved privacy.

Notably, none of the editorials blamed the victims. Several explained exactly why the victims should not be blamed, including an E! Online editorial titled “Everyone Needs to Stop Blaming Jennifer Lawrence and the Other Celebs for the Nude Photo Scandal.” (Notably, in these articles the only evidence cited of widespread victim-blaming were tweets by comedian Ricky Gervais and tech journalist Nick Bilton, and a video of rapper RZA at the airport.) The E! editorial, however, garnered 201 comments, many of which included victim-blaming comments like:

No, I shouldn’t feel remorse if I look at these photos because, quite simply, if you use your iphone to take a picture of yourself covered in semen—you’ve saved it to the apple cloud, it’s no longer YOURS. I mean, it is, but now it’s out there, on a server, waiting for someone to find it. Perhaps, instead of using your hackable iPhones, use a digital camera, or better yet, a film based one. Or just don’t take pictures of yourself covered in semen—but either way, you had it coming for being a ***** who takes pictures of herself covered in semen.

² Three articles were not explicitly feminist, three espoused an anti-feminist perspective and two were first-person accounts by celebrities.

(Notably, this comment ignores the role of the man in this situation.) Such comments were closer to those on /thefapping than the feminist point of view espoused in the editorial. While a few commenters defended the celebrities as victims of a crime, many others believed they should not have taken nude photos, and certainly not stored them in the Cloud. The above quote demonstrates many themes: the poor judgment of celebrities in taking nude pictures; the idea that women who take nude pictures are sluts; and the poor judgment of using cloud storage for nude photos.

There is a clear disconnect between the feminist point of views taken by the popular press (with the exception of the two *LA Times* editorials) and the slut-shaming and victim-blaming found in the comments of E! News. This is different still from the gleeful abandon and sense of entitlement found in the Reddit comments. How can we explain these differing points of view?

Discussion: privacy as gendered

Edward Snowden's 2013 release of documents showing mass surveillance by the National Security Agency provoked widespread ire on Reddit, whose denizens are both technically apt and libertarian-leaning. In July 2014, only a month before Celebgate, the *Washington Post* published a major story showing that the NSA had collected text messages and e-mails of private citizens. The celebrity photos were thus leaked amidst ongoing pro-privacy, anti-surveillance discussions on Reddit. Many of the Fapping naysayers pointed out this hypocrisy:

Funny how reddit hates the NSA looking at their shit. But if someone hacks someone's phone and then posts the pics online it's awesome (8/31/14 17:16)

I'm not comfortable with how these images were obtained. We cannot decry the use of intelligence communities like the NSA while indulging in illegally obtained pictures of other people. It is hypocrisy. (8/31/14 17:22)

Such comments inspired a spirited back-and-forth contrasting the two—the main argument being that the NSA is a government organization engaging in systemic surveillance, while the photo hacker is a private citizen who committed a singular crime. Others argued that the only reason these privacy violations were notable is because the victims were privileged, wealthy, celebrities:

Lol, it only matters when the people being spied on are famous. Then the FBI, the "righteous bridge" [sic], and the media all seem to have a problem with it. Yeah, I see no problem with the common folk getting a bit stupid over boob pictures. Especially, when the gov-

ernment, the rich, and the famous get away with worse all the time. (9/3/14 4:14)

To this commenter, when "regular people" have their privacy violated—through warrantless wiretapping or NSA metadata collection—it is ignored by the government and the media, but celebrities, because they are privileged elites, are more likely to have the resources to combat privacy violations.

However, throughout the subreddit "celebrity" means celebrity *women*. Redditors consistently blamed women for storing nude pictures on their phones or in the cloud, implying a feminine lack of technical proficiency. Gendered terms like "celebrity sluts" further gendered privacy as something men are entitled to ("attention whores who secretly want their images to be discovered to further their careers") and play into discourses of women "asking for it" that justify sexual violations. Despite this, when criticized, Redditors repeatedly denied that gender played a part:

Its got nothing to do with rape and calling it "rape culture" is wrong. I can understand your point that this is theft of their privacy but TBH the gender of the people in the image shouldn't matter. Its theft of someones privacy the people just happen to be female (8/31/14 19:04)

This has nothing to do with women you idiot. In fact, if there were any hot men leaked, we wouldn't hear women complaining at all (9/1/14 2:29)

Of course, this discussion is taking place in a forum with widespread use of sexist language, sexual objectification, and aggressive performances of masculinity.

The /Fapping exemplifies the geek masculinity that Adrienne Massanari documents on Reddit (Massanari 2015a; Almog and Kaplan 2015). There is very little ethical compunction about viewing stolen/hacked photos or empathy for the victims. Instead, there is a shared sense of entitlement, ownership, and critique of women's bodies. Participants rarely refer to relationships with women; instead, masturbation becomes a proxy for male bonding and sexual prowess. When men do refer to girlfriends or sexual partners, it is to contradict dominant narratives of victim-blaming and slut-shaming. This suggests that many of /thefapping participants are not involved in intimate relationships with women, romantic or otherwise. Instead, women are viewed as sexual objects. Thus, the photo leaks are justified from within a culture of normalized sexism and the dehumanization and devaluation of women.

In Reddit's blog post about the Fapping, the company stated, "The philosophy behind this stems from the idea that each individual is responsible for his or her moral actions" (yishan 2014). The idea that individuals are responsible if their privacy is violated is widespread, and is the primary frame that Americans, young and old alike, hold

when it comes to digital privacy (Hargittai and Marwick 2016; Marwick and boyd 2014; Marwick et al. 2017). While editorials about Celebgate were careful to call out victim blaming, this is an explicitly feminist view that draws from discursive resources around larger conversations of sexual assault and rape culture. Commenters on both Reddit and E! Online were dismissive of such claims, instead suggesting that victims were asking for it for posting their nudes on the cloud—or even taking them in the first place. This same point of view is generally taken with regard to revenge porn (Hasinoff 2015), contributing to a culture which expects men to pass around naked photos of women and blames the woman for taking the picture, rather than the man for distributing it, if it gains a wider audience than intended. Similarly, the use of pornography is normalized for men while the female participants are denigrated as sluts or whores.

Unfortunately, this entitlement and victim-blaming extends to non-famous women as well. While researching a previous paper, a co-author and I discovered a forum where young men posted the Facebook profiles of female classmates, asking people to hack their accounts in hopes of finding nudes. Websites like Thedirty and AnonIB are image-sharing networks where men collaborate to locate and distribute nudes without consent, often without the knowledge of the victim. The Fappening may indicate a lack of understanding as to why such actions are ethically and morally, if not legally, wrong. Normalization of pornography and sexual frustration do not entitle young men to view women's naked bodies.

However, when “regular” women get their pictures shared non-consensually, they lack the resources of celebrities. They are far more likely to be socially shamed and lose educational or employment opportunities as a result. While revenge porn is increasingly recognized as a legal and criminal issue, there is still a long way to go. In an age where more people are “public” than ever before, not only because of the widespread popularity of social media but because a larger segment of the population is required to appear online or court publicity for success, the justification that “they’re public figures, so it’s OK” or that taking nude pictures is “asking for it” —is deeply problematic. The potential for attention and publicity brought about by the material affordances of the modern internet creates a continuum between “celebrities” and “average people.” Thus, attitudes towards nude photos of celebrities may mirror public attitudes towards stolen photos of the non-famous, namely, revenge porn.

This analysis thus illuminates popular understandings of privacy as gendered. In contrast to feminist writers who framed revenge porn as a crime linked to structural sexism, Reddit and E! commenters justified it based on gender stereotypes. Arguing that women who take nude selfies are “asking for it” or that privacy violations are justified if the victim

does not display an appropriate level of technical proficiency sets up a paradigm in which women have less of a right to privacy than men unless they adhere to male-gendered values. As a result, women are blamed for revenge porn, which reinforces the idea of the female body as public property.

Conclusion

Celebgate represents the culmination of two forces: the entitlement that men, especially young men, feel over women's bodies; and the emergent form of geek masculinity, a normative masculine identity characterized by technical expertise, interest in genre entertainment, and a political commitment to free speech and libertarianism. Those who subscribe to this free speech discourse often justify the use of tactics that researchers or victims would characterize as “online harassment” or networked abuse as ways to check over-reaching “political correctness,” which they consider oppressive and an assault on free speech (Jhaver et al. 2016). In other words, the value put on privacy protection by Reddit users does not extend to women, who are objectified and denied agency throughout the site. Women's right to privacy over pictures of their bodies is less important than men's rights to those bodies. Sadly, this is consistent with an overarching misogynist worldview. It is worth asking to what extent communities like Reddit actively inculcate such views in their participants, and whether there is a moral responsibility among moderators and tech companies to counter these points of view.

Acknowledgements The author would like to thank Dr. Elena Filatova (New York City College of Technology) and Dr. Alex Leavitt (Facebook Research) for their assistance collecting data from Reddit. Many thanks to the Data & Society Research Institute for supporting this research with a Fellowship. Earlier versions of this work were presented at the Privacy Research Group at the Information Law Institute at NYU Law School; Hunter College; and at the 2016 Association of Internet Researchers annual meeting. Thank you to everyone who provided help and feedback.

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