

## Online redistribution of intimate pictures without consent among Danish youth

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# **ONLINE REDISTRIBUTION OF INTIMATE PICTURES WITHOUT CONSENT AMONG DANISH YOUTH**

**Charlotte Amalie Hyldgaard**

## **Abstract**

Over the past few years, Denmark has seen a rapid increase in the number of cases of intimate pictures being redistributed without consent. The phenomenon, which seems to involve children down to the age of eight, consists mostly of girls having their intimate pictures redistributed on different Facebook groups as well as among groups of primarily boys. Several NGOs, the media and the Danish Government have all become aware of the increasing problem. However, why do we see many cases of this problem in Denmark, and how do we explain it, as well as combat it? On this basis, the main research interest of this project is what explains the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent among Danish youth. To answer this, different sources have been collected and consulted. As several NGOs have joined the fight against the phenomenon, interviews have been conducted with three experts, whom are all working in field. These three interviewees provide the main data for the project. Online articles, letters from Børnetelefonen.dk, as well as a DR documentary supplement the interviews. The theory section is constructed based on collected theory from the following main themes, which includes: cyberspace, trust and intimacy, sexuality and youth culture. These main themes have been identified as contributing to explain the phenomenon. The main research question is answered through a four-split analysis: First, the focus is on the background of sharing intimate pictures, also called sexting, which seems to be more or less consensual. It is analysed how young people increasingly communicate in pictures and attempt to manage favourable impressions of their online selves, mainly due to the Internet's ability to construct identities and the technological developments in social media and smartphones. Next, the focus is on the motivations for engaging in sending intimate pictures. Lastly, the focus is on the driving forces behind the phenomenon. The last section is split in two: the first part is on technological explanations and the second part is on gendered explanations. A key point of technological explanations is how there is a lack of clear boundaries between private and public information and unclear boundaries for online behaviour. A key point of gendered explanations is how there is a double standard for women online, which follows some narrow social codes, and if these are broken, it can have severe consequences for the victim. Another key point is how the Internet can be viewed as predominantly male, thus at the expense of women, allowing intimate pictures to be redistributed on for example

closed Facebook groups, thus reducing these pictures (and the victims in them), to entertainment. This can partly be explained by youth culture, as how guys in homosocial relations for example, which can be found in some of these closed groups, redistribute intimate pictures of girls without consent, in order to gain social status among their peers. This combined with how there has been a lack of addressing which boundaries should be applied online offer possible explanations of the phenomenon of redistributing intimate pictures without consent among Danish youth. Based on the findings of this project, I will conclude with specific recommendations on how to combat this phenomenon.

## 1. Introduction

“I am 13 years old and about a year ago, my ex-boyfriend pressured me into sending intimate pictures. I was very much against it and did not really feel like it, which he did not understand, and he kept on pressuring me. He was 15 and I was 12”. This quote is derived from a letter sent to Børnetelefonen.dk, a website run by the child welfare organisation Børns Vilkår, where children can write about their problems and receive advice. This letter is only one among many<sup>1</sup>, all revolving around the issue of adolescents and children having sent naked, semi-naked or sexually suggestive (which will all be referred to in this project as ‘intimate’) pictures to another person. Throughout 2015-2016, the Danish media also reported on many cases where adolescents had intimate pictures redistributed without consent. Examples of headlines include “Naked pictures of adolescent Viborg-girls are being spread throughout the Internet” (Nygaard, 2015), “Previous X-Factor participant charged for distributing child-pornography” (Madsen and Maubøll, 2017) and “Young boys are using nude photos as trading cards” (Mather, 2016). The high number of cases resulted in the Danish Equality Committee calling a hearing in Folketinget (Danish Parliament) on revenge porn on 25 January 2017 (Folketinget, 2017). Many different actors who work in the area were present and contributed to the discussion on revenge porn and the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent, as well as laws, regulation and preventive work. Red Barnet, a Danish subsidiary of the international NGO ‘Save the Children’ working for children’s rights, presented a number of enquiries they had received from children and adolescents on their campaign website Sletdet.dk. The page and the counselling

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<sup>1</sup> In 2016, Børnetelefonen had 41,627 conversations with children, which includes the letterbox, where kids can write in about questions: <https://bornetelefonen.dk/bornetelefonens-tal-2016>.

section opened on 1 May 2016, and from then until end December 2016, 330 young people contacted them regarding online redistribution of intimate pictures without consent. Red Barnet concluded that in three out of four cases, the victim were girls between 14 and 17 years old (Folketinget, 2017). This very high number indicates how severe and widespread this problem has become in Denmark, and how it appears to be increasing.

## **2. Problem field**

According to Medieudviklingen (2016), many Danes make use of the Internet on their mobile phones every day (64% in 2016). It is the Danish youth (age: 15-29) who spends most time (more than 1.5 hours) on the Internet on their mobile phones every day. On average, women tend to spend more time on social media (approximately 48 minutes per day) compared to men (approximately 37 minutes per day). Social media and communication apps, such as Snapchat and Instagram, have increasingly become important to Danish youth, especially for girls between the ages of 10-12 (Byrresen and Gretlund, 2016). This development is important because it shows how much especially young people are using the Internet and their mobile phones every day. Furthermore, the increasing ability to take photos and send them via a variety of different picture apps have allowed young people to share everything easily and quickly. This has arguably also played a role in the development of the sharing of intimate pictures among youth, which will also be referred to as ‘sexting’, and is defined: “(...) as the sending or posting of sexually suggestive text messages and images, including nude or semi-nude photographs, via mobiles or over the Internet” (Cooper et. al., 2016:707). Examples of the sharing of intimate pictures could be a girl sending an intimate picture to a flirt or love interest to make him happy. According to Red Barnet (2016), intimate pictures and films is everyday life for youth in Denmark, and thus making the sharing of intimate pictures a natural part of their social life (Red Barnet, 2016:3). This is facilitated by the technological developments and the constant access to the Internet, e.g. through mobile phones. Red Barnet’s own survey showed that the percentage of young people who have shared intimate pictures increased the older they got. Another survey in the same Red Barnet leaflet made on children from 7th – 9th grade showed that 7 percent had shared and 91 percent had not shared an intimate picture. A survey conducted with Danish high school students showed that 20 percent of the interviewees had shared intimate pictures and 78 percent had not<sup>2</sup> (Red Barnet, 2016:9). Thus, it can be argued that relatively many young

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<sup>2</sup> See the whole survey on: [www.skolesundhed.dk](http://www.skolesundhed.dk)

people have shared intimate pictures. However, there have been a high amount of cases, where victims have shared intimate pictures with a flirt and afterwards found out how they have been redistributed online without their consent. It is important to emphasise that intimate picture sharing online seems to first become a problem when they are redistributed without consent, which is also when it gets public attention. Problems arise when the rules, which are normally applied in the physical world, do not transgress onto the Internet and cyberspace. Terms such as privacy and consent have come to mean different things on the Internet compared to the physical world, and the redistribution of intimate pictures can be followed by severe consequences (Red Barnet, 2016:3). As detailed in the Red Barnet 2016 leaflet, the redistribution of intimate pictures includes a variety of different perspectives and can be a very complex situation with different motives and relations. However, in Denmark, young girls are increasingly victims of the redistribution of their intimate pictures without their consent. How has the sharing of intimate pictures transcended into the phenomenon of redistribution of intimate pictures without consent among Danish youth, and what can explain this phenomenon?

### **3. Research Question**

The multiple recent cases of online redistribution of intimate pictures without consent among Danish youth have led to the following research question:

What explains the phenomenon of redistributing intimate pictures online without consent among Danish youth, especially with focus on gender and technology?

In order to create an overview and to investigate the phenomenon, three sub-questions have been created. They will provide the overall structure for the analysis. The sub-questions are as follows:

1. What is the background that enables the sharing of intimate pictures?
2. What are the motivations to engage in sending intimate pictures?
3. What are the driving forces behind redistributing intimate pictures without consent?
  - a. How can it be explained in terms of technology?
  - b. How can it be explained in terms of gender?

It is important to stress that the main purpose of this project is not to provide the 'right' explanation to the phenomenon of redistributing intimate pictures without consent, but rather to provide possible explanations for this. Furthermore, it is important to mention how, throughout this project, I will distinguish between 'sharing of intimate pictures' (also referred to as 'sexting') and 'redistribution of intimate pictures without consent' as was briefly mentioned in the problem field section. Sharing of intimate pictures indicate that a person takes an intimate picture and actively sends it to another person. Since I consider sexting to include an aspect of consent, and since I argue that there is sometimes pressure involved in sharing an intimate picture, I will mostly use 'sharing of intimate pictures'. There are other ways a person can get access to intimate pictures, e.g. through hacking or taking a picture without the victim's knowledge. This, however, will not be a focus point in the project. The project will include theories related to developments in cyberspace, trust and intimacy, sexuality and youth culture. These theories will be used to analyse data from the interviews of two interviewees who work with victim counselling at different NGOs. This data will be supplemented by an interview with the founder of an activist group who work to combat the phenomenon. The information from these three sources, as well as other collected empirical material, such as online articles; letters from Børnetelefonen.dk and a documentary will provide the foundation for the explanation of this phenomenon as well as the specific recommendations on how to combat it. In order to make these recommendations, it is important to have disclosed the full scope of the phenomenon and put it in a relevant context. Technology and gender are two main themes in this regard, as they have been identified as important for the driving forces behind the phenomenon. Hence, they are included in the research question.

#### **4. Methods**

To make this project especially relevant, the goal was to incorporate the perspective from civil society, working to combat this phenomenon. Several organisations in Denmark focus on this topic, e.g. by running campaigns and educating youth about online behaviour. For this reason, the following were selected as main data collection methods:

- Expert interviews
- Document analysis

Thus, the primary source of data will be derived from the expert interviews. The experts are in contact with both victims and perpetrators, which is why I argue this is a solid foundation to create the analysis on.



However, to map out the most thorough picture of the phenomenon, the interviews will be supplemented by document analyses of specific cases, including letters sent to a letterbox at Børnetelefonen.dk, a documentary and online articles related to the subject.

#### **4.1. Interviews**

Three interviews will be conducted with the person in charge of the relevant project from the following organisations:

- Red Barnet: Kuno Sørensen
- Dansk Kvindesamfund: Signe Vahlun
- Pulterkammerts aktivister: Jan Lillie Lauritsen

The two NGOs, Red Barnet and Dansk Kvindesamfund both run campaigns, which revolve around the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent. They have also established a counselling line, where victims having their pictures redistributed online without consent can contact them to get help. Red Barnet counselling line is for victims under 18 years of age and the victims who are 18 or above can contact Dansk Kvindesamfund. The counselling line can provide advice on how to limit the damage, as well as provide substantial help and guidance on how to move forward. Furthermore, both NGOs have educational programs where they teach children moral and ethical online behaviour. Pulterkammerets aktivister is a newly founded activist group. It works by infiltrating various closed groups on Facebook where intimate pictures are redistributed without consent and contacting the families, mostly the parents, of the perpetrators.

#### 4.1.1 Table 1: Interview overview

Table 1.1. Kuno Sørensen: Red Barnet

Person	Organisation	About	Link to page
Kuno Sørensen	Red Barnet	Red Barnet has created the webpage, Sletdet.dk, which can help you if you have had private, unacceptable or demeaning information, videos or pictures redistributed, for example nude or semi nude photos. It is a counselling service for children and adolescents under 18 years of age. A delete guidance folder has been created, where one can find specific help to delete and report abusive information, pictures, and videos on social media. Besides, they have made a folder called 'Nøgen på nettet', where you can get advice on what to do if someone has redistributed intimate photos of you without consent. You can also write or call them to get help, and they can guide you on how best to diminish and limit the damage and get through situations. They can assist in deleting hate pages about you and contact social media as well as adults if wanted and required. The counsellors here know a lot about children and difficult situations, which can arise from using social media. One can be anonymous, but it is necessary for the counsellors to know an email address. The page sletdet.dk was created in 2014 after various inquiries from Danish youth regarding cases of intimate picture being redistributed online without consent.	<a href="http://sikkerchat.dk/da-DK/Slet-det.aspx">http://sikkerchat.dk/da-DK/Slet-det.aspx</a>

Table 1.2. Signe Vahlun: Dansk Kvindesamfund

Person	Organisation	About	Link to page
Signe Vahlun	Dansk Kvindesamfund	The page 'Dansk Kvindesamfund Rådgivning: StopChikane' was created 2-3 years ago as a closed Facebook group where people could share their personal stories about sexism. Victims began to post stories about intimate picture redistribution online without consent, which then laid the foundation for Dansk Kvindesamfund to open their counselling service for victims above 18 years of age. A donation from Offerfonden enabled this service, which was launched on 1 March 2017. Dansk Kvindesamfund can help gather information, contact the police, minimise the damage, contact social media pages etc. Every request to StopChikane is treated anonymously. However, data is gathered about age and gender from the victims who contact them. This is to get a clear picture of which age groups are exposed to online harassment. The counsellors working in StopChikane work in Dansk Kvindesamfund and are experienced in situations of online harassment, revenge porn and sexism. A person can write an email, call the phone number or book a personal counselling session.	<a href="https://www.danskkvindesamfund.dk/raadgivning/stopchikane.html">https://www.danskkvindesamfund.dk/raadgivning/stopchikane.html</a>

Table 1.3. Jan Lillie Lauritsen: Pulterkammerts Aktivister

Person	Organisation	About	Link to page
Jan Lillie Lauritsen	Pulterkammerets Aktivister	This is a newly created activist organisation founded by Jan Lillie Lauritsen and his brother. Jan, by coincidence, became aware of the Facebook group and page called Offensimentum, which he quickly discovered was a page where naked photos were redistributed without consent and where a lot of severe bullying took place. After he posted how he would report these cases to the perpetrators parents, he was expelled from the group. On 10 January 2017, he and his brother decided to start Pulterkammerets aktivister as a countermeasure to Offensimentum and the similar groups on Facebook. They decided to make it their aim to contact the parents of the people who redistributes these pictures online without consent. Thus, they have created a group of activists who infiltrate various Facebook groups and pages. The group report and contact the parents of the perpetrators whenever they come across severe bullying or intimate pictures being redistributed without consent. The group view themselves as securing the privacy rights of the individual. They aim to combat bullying and the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent.	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/pulterkammeretsaktivister/">https://www.facebook.com/pulterkammeretsaktivister/</a>

## 4.2. Document analysis

In this project, document analysis will be used as a supplementary method to create the most extensive overview of the phenomenon. As argued by Lynggaard (2010), different sorts of documents can be analysed in attempt to identify similar themes in a problem field (Lynggaard, 2010). In this this project, it means that different sorts of documents (and a documentary) will be used to identify patterns, which can be analysed on the basis of the theoretical framework. The selected document sources consist of articles and letters that cover a variety of different types of documents, which will all be presented in Table 2 below, thus the document analysis will serve to create as great an overview about this complex topic as possible.

## 4.3. Presentation of Data

The primary source of data will be the expert interviews. These will be supplemented by specific cases, which will include letters written to online counselling on Børnetelefonen.dk. Data will also be supplied by articles retrieved online, as well as a documentary on the phenomenon. The different

sources of data will be used to outline and analyse the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent in Denmark. The interviews with the two NGO workers will provide input from people who work with the victims and do educational work in this area. In contrast, the activist is in contact with perpetrators and their families, as well as the victims. When all of the data is collected it will be coded into different themes derived from the theoretical framework, and will, together with the three sub question provide the structure for the analysis.

#### 4.4.1. Table 2: Data overview

Interviews	Letters to Børnetelefonen	Articles	Documentary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jan Lillie Lauritsen, Pulterkammerets Aktivister</li> <li>- Kuno Sørensen, Red Barnet</li> <li>- Signe Vahlun, Dansk Kvindesamfund</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appendix 5: Pic 1</li> <li>- Appendix 6: Pic 2</li> <li>- Appendix 7: Pic 3 and 3.1</li> <li>- Appendix 8: Pic 4</li> <li>- Appendix 9: Pic 5</li> <li>- Appendix 10: Pic 6</li> <li>- Appendix 11: Pic 7</li> <li>- Appendix 12: Pic 8 and 8.1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fahnøe (2016/December), BT</li> <li>- Korsgaard and Heinskou (March/2013), Politiken</li> <li>- Madsen and Maibøll (2017/January), BT</li> <li>- Mailund (2017/January), BT</li> <li>- Mather (2016/April), Berlingske</li> <li>- Nygaard (2015/March), Metro Express</li> <li>- Poulsen and Andersen (2016/August), BT</li> <li>- N.A. (2016/March: 9.47), Berlingske</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ung, Nøgen og Udstillet, (Young, Naked and Exposed), DR2 documentary 2016. Aired on TV, 6 March 2017.</li> </ul>

#### 4.3.2. Documentary

The documentary is viewed as both credible and authentic. It is a documentary created by DR, a Danish government-owned radio and television public broadcasting company, which has the resources and ability to explore this complex issue in depth. It includes interviews with young people in general as well as victims and perpetrators, and even a confrontation between a victim and a perpetrator. Therefore, this documentary is considered to be highly credible and representative, and is an excellent addition to the rest of the data.

Especially its focus on the perpetrator perspective is valuable in this context, since it is the only material where perpetrators have a voice and explain motivations. Additionally it provides us with the victim perspective, and in-depth explanations of some of the consequences of the victims.

#### 4.3.3. Letters to Børnetelefonen.dk

When using Internet sources, authenticity can be a challenge due to anonymity, for example in the letters written into Børnetelefonen.dk. They are anonymous to protect the child writing it, but that also means one can challenge the credibility and ask if the question written is in fact from a 13 year old girl for example, or if someone else has written it. Regardless, these letters must be assumed to be from a person who is in need of help, and therefore the exact facts about the person, is perhaps less important. Furthermore, other young people who are in a similar position and also in need of help can read the responses from the counsellor.

#### *4.3.4. Online articles*

The online articles that I selected are viewed as credible, in the sense that they are from well-known news pages, and contain data such as author and year. However, it is important to stress that they present cases from specific perspectives and with certain people. Thus, there is an element of subjectivity, which must not be ignored. Furthermore, the articles have authors of both genders, thus diminishing gender bias within.

Overall, I argue that the gathered sources cover a wide spectrum of the phenomenon. Due to limited time and the sensitivity of the phenomenon, I have chosen to acquire my empirical data from experts rather than conducting interviews with victims and perpetrators. It is very difficult to get access to someone who has redistributed intimate pictures without consent, and it requires experience, care and sensitivity to conduct an interview with a victim. However, the perspective of both perpetrators as well as victims are embedded in the empirical data collected, and I argue that I am well covered in terms of investigating this phenomenon.

#### **4.4 Delimitations**

- The focus of this project is on young people, who will also be referred to as youth and adolescents throughout. This is in regards to the perpetrators, victims and spectators. Young people in this project are not limited to only being under 18 years of age; they can also be young people above 18. I have chosen not to distinguish between above and below 18 years, and how it can be characterized as child pornography, if the victim is below 18 years of age, since this distinction can be difficult e.g. is it the age of the victim when the picture is taken, or redistributed. Additionally, this is because I argue how it does not change the explanations of the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent, whether the

perpetrator or the victim is below or above 18 years of age. Notwithstanding, I use both the term women and the term girls, when referring to young females, as well as the term men and the term boys when referring to young males. Henceforth there will not be distinguished between ages in regards to this, only gender. Nonetheless, I want to delimit myself from cases where for example, adult women have had their pictures redistributed by an ex-husband following an ugly divorce. This is not to neglect this perspective or to ignore these cases, but to keep a specific focus in the project, since the phenomenon is already very complex. Furthermore, I also want to exclude adult perpetrators who are paedophiles and trying to gain access to intimate picture of young girls and boys. Instead, this project looks at the redistribution culture, e.g. in closed Facebook groups and the like, where intimate pictures are redistributed without consent.

- There are different ways intimate pictures can become public on the Internet, and throughout this project the focus is primarily on cases where the victim has sent, taken or allowed someone else to take an intimate picture of him or her, but not given their consent for it to be redistributed. Additionally, I have chosen to use cases where pictures have been hacked. I leave out cases where someone else has taken a picture of the victim without his or her knowledge. This is because I believe that such an action can be only partly be explained by the theoretical framework of this project. However, I do not neglect the existence or severity of these cases.
- I want to avoid the term ‘revenge porn’ as an overall expression of the phenomenon, since I do not believe this concept encompasses the full extent of the phenomenon. Instead, the definition is: (online) redistribution of intimate pictures without consent. This is a broader definition, chosen in order to include the full spectrum of the phenomenon. Even though the term revenge porn falls under the definition, it is important to emphasise that cases witnessed in Denmark do not necessarily include the ‘revenge’ aspect, since the perpetrator and the victim may never have met before. The chosen definition allows for the possibility of the victim and the perpetrator being either acquaintances or total strangers. Additionally, I want to highlight that while an ex-boyfriend/girlfriend can redistribute pictures without consent, pictures can also be hacked, and provide an example, which is not related to the term ‘revenge porn’.
- It would have been a great contribution to the project to conduct interviews with both perpetrators and victims; this has not been done for a variety of reasons. They include the time- and resource intensive nature of finding interviewees and conducting the interviews. Furthermore, not

many perpetrators or victims are willing to talk about it publically. I have attempted to overcome this by conducting an interview with the experts working in close contact with victims and perpetrators.

#### **4.6. Ethical considerations**

When reflecting on ethical considerations in this project it is important to consider two two aspects: my role as a female researcher as well as how I am conducting research on a very sensitive subject. Throughout my work experiences in this area, as well as my specialisation in Global Gender Studies, my perception of this phenomenon can be argued as partly biased. These aspects can be viewed as influencing my starting point in explaining the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent, and focus on gendered elements within. Others might argue how gender is unimportant in regards to this phenomenon, however, due to what numbers suggest in terms of the victims of having their pictures redistributed without consent, as suggested by Red Barnet (2016), I argue how there are gendered elements within. Furthermore, in attempt to overcome the possible bias, due to my background, I have tried to use a variety of different sources and perspectives in the project. It is important to stress that personal subjectivity will always be a factor in a project, which makes different sources and solid reasoning for the methods employed in the project all the more important. Although the analysis of the phenomenon from a gendered perspective is well founded, I recognise that there are other ways to interpret it.

#### **4.7. Concept definitions**

Before the section on the theoretical framework, concept definitions are required in order for the theoretical framework and the analysis to be comprehensive. The terms that require definitions are the following:

- *Victim blaming*: “Victim blaming is a devaluing act where the victim of a crime, an accident, or any type of abusive maltreatment is held as wholly or partially responsible for the wrongful conduct committed against them”<sup>3</sup>. In this project, victim blaming is used in relation to how many of the victims have had blame directed at them when their intimate pictures have been redistributed. This can both be explicitly, where people tell them it is their own fault, or it can be implicitly, where the victim feels it through others people’s attitudes.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://definitions.uslegal.com/v/victim-blaming/>

- *Slut shaming*: “The action or fact of stigmatising a woman for engaging in behaviour judged to be promiscuous or sexually provocative”<sup>4</sup>. Like victim blaming, this is also a term used when a victim, most often a girl, is shamed by others for having her intimate picture redistributed. People call the victim a slut who deserves to be harassed for being too promiscuous.
- *Snapchat*: A popular picture app where people take pictures of everything and send it to others, often with some text included. Pictures are only visible for a few seconds, after which they disappear for good. However, different apps capable of saving the snaps as well as taking screenshots have caused problems for Snapchat.
- *Instagram*: A picture app where people post their pictures and others can comment and like them, just as on Facebook. Everyone has a profile, often personal, with pictures posted, effectively making it an online photo diary.

## 5. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework provides an overall structure as well as dimensions to answer the research question. The theoretical framework encompasses four main themes, which are: cyberspace, trust/intimacy, sexuality and youth culture and which will provide subsections of the theoretical framework. Throughout these subsections, the issue and relevance of gender and technology will be included, since they are considered to permeate the whole theory section.

### 5.1. Cyberspace

#### 5.1.1. Utopian vs. dystopian view of the Internet

Generally, there seem to be two prevailing views of the Internet. These are the utopian and the dystopian view, in which the Internet is viewed as either liberating or oppressive (Arvidsson and Foka, 2015). The utopian view focuses on the possibilities that the Internet has brought along, e.g. in terms of the development in women’s rights, and women now having freedom and possibility of being emancipated online. In contrast, the dystopian view argues how the internet is viewed as being male dominated, and now, where women are

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<sup>4</sup> [https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/slut\\_shaming](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/slut_shaming)).



as much part of the internet as men, elements of this can be viewed in for example how women are being severely harassed after having an intimate picture redistributed online without consent (Arvidsson and Foka, 2015). In the light of the many cases of intimate pictures being redistributed online without consent, one could argue this could be related to the dystopian view of the Internet. Following this view, an important term to mention is cyber bullying. Cyber bullying does not necessarily encompass a gendered perspective, as the consequences can be as severe for boys as it can for girls. However, cyber bullying revolves around some of the same characteristics as seen in revenge porn and overall the redistribution of intimate photos without consent, including the harassment that the victims experience in the aftermath. When revenge porn and cyber bullying are compared, it is argued how “(...) cyber bullying relates to a much broader range of behaviour” (Mathen, 2014:531), and therefore they cannot be completely compared to each other. In relation to this project, cyber bullying is not considered equivalent to revenge porn, even though they share similar characteristics (online, real and severe consequences for the victims). Instead, revenge porn is considered a type of cyber bullying. Being online, the victim does not have a ‘safe space’ to escape the bullying, which would previously have been at home. The Internet and technology enables us to be online at all time, thus preventing us from ever getting away from harassment. Thereby, some of the elements in cyber bullying are similar to having an intimate picture redistributed without consent. However, the gendered perspective is left out, which is why neither revenge porn, nor the general phenomenon of redistribution of intimate pictures, can be ‘reduced’ to cyber bullying. It is important to stress that the redistributing of intimate pictures without consent cannot necessarily be viewed as part of a larger sexist and misogynist culture practiced by all men to hurt women. It is more nuanced than that, and it is important to remember how there are other elements playing a part as well, e.g. how people act and perhaps forget the consequences of their online actions.

### *5.1.2. Identity and the online self*

Identity is created in different ways and is both constructed and changed throughout adolescence. The Internet has increasingly become a place for identity development (Brickell, 2012), especially for young people who have grown up with recent technological developments. Herring and Kapidzic (2015) argue that adolescents create online selves where “self-presentation is generally considered motivated by a desire to make a favourable impression on others, or an impression that corresponds to one’s ideals” (Herring and Kapidzic, 2015:1). According to several studies, very few young people are concerned about the pictures they post on social media (Herring and Kapidzic, 2015:4). For young

people, this trading, sharing and posting of personal pictures and information are considered an important aspect of their social interaction with each other and contribute to their feeling of belonging (Zemmels and Khey, 2014). Young people share things online to construct their identities, express themselves and perform. They are aware that the Internet poses a set of risks, however they are not aware of the extent of the consequences. Thus they consider it an interaction and balance between risk and opportunities (Zemmels and Khey, 2014). Identity construction and development can also be challenged by unwritten social rules online, for example how to present oneself on a picture online. Young people must follow these rules in order to manage the impression they give to others through their online self. Thereby, a person cannot do anything deviant in terms of their online self and must stick to the social rules (Oeldorf-Hirsch et. al., 2016). An example is how certain pictures are deemed inappropriate or stupid in a forum of young people, while other things are labelled as cool and right. This is where the aspect of embarrassment becomes relevant, as pictures can become the focus of an embarrassing situation for the person in the picture, and can result in ridicule from his or her peers (Ibid). The fear of being ridiculed if the social rules are not upheld, poses as ‘online threats’ to one’s self-presentation and can occur if someone shares a picture of another, which can be framed as ugly, embarrassing, too much, or in terms of being too ‘slutty’ or ‘easy’. Thus this can result in having severe impact on a person’s identity, and can lead to a person being either shamed or blamed for the picture going viral, even though it is without their consent or knowledge. Online, it seems that “individuals work to manage favourable impressions on Facebook as well as offline, engaging in selective self-presentation by controlling what information is displayed to whom.” (Oeldorf-Hirsch et. al., 2016:93) People wish to control what goes online and what does not, therefore if something a person does not want to be shared with others, goes viral online anyways, it can result in severe consequences for a person’s online self and identity. In addition, since the distinction between the online self, and the lived self has vanished in many ways, this could be argued to have a large negative impact on the person overall, both in online as well as lived life. This is significant in regards to the project to help explain how important the Internet and online self is to youth today. An online self is closely linked to the person itself, and cannot be separated, thereby, making the exposure online severe and damaging to the lived life as well as the online self.

### *5.1.3. Internet dominated by men*

Historically, women have been associated with ‘belonging’ in the private sphere, in the safety of the home, “constructing the private and domestic sphere as the safest and most appropriate place for girls and women” (Salter, 2016:2724).

However, women have gained a more public role and participation in public life; they have been granted formal rights, and have attempted to exercise these in practice. With the development of the Internet, women have also gained increasing participation online, in an equal manner as men (Salter, 2016). However, it is argued that the Internet can be viewed as the “white male playground” defined by Arvidsson and Foka (2015), and which is permeated by sexism and pornography. It is argued that the historical definition of technology in itself is “cast in terms of male activities” (Wajcman, 2009:144), as in for example machinery, military, weapons, which are all tools of war (ibid). Furthermore, as argued by Wajcman (2009), technology in the western world is “(...) deeply implicated in its masculine project of the domination and control over women and nature” (Wajcman, 2009:145). Additionally, technology is viewed as socially shaping, but shaped by men, in the exclusion of women (Wajcman, 2009).

Therefore, this can indicate how the Internet, by definition, is created in its relation to men, and fundamentally caters to men. This, among other things, one could argue, could be the reasoning behind the fact that many women experience harassment online, as well as the shaming and blaming which are witnessed and experienced in many forums, in the aftermath of having an intimate picture redistributed without consent. This adds to the concern that women are more vulnerable on the Internet and more likely to become victims of gendered harassment and exposure online.

Continuing, Shah (2015) defines two approaches, which can be used to analyse why the exposure of women’s bodies on the Internet, for example having an intimate picture redistributed online, can arguably be used to legitimise harassment of women. The first approach views the gendered body as active, using the passive Internet for its possibilities. However, this approach makes women responsible if they have intimate pictures redistributed without consent e.g. legitimising victim blaming. The other approach views the Internet as an active institution, which regulates the gendered body, e.g. applying social rules, which can for example be broken if an intimate picture is redistributed online. This approach thus removes some of the responsibility of the victims. Thereby, the first approach legitimizes the shaming of the body online, as it transgresses the borders of the safety and where it ‘belongs’. (Shah, 2015) In terms of non-consensual sharing of intimate pictures, Shah (2015) argues how the girl taking and sending intimate photos is not (necessarily) viewed as a ‘slut’ or a ‘whore’, until she is exposed, “(...) once the slut has been identified, she is reduced to a name – as a passive object – that is acted upon by the technological” (Shah, 2015:np). These two approaches mentioned by Shah (2015) thus suggest how women’s bodies are seen to be surrounded by shame, either by being dirty in themselves, or being pure and having to be preserved. This dialectic highlights

the restraint, which are placed upon the female body in terms of technology. These restrictions on the female body online, as well as the notion of how the Internet can be viewed as a 'male playground', could be viewed as enabling the victim blaming and slut-shaming, as well as the harassment happening to some women after intimate pictures are redistributed online without consent. Furthermore, the second approach offers an alternative way to view the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent, shifting the blame from the victims onto the Internet.

## **5.2. Trust and intimacy**

### *5.2.1. Trust in technology and each other*

Regarding trust and technology, studies have shown how young people tend to have a lot of trust in mobile phones, even more than in any other media (Zemmels and Khey, 2014). It is argued that youth tend to view mobile phone communication as a 1-1 relationship, compared to social media platforms, where they view the communication as a 1- many relationship (ibid). Furthermore, it is argued that, "mobile phones are becoming like a natural extensions of the human body, so closely tied to the owner" (Zemmels and Khey, 2014:297). This indicates how youth tends to have a lot of trust in mobile phones, and a general trust in that what is being shared on their phones will remain private between the sender and the receiver. This perspective is important, because it can explain why a person trusts another person enough to send them intimate pictures over the mobile phone, trusting that they will not show or distribute these to others.

Furthermore, it can indicate how young people tend to view risks of getting exposed as small, since the mobile phone is, as mentioned, a natural extension of the person, hence a 'safe' way to share something. From research done by Zemmels and Khey (2014), there seems to be an overall perception among youth that cyberspace and mobile phone sharing are somewhat private, and therefore people are more willing to share intimate pictures (Zemmels and Khey, 2014). However, following the dystopian view of the Internet, it is also argued that the Internet, and the fact that anyone can be in touch with the whole world at any time, makes "(...) pursuing courses of hate and harm all too easy" (Stroud, 2014:168). Examples of this include how a person quickly can expose and redistribute pictures without consent, and that there is no way to take that action back. Furthermore, the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent is made easier by the "(...) presence of largely anonymous or psuedoanonymous online selves" (Stroud, 2014:168), making it difficult to track people, as well as persecute people and figure out whom has redistributed the pictures in the first place. These are examples of how the trust is sometimes broken when intimate

pictures are being redistributed without consent. Furthermore, it shows how trust is important in the development of young people and their establishment of the self, and youth tends to have a large amount of trust in their peers (Zemmels and Khey, 2014) and with regard to the redistribution of intimate pictures, there is a trust assumption that pictures sent will remain private between the sender and the receiver.

### *5.2.2. Intimate relationships and sexting*

According to Anthony Giddens (1994), intimate relations today have become more free than before. People no longer engage in relationships because they have to, but can choose to do so (Giddens, 1994). This, Giddens refers to as the 'pure relationship', and it is dependent on the individual's wish to engage in it, and not on plight. Today, both partners must find the relationship profitable (Giddens, 1994). Finally, Giddens argues that the intimacy between partners is special, and there are expectations attached, how one's partner must give something to the other person e.g. share something private and intimate with only the other person (Giddens, 1994). This could be viewed as a token of trust, which is expected to persist among partners in intimate relationships. Today, it could be argued this is to be found in relation intimate picture sharing also referred to as sexting. As Zemmels and Khey (2014) argue: "Digital media text messaging (...) has become the dominant form of young people peer communication (...)" (p. 286). The fact that youth today highly communicate in pictures, as well as their high exposure to "sexually explicit and provocative materials via media technologies (...) aid their understanding of sexuality and the self" (Cooper et. al., 2016:712). This might suggest how sexuality and the possibility of using technology to explore sexuality have resulted in sexting. Sexting is contradictory in the sense that it is framed both as deviant youth behaviour and a healthy liberating way for youth to explore their sexuality (Döring, 2014)(Albury and Crawford, 2012). One could argue that the condition, which determines whether sexting is good or bad, is determined if/when it goes wrong. This could indicate that when young people are sexting with love interests and pictures remain between partners, it is something which is not really discussed. However, if the pictures are being redistributed without consent, it is viewed as harmful. Perhaps it could be because it is not known what goes on between the youth before it turns into a case. It could be argued that when consent is present, it is healthy, and when consent is lacking, it is unhealthy. However, this is just one distinction among many. There seems to be a clear gender perspective in sexting, one of them is how "boys ask girls for sexual photos far more often than the other way around. Moreover, some boys may send sexual photos to girls without any request to do so" (Davidson, 2014:27). The most common motivations for youth to engage in sexting have

been researched, and results show that the primary motivator is to flirt or gain romantic attention. The second motivator is in consensual relationships, to keep intimacy between partners. If a couple wants to keep the intimacy and excitement between them when they are away from each other, it is a way to keep the intimacy and continue the excitement until they see each other again. The third motivator is to experiment with sexuality, whereas the fourth is pressure from partners and/or friends (Cooper et. al, 2016:709). Studies show how girls were more motivated to engage in sexting for romantic reasons and wishing to be intimate with their partner, for example through intimate picture sharing (Davidson, 2014), which also highlights how "trust is regarded by youth as one of the most important features of their romantic relationships" (Döring, 2014:np). This aspect is important when studying why girls would agree to send intimate pictures if a boy asked them for one. This is a gendered understanding where girls and boys differ in terms of what they wish to gain from a sexting correspondence. For boys it might be the sexual excitement, and for girls it could be more about intimacy, wanting to feel 'closer' to the other person. (Ibid) Throughout this study, it is argued how girls want more intimacy between themselves and a love interest, rather than sexual photos. However, according to research published by Davidson (2014), the boys believed that the pressure they put on girls to send intimate pictures were more of a request and not a threat (2014).

However, girls' perception of this can be a very different story. Girls wish to get acceptance from potential partners and feel popular (Cooper et. al., 2016). Sexting is also proposed as a way to act sexually, however less risky than engaging in for instance actual intercourse. By using sexting, young people can maintain the sexuality and intimacy in engaging with a potential flirt without having to worry about pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, making it easier and less risky to send an intimate picture (Davidson, 2014). However, some might fail to understand how the sharing of intimate pictures subsequently might have other consequences, like the redistribution of them without consent. This perspective is important to include, because the taking, sending and receiving of intimate pictures among youth have become normalized in contemporary society.

### **5.3. Sexuality**

#### *5.3.1. Sexual equality or sexism*

In the Western world, men and women are equal, "women have the formal right to do most things that a man can do, and vice versa (...)" (Gauntlett, 2002:3). However, as also argued by Gauntlett (2002), this may only be true on the surface; what is beneath might convey a different picture. With regards to the many cases of redistribution of intimate pictures without consent among Danish

youth, it might suggest how there is not completely equal treatment of girls and boys. According to feminist theory, there is an important distinction in the way women are emancipated in today's society in terms of sexuality. On one hand women are viewed as being free to do whatever they wish, no marriage strings binding them, access to the internet, pornography, sex toys, etc. On the other hand, according to liberal feminists, there is a lack of freedom from oppressive structures (Fahs, 2014). According to liberal feminists, women must have both the freedom to do whichever they want in terms of sexuality, as well as being free from oppressive structures in society (ibid). As argued by Fahs (2014): "(...) freedom must include both the freedom to do what we want to do AND the freedom from oppressive structures and demands" (Fahs, 2014:269). This finding relates to this project in the question of how the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent bring out a gendered aspect and reveal how gendered inequalities remain within our society. Girls are continuously shamed and blamed online for their bodies or pictures to a much larger extend than men, despite the fact that there is supposedly gender equality in the Western world today. Furthermore, this aspect is included in the project to highlight the differences between the genders in cases regarding the redistribution of intimate pictures, and the consequences of and attitudes towards this, and also to underline how women are perhaps not completely free from oppressive structures.

### *5.3.2. Objectification in pornography*

Due to the media and the emancipation of sexuality, pornography has become highly accessible through the Internet, and is something being used extensively by adolescents today. This also creates an easier and more direct access than before for youth to the world of pornography on the Internet (Daneback and Löfberg, 2011). It is being argued that the high use of pornography by especially boys contributes to creating idealised and unrealistic fantasies about women, which therefore might result in the sexual objectification of women's bodies. Subsequently, this might result in girls viewing their bodies and their sexuality from a male perspective, and "(...) are defined according to how they will bring pleasure to the observer" (Tylka and Van Diest, 2015:68). It can thus be argued how pornography can be objectifying and sexualising women and their bodies (Tylka and Van Diest, 2015). This may result in creating a harmful self-image for girls, who are trying to live up to the ideal of the female body in pornography that is desired by men, as well as contribute to a dehumanising view on girls and the female body from the male gaze. This is not to be viewed as only due to pornography, but pornography can be a relevant factor in how girls view their bodies, as are magazines etc. Furthermore, this can lead to boys and also girls viewing a naked body online or on a mobile phone as something

normative, and something, which does not need consent to be further redistributed with others. This may again lead to failure to recognise the human behind the picture and thus enable especially boys to send and redistribute pictures of girls without the girls' consent. Through pornography, where women are being objectified, a prevailing attitude may emerge that men have unlimited access to women's bodies as a taken-for-granted assumption (Fahs, 2014). This can result in women becoming more sexually objectified, and men failing to view women in pictures for example as 'fully human', reducing the girl in the picture to entertainment for the male gaze. This perspective is used in this project to discuss how boys, with the easy access to pornography on the Internet, might have become so used to viewing naked women and sexually objectifying women in pictures, that they may fail to recognise that the girls in the pictures they see or further distribute are actually individuals with real emotions and suffer real life consequences from the redistribution of their intimate pictures without their consent.

### *5.3.3. Double standard*

With regard to gender, and the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent, there seems to be a persisting and prevailing double standard, which has large consequences for women, to a much higher extent than for men. As argued by Salter (2016), "the patterns of previous times continue with the social media age, where women must not be too risky, nor too 'prude', and can result in a damaged reputation and the risk of sexual harm" (Salter, 2016:2724). This can be transferred to cases seen today, where terms such as victim blaming and slut shaming have become well known terms, and where girls and women, having their intimate pictures redistributed without their consent, have experienced hate and shaming for 'exposing themselves' despite the fact that they may have shared their pictures solely with an love interest. According to Giddens (1994), this double standard, which persists for women, has historically always existed. It is still found in today's society, where it seems to cause a much larger uprising when girls and women's pictures

are being redistributed, than when the same happens to men. With regard to the Internet and social media, social media can be viewed as very contradictory in terms of women's sexuality online. There seems to be a tendency "to view female participation in online publics as contingent on narrow codes of behaviour and appearances that justify apportioning blame to the girl or woman if she experiences online abuse and harassment" (Salter, 2016:2725). This can be viewed as if there is a very thin line to balance for women and their sexuality online, where they quickly become viewed as deviant and therefore to blame for getting exposed and subsequently being harassed. In terms of sending intimate



photos, the double standard persists as well, and women are on one hand being viewed as prudes if they do not send intimate photos, and at the same time labelled as 'whores' and 'sluts', if they do. This judgment is not only expressed by men, but also by other girls calling them 'attention whores' (Salter, 2016). This view is supplemented by Ringrose and Harvey (2015) arguing that if, "girls are judged as 'showing off' 'on purpose' and trying to solicit attention through self-image posts, they (are) called 'attention whores', who don't 'respect themselves'" (Ringrose and Harvey, 2015:208). This further indicates that the primary focus when intimate photos are redistributed without consent is on the girl taking the photos, and who is in the photos, rather than on the person redistributing them without consent (Salter, 2016). Thus, there seems to be a clear gendered perspective in this, which can also be seen in how it does not carry the same risk, nor attention, if a guy sends an intimate picture, than if a girl does (Salter, 2016). As Davidson (2014) also mentions, the term 'slut', seems to only truly apply to women, and it does not stick as well to men, just as there is no equivalent term for boys (Davidson, 2014). This double standard is also found in cases of revenge porn, where intimate pictures have been redistributed by an ex or a flirt, as a way of getting revenge. Girls are not necessarily viewed as 'sluts' by sending the pictures, but as soon as pictures are redistributed and go viral, they become just that. This Shah (2015) relates to how women are viewed as passive in this situation, and without agency, however not "in the women's relationship with the image but with the ways in which these images are read" (Shah, 2015:np). They are viewed as exposing themselves to technology, which indicates how they are 'sluts' and must be punished for that (Shah, 2015:np). Due to this double standard it seems that girls must learn how to navigate on this thin line, being interesting and sexual, and fear to be labelled as a 'slut' if sending intimate pictures to another person or if the picture is redistributed among others. As Ringrose and Harvey (2015) argue, it must be managed with caution, because a girl being asked to send an intimate picture could be viewed as if she is being desired, but at the same time it puts her at risk for being labelled as a 'slut' (Ringrose and Harvey, 2015). Results from a study, where girls were asked why they sent intimate pictures to boys, revealed how they, "(...) believed that sending them was the undesirable price they had to pay for a desirable relationship" (Lippman and Cambell, 2014:380). This indicates how girls regard this as a risk they must take, and a price they must pay to be in a desirable relationship. This perspective is important because it offers an explanation to why girls, to a higher extent than boys, are affected by having their pictures redistributed without their consent, as well as provides an explanation for the motivation for them to do it. It also highlights the gendered risks and double standards attached to sending intimate pictures. Girls and boys are differently challenged by this problem, since the consequences of girls having intimate pictures redistributed without consent seems to be more profound and far reaching than it is for boys. However, there are also different

challenges for boys and girls in terms of the perpetrators, where boys are more likely to be labelled as sexists and misogynists for sharing pictures of girls, whereas girls redistributing pictures of other girls might be labelled as ‘only’ jealous or careless.

## **5.4. Youth culture**

### *5.4.1. Social capital*

The motivation for boys to engage in sexting seems to be connected “to peer social relations and the exercise of power within the peer group” (Davidson, 2014:44). A way to view peer social relations and power is to look at social capital within a group. According to Pierre Bourdieu (1986), an agent or individual is in possession of what he labels as capital. Bourdieu refers to capital as a value or a resource, which is ascribed relative value, depending on the field in which it is brought into play (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996:np). Through capital, the agent is able to reach influence and power in that field. Capital exists in three forms, cultural, economic and social capital. An additional fourth capital form, the symbolic capital, refers to the form of capital within which the other three fundamental capital forms can appear. What creates the symbolic capital is how individuals’ perceptions ascribe the capital more value (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996:np). With regard to this project, one could argue that capital can be used as a way to view how these boys gain social capital from possessing various intimate pictures from girls, and how they gain even more when they share them among their friends. Bourdieu defines social capital as:

“Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the world” (Bourdieu, 1986:51)

In this context, social capital is therefore viewed as the capital that grants boys status among their peers. A group on Facebook, where intimate pictures are redistributed among boys, for example, is a field, one could argue, where possession and redistribution of intimate pictures of girls grant the boys social capital and status among their peers. Social capital, in form of intimate pictures, can thus grant the boys more status within these groups and increase their symbolic capital within this field. In other groups, intimate pictures might be seen as something only redistributed by losers, but within these groups of boys, it is prescribed value as social capital, and holds prestige and status to be in

possession of these, especially if these are rare or difficult to get a hold of. For boys it can become an object for competition to get pictures from girls, especially from very desired girls, and these pictures become a social capital for the boys (Davidson, 2014). If looking at why girls share intimate pictures, it can also be viewed in light of Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital. As well as how boys get a certain amount of social capital and status from the possession of intimate pictures (and the redistribution of those within peer groups), one could argue that girls achieve social capital by sending the intimate pictures. In this field, one could argue, that girls seek to obtain the social capital of status and interest from boys, and in return they share an intimate picture as well as trust the person they are sharing with, and expecting intimacy between the two in return.

#### *5.4.2. Homosociality and male bonding*

The term homosociality is defined as the social bond between persons of the same sex. In this context it is being used as a definition of a relationship between men, a male bonding experience, where patriarchy is upheld (Hammarén and Johansson, 2014). This term will be used to help explain motivations for boys to attempt to get girls to send them intimate and sexual photos, as well as the redistribution among the boys without consent from the girls in the photos. Furthermore, it will contribute to help explain why some boys fail to recognize the severity of their actions, as well as offer ideas about power and status among peer male groups. The term homosociality, can also be viewed as male bonding, and is characterized as "homosocial desire and intimacy, as well as homosexual panic" (Hammarén and Johansson, 2014:2). This idea represents how men must emphasize their heterosexuality in order for others to not suspect homosexual relations, and it therefore focuses on developing misogynist language and emphasizes the sexist views on women.

Thereby, men's relationships towards women become predetermined by the sexist culture reigning in the homosocial groups (Hammarén and Johansson, 2014). Through this "(...) women become a kind of currency men use to improve their ranking on the masculine social scale" (Hammarén and Johansson, 2014:2). In terms of redistribution of intimate pictures without consent, girls in the pictures become reduced to a currency, which can be traded among boys within a group. This is furthermore explained by Cooper et. al., (2016), where boys, through the homosocial relation groups, send and share "(...) pictures of girls' bodies, particularly their breasts, in order to prove their sexual activity and to gain status among their peers" (Cooper et. al., 2016:710). By showing images of girls to others within the group, boys provide physical evidence of their ability to gain girls' trust and get them to do something they have asked for

(Ringrose and Harvey, 2015:210). In this case, it would be receiving an intimate picture of a girl, which would generate status and respect from other boys within the group. This is an expression of male dominance, when there is lack of consent from the victim, and this can also be related to the capital forms from Bourdieu, which were discussed in the previous section. Ringrose and Harvey (2015) argue that girls who are deemed less likely to send intimate pictures prompt more status for the boy receiving them, than girls deemed more likely to send intimate pictures. Again focus is here on the currency and value that these pictures hold. Finally, what is characteristic of homosocial groups, is how the prevailing sexist and misogynist attitudes only offer one way for boys to act, leaving no room for boys to ask questions as to whether the actions within the group are morally and ethically acceptable, and recognizing the corruption of the actions. According to Ringrose and Harvey (2015), any boy who questions the sexist actions and attitudes within the group is in danger of getting excluded himself or labelled as homosexual and socially unacceptable. Thereby, the group dynamic also plays a role in withholding boys in the group, who may not wish to take part, but would rather stay within than being excluded from the group. This is especially important to highlight the many cases of different online groups of guys redistributing numerous intimate pictures of girls without their consent.

#### *5.4.3. Rape culture and victim blaming*

“The term of rape culture refers to multiple pervasive issues that allow rape and sexual assault to be excused, legitimized and viewed as inevitable” (Dodge, 2015:67). This term will be used in this project to highlight, in continuation of the previous section about homosociality and male bonding, how intimate pictures and videos of girls can be redistributed among hundreds of people, without anyone pausing and thinking about the victim and the consequences that the next click ‘send’ will have for the person. This term will be used in ensemble with the term victim blaming, where the victim is being blamed for its actions rather than focusing on the perpetrator doing the crime. Both terms will be used to describe how perpetrators are being given social license to act in whichever way they want, avoiding consequences of their actions (Dodge, 2015). This is not to be viewed as deterministic in a way that this is the only explanation for why there is a tendency for boys to share intimate pictures without consent, but as a suggestion of how to view some of the potential motivations behind the sharing. Examples of victim blaming and rape culture can be found in the following quote, related to girls having shared intimate pictures and afterwards receiving blame and shame for their pictures being redistributed among others without their consent: “(...) the girls pictured in them were sluts that deserved having their bodies violated and/or having their humiliation used for entertainment (...)” (Dodge, 2015:68). According to Dodge (2015), meaning is

given to things or people within frameworks of interpretation, which is something given to them by people. Thereby, in a homosocial group for example, with sexist and misogynist attitudes, redistributing intimate pictures without the consent of the girls in the pictures can be deemed normal, thereby socially accepting women as objects and as entertainment for boys. A term borrowed from Judith Butler is the ‘digitalization of evil’, which she argues is:

“(…) our ability to respond ethically to photographs of human suffering is influenced by the way a photograph is presented to us and how this presentation, or ‘framing’, is influenced by broader norms that affect our ability to perceive individuals as human to recognize their suffering” (Judith Butler in Dodge, 2015:71)

This quote suggests how for example intimate pictures, which have been redistributed without consent, can continue to be redistributed widely, by many different people. The quote furthermore suggests an explanation of what enabled this wide redistribution of intimate pictures. It can be argued how many people might fail to realise how wrong and disturbing it is to redistribute intimate pictures without the consent of the victims, and with people they were never sent to. This can be argued as still containing myths about sexuality, for example the purity myth, where ‘good girls’ should behave according to an inner moral compass, and if they fail to do so, e.g. by sending intimate photos (which are redistributed) they are viewed as deviant girls, who should be punished for their actions (Dodge, 2015). According to Henry and Powell (2014), the problem to focus on is that “non-consensual creation and distribution of sexual images has largely been framed in public discourse as a problem of user naivete, rather than one of gender-based violence” (Henry and Powell, 2014:105). Furthermore, the issue of victim blaming and rape culture encompasses the double standard, which exists for girls, as Cooper et. al. (2016) speaks about, where girls’ value stems from their sexual appearance and appeal. However, it is a fine line between reward and punishment, because they can be punished both for being too risky as well as too prude (Cooper et. al., 2016). This brings out the point of how big a risk it is and how thin the line is for girls between sending an intimate photo, which will bring joy and excitement, and the punishment and victim blaming this action can also imply. Furthermore, in terms of victim blaming, “in many western cultures and societies, sexuality is surrounded by shame and guilt and often consigned to the private areas of life” (Daneback and Löfberg, 2011:190). This perspective can be used to argue how a naked body, and especially a naked female body, can be surrounded with shame and guilt, in continuation of public exposure. This leads to the dialectic relationship between, for girls, the highly sexual environment, and perhaps explicit or implicit pressure to send intimate pictures to someone, and the shame and victim-blaming following, post exposure.

The above section represents a very complex field. Especially, when working with youth, it is important to understand how some people might not be aware of what they are doing when redistributing intimate pictures, some might not be aware of the consequences, and some might not redistribute the pictures to deliberately be evil and hurt the victims. However, there are still elements of sexist cultures, in terms of homosociality as well as victim blaming, which must not be ignored. One could argue that there is a continuum between the lack of awareness, peer pressure and sexist justification of humiliation. There are many grey areas and elements within the phenomenon of redistributing intimate pictures without consent, and these will be analysed in relation to the data collected in the following section.

## **6. Analysis**

The main focus of the project is to analyse and explain the phenomenon of redistributing intimate pictures without consent among Danish youth, especially with focus on two main themes, gender and technology. The phenomenon encompasses many different elements, thus making it challenging to explain. The strategy of analysis is to identify important dimensions, which can contribute to explaining the phenomenon in the empirical data ('theory-driven analysis'). In order to investigate the phenomenon, three sub questions have been created to provide the structure of the analysis and to find explanations of the phenomenon. This covers the background of the sharing of intimate pictures (or sexting), the motivations for young people to engage in the sharing of intimate pictures, and the driving forces behind the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent. This last sub question will be further divided into two parts and analysed from both a technological and a gender perspective, which are two main themes derived from the theory section and included in the main research question. These four sections will provide a possible overview of the phenomenon and lay the groundwork for the discussion as well as recommendations in the next sections.

### **6.1 Background**

To be able to answer the main research question, i.e. 'what explains the redistributing of intimate pictures without consent', the background for this phenomenon must be analysed. In this section, it will be investigated under which conditions the phenomenon of redistributing intimate pictures has developed. This will greatly contribute towards answering the research question.

### *6.1.1. Picture communication and favourable online selves*

As learned from the theoretical framework, identity today is something, which is created online, and as Bickell (2012) argues, the Internet is increasingly becoming the most important place where identities are constructed. Furthermore, as argued by Herring and Kapidzic (2015), adolescents create online selves and attempt to manage favourable impressions of them, which means that they attempt to appear interesting and desirable online. It is therefore crucial how one is presented online, because the way people perceive you and think about you depends on your online self. This theoretical perspective can be related to what was found in the empirical data. The Assistant Director of Dansk Kvindesamfund, Signe Vahlun, (who in the following will be referred to as Vahlun) argues that this transcends into how young people communicate today: “(...) we have increasingly started to speak in pictures rather than text. If one looks at young people today, they do not write very much to each other anymore. They share pictures, pictures of everything (...)”. Kuno Sørensen, expert at Red Barnet (who in the following will be referred to as Sørensen), supports this view: (...) “Instagram and Snapchat are what most young people use nowadays”. Instagram and Snapchat are both picture and communication apps, and very popular among young people. Therefore, it is important to understand how the Internet and technology have developed and played an important role in how young people convey themselves, as well as how they communicate today. It can be argued that the importance of the favourable online self, combined with how communication has transformed into picture sharing, has paved the way for the evolvement of the sharing of intimate pictures. This means that young people today, through communication with each other and on social media, attempt to manage favourable impressions of their online self through pictures. This happens through 1 to 1 communication media such as texting on mobile phones, but it also happens on social media where one has a profile with pictures. Today, one’s online self has become interlinked with the lived self, and thus made it important to manage a favourable impression of the online self. However, as suggested in the empirical data, this idea has been developing for years, parallel to the technological development. According to Sørensen, an example of how one is trying to uphold a favourable impression of the online self can be closely related to sexuality and experimenting herewith. According to Sørensen an example hereof is the social media webpage called Arto.dk, which back in the year 2000:

“(...) became huge (...) children and young people also here tested boundaries on how far one is allowed to go, and such cleavage pictures was something which became a problem eventually, because they were competing on making themselves as conspicuous as possible and get as many likes as possible”

Here, Sørensen explains how the managing of favourable impressions of the online self has been developing for many years. The attempt to appear desirable and interesting is therefore not new in itself, but the possibility of taking pictures and send or post them is new. Therefore, it can be argued that the technological development has provided youth with a variety of possibilities to communicate with each other at all time. In addition to this, due to the high exposure to sex, as presented by Daneback and Löfberg (2011), it is argued by the empirical material how: “(...) the sharing of intimate pictures today is a natural thing with the sexual curiosity adolescents have (...)”. The quote by Sørensen, which suggests that young people bring their sexuality into the way they communicate by the use of intimate pictures, can be supported by the DR2 (2016) documentary. Surveys have shown that more than half of the Danish youth have received a nude or semi-nude photo (DR2, 2016). The connection between managing favourable impressions of the online self and experimenting with sexuality has thus been developing for years, according to Sørensen. This is then combined with the development in communication and technology, which are arguably part of the preconditions for the sharing of intimate pictures.

### *6.1.2. Sexuality as public knowledge*

As presented in the theory section by Daneback and Löfberg (2011), sexuality is no longer as private as it has been, due to media, the emancipation of sexuality, and the rise of the Internet. As suggested by the empirical data, and following on from the previous section, Vahlun says: “we also live in a society today where we increasingly sexualise each other compared to previously”. Today, even children and adolescents are exposed to pornography and sexual images through the Internet and commercials.

Therefore, it will be indicated how sexuality has become part of the public life. This trend has arguably also influenced how young people think about sexuality, and how they may not view sexuality as something to be kept private as it was previously. An article from Berlingske (N.A 1, 2016) aligns with this idea. Based on students from a specific Danish high school, it reports how private and intimate information about the students’ sexual lives is described in detail in the school magazine. The content in the magazine rates from information about who lost their virginity to whom, who are having sex and who has a sexually transmitted disease. This content has all been published without the consent of the people involved, who are also mentioned by name (N.A 1, 2016). This provides an example of how sexuality has become part of the public life, as presented by Daneback and Löfberg (2011). It is no longer clear what should be shared and what should remain private in relation to sexuality. This clears the way for personal or ethical boundaries to be crossed like having intimate



pictures or sexual information published in a school magazine. Moreover, this can be related to the views of Cooper et. al (2016), who state that it has become increasingly easier for adolescents to access pornography and other sexual material via media technology, and to use this to understand their own sexuality and self. Young people mirror some of the stimuli they get from the sexual world which they are constantly exposed to. They convey this into their lived lives by sharing and/or redistributing intimate pictures and sexual information, and treating it as public knowledge. They also express it by their focus on public ridicule in terms of sexuality, e.g. if the social rules are not followed and generally if sexual details become public knowledge.

### *6.1.3. Mutual trust online*

There seems to be a consensus and a latent trust between people that when intimate pictures are shared, they should remain private. As learned from the theory section, Davidson (2014) says that trust is considered one of the most important features of a romantic relationship, which is an argument also found in the empirical data. A girl has written to Børnetelefonen.dk: “I am a 13-year-old girl who did the stupidest thing. Some time ago, I got back together with my ex (again). He asked for the so-called nudes and yes, I trusted him a lot and I was sure I could trust him”. The ex-boyfriend ended up redistributing the intimate pictures without her consent. The fact that she trusted the boyfriend and believed that the pictures would remain private suggests that there is a level of trust, or at least an expected level of trust, when intimate pictures are shared (Davidson, 2014). Sørensen explains: “(...) one should be able to share pictures privately with another person, without afterwards being made to feel responsible for it being redistributed (...)”. He continues: “(...) it is completely okay to share intimate photos with boyfriends or good friends, or whatever, but fundamentally there is trust that they remain private and confidential (...)”. However, this is not always the case. The trust is sometimes broken, and intimate pictures are redistributed without consent, with severe consequences for the victim. According to Zemmels and Khey (2014), studies have shown that many young people tend to have a lot of trust in mobile phones, and consider communication on mobile phones to be 1 to 1 relationships, meaning that whatever is shared will remain between two people. This could perhaps be related to the fact that young people have ‘grown up’ with technology and therefore tend to not view it as being as risky as older people might. It can also be related to the fact that the mobile phone has become a natural extension of the body, thus enabling a strong relationship of trust between the owner and the phone as presented by Zemmels and Khey (2014). This argument is supported by the empirical material here, e.g. the interview with Vahlun, who argues:

“(...) this (the redistributing of intimate pictures without consent) proves that there are some things you want to remain private, but you can never be sure. This is not necessarily due to the big bad Internet, but due to the people behind it. It is not something one can blame the Internet. The Internet facilitates it, but people do it.”

Considering this quote through the dystopian view of the Internet (Arvidsson and Foka, 2015), the Internet is a place of both great possibilities and significant risks. However, this quote furthermore indicates how there is a faulty trust both in people as well as in technology. In terms of people, Vahlun argues that it is important for society to continue talking and teaching about mutual trust if people have shared intimate pictures: “(...) they have given consent to share the pictures between each other, however you cannot redistribute them, because I have not given permission to that”. Here Vahlun puts emphasis on the fact that people should be able to trust each other. However, as explained by Stroud (2014), the fact that everyone can be in touch with everyone at all times makes pursuing courses of hate and harm easy. This means that the fundamental trust, which should be present when communicating online and through mobile phones, can be broken easily and with severe consequences. This will be analysed further in the section on technological explanations.

#### *6.1.4. Summary*

In this section, the background of sharing intimate pictures has been presented, as including elements which can be considered preconditions for the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent. In summary: 1) Young people increasingly communicate in pictures due to recent technological developments, e.g. smartphones and platforms for sharing, e.g. social media. 2) Identity is now created and judged online, as well as in real life. Thus, it has become extremely important to manage a favourable online self. 3) Sexuality has gone from being something private to something very public due to the high exposure and access to sexual content from a young age. 4) There is a high level of trust in each other as well as in technology, e.g. mobile phones. This includes the expectation that something shared between two people remains private. However, trust can be broken, as in the case of redistribution of intimate pictures without consent. These conclusions form the background and the preconditions for the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent.

## 6.2. Motivators

In order to investigate what explains the redistributing of intimate pictures without consent, it is important to establish the different motivators of young people to engage in intimate picture sharing in the first place. The following section will seek to discover some of the common motivators, as were outlined in the theoretical framework. There might be other motivators, but since there have been no interviews held with youth sharing intimate pictures, I rely on the theory, and compare it with the empirical material collected.

### 6.2.1. *Feel desired*

As identified by Cooper et. al. (2016), the first and most common motivator for young people to engage in sexting behaviour is to flirt and gain romantic attention. Essentially, girls send intimate pictures to appear seductive and feel desired by boys. This motivator is identified in the empirical data, where Sørensen talks about his experience: “(...) there are those who intentionally expose themselves in an erotic way to get attention”. This could be through sexting or through, for example, a post on Facebook. This motivator has also been identified by Jan Lillie Lauritsen, the founder of Pulterkammerts Aktivister (who will in the following be referred to as Lauritsen) and is therefore considered a common trend in the empirical material. Lauritsen argues that girls are so eager for boys to like them that they are willing to go very far:

“(...) girls around that age are fairly easy to manipulate, in my opinion (...). Often it is about this guy. Maybe she has previously sent a picture without, let's say, a face. The guy may then demand that she sends more, this time with her face shown, or he will redistribute the one he already has. The girl might then end up doing it. Or perhaps a boy says 'I have to see you naked in order for me to decide if I want to be with you or not (...)’”.

Although this quote is not a concrete example, it mirrors experiences from Lauritsen's own work, and is therefore considered highly relevant. It illustrates how some girls greatly wish to appear desirable and gain attention from boys, and how this wish can turn into an opportunity for someone to manipulate them into sending intimate pictures. An empirical example, where a wish to be desired has resulted in sexting, is a quote from Børnetelefonen.dk from a young girl: “I am a 14-year-old girl. I have a big problem. When I was younger, I sent naked photos and I have only recently stopped because I realised how wrong it was, and how low my self-esteem really is”. This girl's low self-esteem resulted in a desperate need for acceptance and to feel desired by boys, which caused her to send intimate pictures of herself at a young age. According to Cooper et.al.

(2016), this is a common trend, where girls wish to gain acceptance from potential partners and therefore engage in sexting behaviour, even though they might not actually want to.

### *6.2.2. Remain intimate*

According to Cooper et.al. (2016), the second most common motivator for young people to engage in sexting behaviour is to maintain intimacy and for example, prolong the excitement in a romantic relationship. Giddens (1994) argues that today, intimate relationships to a much larger extent entail freedom for both women and men compared to previously. Individuals engage in romantic relationships if they choose to do so, and if it is beneficial for both partners. This can be very relatable to the motivators for why young people might share intimate pictures with each other. An example of this can be found in the empirical data, in a letter to Børnetelefonen.dk, where a young girl writes:

“(…) when I turned 13, I had had a boyfriend for a few months (approximately 4-5). I thought I wanted to make him happy. He is a year older than I am, and he is the best boyfriend you could imagine. So I took some pictures of myself where you could see my face and where I covered my nipples with my hand, but pressed my breasts together. I sent them over Snapchat and it continued for a few weeks”.

This quote supports the theory that young people send intimate pictures to boys in order to remain intimate and ‘make him happy’. This girl expressed her wish to be intimate by using technology to send intimate pictures to her boyfriend. Wanting to be intimate is not new. However, technology has facilitated this need without being in physical contact. Thus, it can be argued that relationships today have developed in parallel with technological developments, and one of the ways to show and experience intimacy is by sending each intimate pictures. It also supplement Giddens’ (1994) theory on how people must share something intimate with a partner, as a token of trust, which here could be an example of how a girl sends a picture to a boy to remain intimate in the relationship. If the boy asks for a picture, and the girl believes this is the way to be or become intimate with him, she may be easy to manipulate and do it regardless of the risks.

### *6.2.3. Experiment with sexuality*

The third most common motivator for engaging in sharing intimate pictures and sexting behaviour is to experiment with sexuality (Cooper et. al., 2016). In

today's society in Denmark, the Internet has 'helped' develop sexual experimentation by making it available online. According to Sørensen, young people have always experimented with sexuality, but today this experimentation has gone online. It is argued how concrete boundaries between the lived self and the online self are disappearing. In the empirical data, Lauritsen explains what he has seen in closed Facebook groups, how there: "(...) are girls who seem around the age of 14, who have lost their own boundaries. They do not care, as long as they get attention from boys. Girls who write that they will send nudes of themselves (...)". Following the trail of thought from Bourdieu (1986) in relation to social capital, one could argue that girls might gain social capital by sending intimate pictures or post daring pictures online, because it gets them attention from boys. Thus, they are managing favourable impressions of their online selves. As argued by Davidson (2014), the experimentation with sexuality online, and the sharing of intimate pictures, could also be partly due to young girls' desire to appear desirable and sexy to partners or a love interest without actually having to engage in physical sexual behaviour, which they perhaps do not feel ready for. An example of this is from the letter to Børnetelefonen.dk from a girl who sent intimate pictures when she was eight years old. First when she was older (14) she realised that she did not actually want to do it. Experimentation with sexuality, as outlined in the background section, is not new. However, the way in which young people today are able to experiment, namely through technology (e.g. intimate picture sharing), is new. Thus, experimentation with sexuality is arguably one of the common motivators for why young people engage in sexting behaviour.

Young people apply today's technological communication devices to implement a common behaviour for them. Sørensen argues: "(...) young people, should, to some extent, have room to test boundaries (...)", thereby underlining how it is normal and right, in his view, to experiment with sexuality.

#### *6.2.4. Pressure*

This can be related to the fourth most common motivator, i.e. pressure from friends or a partner (Cooper et. al., 2016). However, this motivator can be very difficult to identify. As Lauritsen outlines: (...) perhaps a boy says 'I have to see you naked in order for me to decide if I want to be with you or not (...)'. This could indicate how some might feel pressured into sending intimate pictures by a partner, a love interest, or friends, and they give in perhaps because they want to feel desired. If applying the theory of Giddens (1994) to the issue of intimate pictures being shared among young people, it could be argued how young people consider the sharing a way of remaining intimate or feel desired. As discussed in the previous section, young people trust their technological

communication and consider it private (Zemmels and Khey 2014), hence they believe that intimate pictures will not be sent to anyone they were not intended for, and are willing to take the risk. Furthermore, as suggested by Lippman and Cambell (2014) it could be argued that girls might see the sending of intimate pictures as a price they have to pay for a desirable relationship.

#### *6.2.5. Summary*

The motivators for sending intimate pictures varies, however. There are some common trends from the theoretical framework, which can also be found in the empirical data. They are: 1) To appear desirable and gain romantic attention, e.g. from a love interest. The motivator is therefore to ‘give’ a love interest something intimate and private, and as a result feel desired by him. 2) Wanting to remain intimate in a romantic relationship. Pictures and technology enable constant contact and the possibility to remain intimate despite being physically apart. 3) To experiment with sexuality. This has always been a part of young people growing up, but today it has gone online, and young people therefore experiment differently than previously. 4) Being or feeling pressured into sharing intimate pictures, without the girl actually wanting to do so, but perhaps viewing it as the price to pay for an intimate relationship.

### **6.3 Driving forces behind the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent**

In order to analyse what the driving forces are, and to help explain the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent among youth, the background and motivators for engaging in the sharing of intimate pictures have been analysed in the previous sections. To investigate the driving forces, the focus must be on what happens when intimate pictures transcend from sexting, i.e. more or less consensual intimate picture sharing, to the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent. The analysis will include technological as well as gendered explanations, which have been identified as main categories of explanations. It is important to emphasise that intimate picture sharing first becomes a problem when pictures are redistributed without consent, which is also when it receives public attention.

### *6.3.1 Technological explanations*

#### *6.3.1.1 Lack of clarification of boundaries online*

As mentioned in the theory section, the Internet has brought along a variety of possibilities for communicating with each other online, as can be viewed from the utopian perspective of the Internet, as presented by Arvidsson and Foka (2015). However, the Internet has also brought along several risk factors, which follow the more dystopian view of the Internet. From the dystopian view, it can be argued that the development of the Internet and technology has happened so fast that our society has not been able to keep up, in terms of setting boundaries of what is accepted behaviour online. It can be argued that we are potentially seeing some of these consequences e.g. intimate picture redistribution without consent. As suggested by the empirical data, Sørensen argues how young people tend to:

“(…) have forgotten that there are boundaries for how much one can share and should share (…), both in terms of the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent, but also leaning towards the verbal abuse which happens in conflicts and debates and so on. The distance, the lack of direct personal contact with the one you are doing it to, it makes us go much further online than we would do face-to-face”.

The quote relates to the fact that online boundaries have not been clearly defined. This can result in people thinking that they are allowed to do whatever they please online, thus aligning with the dystopian view of the Internet. In the empirical material, Sørensen suggests that the lack of face-to-face relations allows for bullying and harassment to happen online. People can ‘hide’ behind computer screens, effectively protecting themselves, which in turn allows them to speak to others in whichever way they want, without filter and the boundaries which are applied in the physical world. Arguably, redistribution of intimate pictures without consent happens because of this lack of boundaries, as well as lack of education about how to behave online. Vahlun agrees, when asked why pictures are redistributed without consent. She says that one of the reasons is that “(…) really, it is something we encourage, the possibility is there, and it is easy with the communication means we have today”. This follows the dystopian view of the Internet, and as mentioned by Stroud (2009), the Internet provides a very easy way to expose and harass others without great consequences for the perpetrators. This is because it is easy to remain anonymous and hide online. Furthermore, it is possible to use a language which is not generally accepted in face-to-face relations, e.g. ‘slut’ or ‘fag’, which have become normal online among young people today. The tone used online is much rougher than in real life, which clearly shows a lack of guidelines for what is acceptable. This is evident in the empirical data, where Lauritsen says that he is shocked to see how

the young people write to each online. He explains: “(...) the tone in general (...) when they suddenly call each other whore, just out of the blue, where you are thinking, ‘kid you’re only 12 years old, you have no idea what you are saying’”. Due to the lack of clearly defined boundaries, young people might not understand when or why their behaviour is unacceptable. As Sørensen explains, “(...) we have not set the boundaries between private life and public life properly”. Although there is much excitement about the possibility to share everything at all times and be in constant contact with each other, as can be viewed from the utopian perspective, it can be argued, that in the light of the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent, young people in general do not have sufficient information to understand what moral codes and ethics, which are applied in lived life, should also be applied online.

### *6.3.1.2 Breaking of trust and hiding online*

In relation to the background section on trust, the question is what happens when intimate picture sharing transgresses into the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent. Different explanations can be used to analyse why this trust is broken. According to Stroud (2014), the fact that people can remain anonymous or use aliases online makes it ‘easy’ to redistribute intimate pictures without consent without any consequences. This is evident in the empirical data, where Vahlun explains: “(...) others simply don’t know where, who it is and where the pictures are coming from”. People behind the computer or mobile phone screens might receive intimate pictures from a girl who trusts them and wishes to appear desirable. It takes only one click for a person to redistribute these intimate pictures, and it is especially easy if they do not care about the person who sends them. As it is easy to hide behind the screen (Stroud, 2014), it is very problematic to trust the Internet. As proven, there are actual people behind the screens who sometimes do not have good intentions. This will be elaborated further in the following section on gendered explanations. In the empirical data, both Lauritsen and Sørensen stress that the victim who has her picture redistributed is never to be blamed. Lauritsen argues that it is a major trust declaration to send an intimate picture to another person, and therefore he: “(...) does not see that one should say the victim is to be blamed. It would roughly be equivalent to saying, ‘if you walk home alone from the city, then you must know you will get raped, and this is your own fault because you could just have taken a taxi’”. From the victim’s perspective, it is considered a token of trust to send an intimate picture; the picture is expected to remain between the sender and the receiver. The fact that the Internet is a place where one can hide one’s identity and even create secret groups that are hidden from the public, provides a possible explanation as to why some people break the trust.



However, if an intimate picture is redistributed on the Internet without consent, a person is exposed, and suddenly the Internet becomes a place without anywhere to hide for the victim, which is also part of the technological explanations. Once an intimate picture is online it can be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to get rid of it. Vahlun, who interacts with women who have experienced the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent on a daily basis, explains: “(...) it will be a trauma, which is going to be there for the rest of your life, because you can never be sure that it will be removed from the Internet”. Even if a victim believes that a picture has been successfully removed, it is impossible to know how many people have saved the pictures, and whether it might resurface years later. Vahlun continues: “(...) it is a constant anxiety, you cannot remove yourself from it, you cannot remove yourself physically because it is online and it will stay there forever (...)”. In this regard, the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent shares similar characteristics with cyber bullying. According to Mathen (2014), there is no escaping harassment or bullying that happens online, and one is not able to hide because mobile phones and the Internet follow us everywhere. The online self and the lived self can no longer be separated. This means that what we experience online is equivalent to real life, and we cannot escape from it. This is one of the consequences of this phenomenon. The fact that it takes place via technology and online makes it very hard to stop from spreading. This is part of the technological explanations; the Internet thus provides a place, where it is easy to hide as a perpetrator, and at the same time, provides a place impossible to hide as a victim. It also shows how the online consequences also become lived life consequences.

### *6.3.1.3 Framing dependent and online social rules*

The redistribution of intimate pictures can be related to the social rules which are applied online and related to the online self as presented by (Oeldorf-Hirsch et. al., 2016). In terms of sharing intimate pictures online, it can thus be argued how one must follow the social rules which are applied online. These rules seem to include restrictions on women's sexuality and their bodies, and will be analysed further in the gendered explanations section. However, it can be explained by technology how the Internet provides a place where it is very noticeable if social rules are broken. For example, people's comments on a picture when social rules are broken and an intimate picture redistributed without consent. An empirical example of this is when a group of young people has redistributed intimate pictures of a young girl, and a boy makes a comment in a Facebook group: “For instance he writes how she (the victim) should be exposed and people should throw knives after her. She was called a ‘fucking whore and a sperm container’. He additionally wrote that other boys should rape her if they felt like it” (Poulsen and Andersen, 2016). This quote poses an

example how the sharing of intimate pictures can be framed completely differently from what they perhaps were when first shared, and the victims can suddenly find themselves in a position experiencing severe harassment and bullying. Thus, technology provides a field where it can become very clear how girls in intimate pictures can firstly be viewed as desirable, and after they get redistributed, viewed as whores. The difference is that since the online and the lived self have melted together, the harassment will also continue in the lived life, as happened to a victim who had her intimate picture redistributed and states: “(...) I have just recently started at a new school, where all of 8th grade come up to my new classmates and say, ”see the whore who has started in your class”. These quotes offer an example of how social rules online can be broken, and a person can become a victim of ridicule, which can also turn into severe harassment or bullying, as presented by (Oeldorf-Hirsch et. al., 2016). When first sent, an intimate picture may have been seen as desired, but after a person redistributes them, they can be viewed as deviating from the social rules, merely by becoming exposed. An example is from Børnetelefonen.dk, where a young girl explains how she used Snapchat with a boy from her class and shared intimate pictures. She says: “(...) then, by mistake, I sent them to a group on Snapchat, which I have with 5 others from my class. They could see my breasts but not me, and now I am being bullied in school with it”. This quote emphasises how important it is to maintain the social rules when creating one’s identity (Oeldorf-Hirsch et.al., 2016), otherwise young people can become victims of embarrassment. This empirical example shows that a girl is bullied because she arguable ‘broke’ the social rules for what is acceptable. This is because her intimate picture went public and thus is subject to ridicule. Sørensen sums it up:

“(...) there are those who purposely expose themselves in an erotic way to get attention, and like that they are being redistributed. However, they might regret it afterwards, because the pictures they sent, which they themselves thought were beautiful and seductive, are now being redistributed with comments and degraded. They did not imagine that the pictures would create such a reaction, and it is suddenly turned in a completely different direction. They regret that they sent them, because they did not imagine they would be framed as a cheap whore or similar”.

This aligns with theories of both Döring (2014) and Albury and Crawford (2012), who present the idea that intimate pictures are framed as sexy and desirable until they go viral online, and the victims, in the aftermath, are framed as sluts or whores. With the Internet this framing becomes clear, because it can be read what people think about these pictures, as well as how people act in response to these pictures, for instance in terms of harassment, which will be unfolded more in the gendered explanations section.

#### 6.3.1.4 Summary

One of the main themes to explain the the driving forces behind the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent is technology. The technological explanations of the phenomenon are: 1) A lack of clear boundaries online, e.g. in terms of what should remain private and what can be public, and what is acceptable behaviour. 2) The breaking of trust in a place where it is easy to remain anonymous, and where there is much room to hide for the perpetrator, but no place to hide for the victim. 3) The way in which something, which at first can be viewed as desirable by the person who sends it, can suddenly become framed as the opposite, and the person in the picture framed as a whore. This happens when social rules online are broken e.g. when an intimate picture is redistributed and a girl's sexual body is exposed online, which will be discussed further in the next section on gendered explanations.

#### 6.3.2 Gendered explanations

##### 6.3.2.1 The Internet as a 'white male playground' and no sexual equality

A gendered explanation as to why intimate pictures are redistributed without consent revolves around how the Internet is constructed. According to Wajcman (2009), the Internet and technology is created on male terms and primarily serve the needs of men, at the expense of women, which for example can be viewed through the high level of harassment women experience online e.g. in the aftermath of having an intimate picture redistributed online without consent. Even though Salter (2016) argues that women have gained an online role, on an equal footing with men, the redistribution of intimate pictures of online can be traced back to the ideas of Wajcman (2009). The Internet can in some ways still be regarded as the 'white males' playground' (Arvidsson and Foka, 2015), where women might formally have the same rights as men, but not the same lived rights online (Brickell, 2012). According to Vahlun, the Internet has women hate pages and closed Facebook groups and pages where sexism and misogyny roam free. It is in forums such as these that the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent results in respect and an increase in social status, which will be elaborated upon in the following sections. Women are the primary victims of the redistribution. Sørensen says that it is mostly "girls between 14 and 17 years old" who contact their webpage Sletdet.dk. According to Fahs (2014), it is important how women, with regard to their sexuality, must be both free to do whatever they please, and also be free from societal restraints. Fahs (2014) argues that liberal feminists consider women today free to do many things in terms of their sexuality. However, it is also very important to be free from oppressive structures, e.g. women hate pages and Facebook groups and

pages. This suggests that the Internet provides places online, where women are viewed as perhaps not being completely free from oppressive structures. Women are punished for being deviant and getting exposed online, and breaking social rules, regardless of whether they have sent pictures to a boyfriend or if someone has redistributed the pictures without consent. This is one gendered driving force to explain the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent. As presented in the empirical data, Vahlun argues how this has to do with the question of sexual equality:

“The fact that we have equality in Denmark can fairly easily be punctured with this. If we have equality in Denmark, then you are also equal in terms of how you accept and treat each other, and we do not have that. Not in terms of all the women hate sites being there, and this looks like a women’s problem (...)” .

Even though Vahlun has a subjective attitude due to her field of work, she dismisses the idea that Denmark has gender equality, at least with regard to the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent, which is supported by Sørensen. Even though women are considered to be formally equal online, the existence and abundance of Facebook groups and pages against women contest these ideas.

#### *6.3.2.2 Gendered double standards and shameful female bodies*

As mentioned by both Giddens (1994) and Salter (2016), there is a persistent double standard between girls and boys in terms of sexuality, which can be related to what happens to a girl when her intimate picture is redistributed without consent. This double standard seems to include the social rules applied online for women, which seems to be related to restrictions on women’s sexuality and their bodies. According to Salter (2016), old-fashioned patterns seem to remain, where women can neither be too prude, nor too risky online. Women are thus left to balance these two opposites. Salter (2016) also argues that online and offline harassment of girls is sometimes justified as punishment for a girl ‘deviating’ from the narrow codes of behaviour within which she is expected to act. In the empirical data, Sørensen says:

“This is what the gender relations and the gender balance looks like now, and it has been like this for many years. There is a contradicting relationship between the ‘whore’ and the Madonna, which is still played out in this field. Women may not be too sexually active, because then they transform into the role of a whore, but at the same time, they must be virtuous. This is a contradicting relationship, where

they (women) are being shamed to a larger extent than if a man exposes himself in some way (...)."

Vahlun agrees and explains how there is still a stigma applied to women in the aftermath of having intimate pictures redistributed without consent. This is because the female body is still viewed as something to be sexualised. She argues that this has to do with victim blaming (which will be investigated further in the next section), and how society would much rather control and restrict the female body than the male body. Vahlun stresses that this tendency has yet to be eradicated from society, and that it has a lot to do with how people are raised and general attitudes in societies. She says: (...) "we sometimes even go to extremes and claim that it is not his (the perpetrators) fault, because he is a man and he cannot control himself (...). If a man his whole life has been told that it is his right, then of course he will think that (...)" . Vahlun says that Dansk Kvindesamfund has only been contacted by female victims, perhaps due to their name, but in cases she knows of where men have had intimate pictures redistributed online without consent, the motive is most often blackmail, which is very different from what women experience. An example of a girl who has been shamed after having her intimate picture redistributed comes from Børnetelefonen.dk. She explains how she: "(...) get snaps from boys I don't know, where they write: 'heard you send nudes, send some?' I block them right away. Someone has given my number out, so now I get the foulest messages. And I get the foulest "questions", and yes, it gives me suicide thoughts!". Another empirical example from Børnetelefonen.dk addresses how the shaming of harassment of girls after they have intimate pictures redistributed online without consent, and how the online consequences become lived life consequences:

"Now, 5-6 months later, I still receive daily messages that "everyone has these intimate photos". People look at me when I walk in the city centre and other places, and I do not feel like living anymore. I have just recently started at a new school, where all of 8th grade comes up to my new classmates and say, "see the whore who has started in your class" and everyone, EVERYONE, have the pictures in H (city) where I live. Those in H only have them because someone redistributed them all the way to someone in H, and to all the closest towns around H. I feel like it is happening behind my back, which it does (...). I am so upset that everyone has these FUCKING gross pictures of me (...).

Aligning with Salter (2016), this quote suggests that the shaming and harassment seem to be justified, because the victim has had an intimate picture redistributed without consent. Consequently, people who know her as well as strangers shame her. In the empirical data, Vahlun explains that when "(...) your picture first has been redistributed online, and you are being contacted by phone by I don't know how many different men. Not only from Denmark, but from all

over the world (...)", it puts a severe pressure on the victim, and it seems to continue. Thereby, it can be argued that women are not free from oppressive structures as argued by Fahs (2014). Contrary to men, women are shamed and blamed when an intimate picture is redistributed without consent. As learned from Shah (2015), with regard to the two approaches, one could argue that it is the first approach, where the female body is being viewed as using the Internet, which is predominant. From this perspective it is the responsibility of the victim, if intimate pictures are being redistributed online without consent, because the gendered body does not belong online, and when it is, harassment of it is 'legitimized'. Therefore, girls and boys are challenged differently by this phenomenon, and the female body continues to be surrounded by a high sense of shame and guilt, while also viewed as something to keep private (Daneback and Löfberg, 2011). It could be argued how the other approach, as presented by Shah (2015) would be useful, if focus should be shifted away from the victim, and more onto the Internet and the risks it has brought along.

### *6.3.2.3 Inspired by pornography*

Daneback and Löfberg (2011) talk about how pornography has become increasingly widespread and much more accessible for everyone than it has previously been. Furthermore, Tylka and Van Diest (2015) argue that adolescents' use of pornography can contribute to creating idealised and unrealistic fantasies about women. This, in turn, adds to the objectification of women online, e.g. in pictures. The use of pornography might contribute to boys failing to distinguish between the pornography they usually watch from an intimate picture they receive from a girl. Thus, they either fail to recognise that they do not have the girl's consent to redistribute the picture, or they simply do not care about it. Online, women's exposed bodies are accessible for everyone to take advantage of. Fahs (2014) argues that men having full access to women's bodies reduce women to entertainment for the male gaze. An example of this comes from a perpetrator in the DR2 documentary (2016). He argues that he wants to get intimate pictures from girls to see if they are as 'naughty' as someone has said. Thus, he collects intimate pictures and trades them with other boys and men on a continuous basis (DR2, 2016). The women in these photos have become entertainment to these boys, who redistribute, collect and trade them among each other without considering the consequences for the victims (ibid). An empirical example of how girls have been objectified, in public that is, is from a Danish high school, where pictures of girls had been taken from their Facebook profiles and posted in a 'naughty Christmas calendar', followed by sexual comments from male students. This was done without the girls' consent and posted publically on social media (Fahnøe, 2016). High exposure to pornography might add to the objectification of women, and failure to

understand the difference between pornography and private intimate pictures. This can also add to the way women are considered to be entertainment for the male gaze and thereby contribute to the explaining the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent.

#### *6.3.2.4 Victim blaming and elements of rape culture*

According to Vahlun, there is a prevalent attitude in some parts of society that the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent is the fault of the victim. An example is a case from 2015/2016 where a previous participant in the Danish X-factor had redistributed a video clip of a girl under 18 performing a sexual act on him, without her consent or knowledge. Afterwards, he was invited into a Danish TV studio to talk about the case, thereby enabling him to 'defend' himself and blame the victim. Vahlun is incredulous of this and argues: "(...) he is the bad guy and he did something bad". Also in relation to victim blaming, the DR2 (2016) documentary asks a boy who has redistributed intimate pictures about why he did it. He defends himself, saying that 'it is not as if innocent girls have their pictures redistributed'. According to him and other perpetrators, it is the girl's own fault if an intimate picture is distributed online without her consent. The perpetrator ends up saying how he would never do it to someone he knows personally (DR2, 2016). In Dodge (2015), the work of Judith Butler is used, where the term 'digitalization of evil' is used and means how people might not recognise the wrongness of a picture if it is framed in a certain way, like in an example where an intimate picture was shared, with comments such as 'fucking whore and a sperm container' (Poulsen and Andersen, 2016), and if they do not know the person in the picture. Without the personal relation, the wrongness of redistributing a picture fades. People who redistribute intimate pictures without consent are therefore likely to fail to recognise that it is unacceptable to do so, and furthermore, that the consequences for the victims are very severe. Victims can also be met with victim blaming when they try to report it. According to Vahlun, a policeman might know very little about how to handle such a case, and may only tell a girl that she should never have sent pictures in the first place if she did not want them to be redistributed, which he perhaps thinks would have eliminated the problem.

Following this trail of thought, the term 'rape culture' can be reflected upon, as learned from Dodge (2015). In this context, 'rape culture' is something that legitimises the redistribution of intimate photos of girls without their consent, as well as enabling an attitude of victim blaming. Rape culture is alive and thriving in Denmark, and the tone gets extremely violent and threatening. An example is where the Danish newspaper BT was contacted by a group of young people who wanted to shame and expose a 15-year-old girl. They wanted to publicise

intimate pictures and videos of the girl in sexual situations, and they sent more than 20 messages with the material to the newspaper. In a closed Facebook group, a boy wrote how ‘she should be displayed and people should throw knives after her’ and wrote that other boys should ‘rape her if they felt like it’ (Poulsen and Andersen, 2016). Rape culture essentially legitimises the suggestion that someone should be raped. In the context of intimate pictures going viral, it labels the girls as ‘sluts’ who deserve to be humiliated and used for entertainment.

#### *6.3.2.5 Social capital and status among peers*

Another gendered explanation for boys to redistribute intimate pictures without consent is that of peer social relations, and the exercise of power within a group (Davidson, 2014). According to Lauritsen, this is what the redistribution of intimate pictures in closed Facebook groups and pages is about. He says: “It is about status. It is about rising in the courtyard hierarchy”. He refers to groups which he and his fellow activists have access to. They are essentially like courtyards, with harsh bullying and intimate pictures being redistributed without consent. This aligns with Bourdieu’s ideas about social capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996). A person is in possession of a certain amount of social capital, which holds a specific value depending on the context it is unfolded within. Power plays a great role in this, and through social capital, the person is able to achieve influence and power in that field. In the article, “Unge drenge bruger nøgenbilleder som byttekort” by Stefanie Mather (2016), it is recounted how young boys use intimate photos as a value for engaging in exchanging practices with other boys. They use groups and Facebook groups to request pictures, e.g. of specific girls or from specific areas, and trade. Expert in Internet ethics and Internet culture, Jonas Ravn, project manager at Centre for Digital pedagogics, explains how “at some schools, e.g. in Northern Jutland, young boys have used naked photos as a set of cards. The idea was to collect them all and have a whole set” (Mather, 2016). There are a great number of Facebook groups where one can see high school girls’ naked butts, who is kissing who and even a picture of a named boy who is touching a girls private parts (Mather, 2016). As Jonas Ravn argues in the article, it is extra piquant if a boy can find naked pictures of a girl he knows. The reward is much higher than if it is just a stranger without their clothes on, which can be found anywhere on the Internet (Mather, 2016). Thus, intimate pictures can, in some contexts, become a value, which can be bought and traded, and boys who acquire intimate pictures from girls gain social capital. By redistributing intimate pictures among their peers, boys gain status, especially if the pictures are of ‘desired’ girls. Davidson (2014) argues that especially desired girls are valuable to be in possession of, and those who are ‘easier’ to acquire are worth less. Intimate pictures can also be regarded as a



form of trophy, according to Lauritsen. In a letter to Børnetelefonen.dk, a girl writes: “(...) the other day, I sent a picture of myself only in panties and with covered breasts to a boy with whom I have been flirting. We have also snapped a lot, and it seemed like he liked me too. (...) However, after some time (an hour or something), he wrote that he thought we should just be friends (...).” While the precise motivation behind this example is unknown, it is possible that the boy aimed to get the girl to send him intimate pictures, only to ‘end’ it afterwards when he had collected an intimate picture as a trophy.

#### *6.3.2.6 Male bonding*

In the documentary made by DR2, they investigate pages where Danish boys exchange intimate pictures of girls, and ask other boys for pictures of specific girls or girls from specific areas (DR2, 2016). There are many examples of these types of pages, including kridellerkran.com, which ranges girls based on their Facebook profile, rateandchill.dk, and hotornot.dk (Mailund, 2017). Men bonding over the exchange of intimate pictures relates to the concept of homosociality, as defined by Hammarén and Johansson (2014). Within a homosocial relation, in order for no one to suspect homosexual relations, as well as to emphasize their masculinity, there are sexist attitudes prevailing. In relation to the redistribution of intimate pictures within a closed Facebook group for example, intimate pictures are also used as advertisement to achieve views on a specific post (DR2, 2016), and other group members might fail to realise that this behaviour is unacceptable in general society (Judith Butler in Dodge, 2015). Many homosocial groups sport sexist and misogynist attitudes. Vahlun gives an example from a page called ‘Cum on her face’:

“(...) they just take their profile pictures, and then they create a folder. They print a picture, masturbate, get cum on it, take a picture of it with their sperm on it and repost it on the page. Then they can see which pictures have gotten most sperm on them. I mean, that is specifically hatred and exploitation of women. It is oppressive (...)”.

This is an example of women being objectified in certain online contexts. It is also an example of homosociality, because men use women (their pictures) to bond over sexist behaviour towards women, in a manner that emphasises their heterosexuality, as can be found in homosocial relations as argued by Hammarén and Johansson (2014). This behaviour is then used to ‘legitimise’ the bonding between men. As mentioned, there is one controversial site, which has received a lot of attention, due to its many users as well as its content. It is called Offensimentum, and it serves as an example of homosocial relations in this context.

#### 6.3.2.6.1 *Offensimentum*

In the empirical data, both Lauritsen and Sørensen brought up the Facebook group Offensimentum. This was the page that inspired Lauritsen to start doing activist work in this area. Offensimentum has been a disputed page in the Danish media in recent years, since it is a closed Facebook group where the focus is on being offensive. Consequently, people post controversial and potentially offensive things. Offensive things shared include racist pictures, intimate pictures, severe bullying and much more (N.A. Berlingske 2, 2016). On 3 April 2017, this group had more than 105.000 members (Jonassen, 2017). In 2016 Lauritsen found himself invited into Offensimentum. After approximately 30 minutes, he realised that the page “(...) is swamped with naked photos, and there is extremely severe bullying going on (...)”. According to him, these types of groups and pages are popping up all over online in a completely random fashion. On these pages, women become a currency to be traded by boys who are bonding over the exchange (Hammarén and Johansson, 2014). Men also receive social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and status by being in possession of these intimate photos and sharing it among their peers. Thereby, they improve their ranking on the masculine social scale (Hammarén and Johansson, 2014). Sørensen talks about one of the biggest challenges he faces in his work:

“(...) the different Facebook groups, Momentum and others, Viborg-folders and similar picture folders (...). Some young people are unable to control their sexual desires and their relations to the opposite sex. Therefore, they have to degrade the opposite sex in order to heighten themselves (...). That is one of the strengths of the Internet; people gather around a certain subject, stir up an attitude and get many followers. (...) a lot of people want to be included. They might not completely like what they see, but if they speak up and say no, they risk being kicked out of the community, looked down upon or themselves becoming victims of bullying or humiliation”.

According to Ringrose and Harvey (2015), it is very difficult for people within these homosocial groups to speak out and stop the unacceptable behaviour. This means that a lot of people, who might oppose what is happening, become passive followers. If someone questions sexist actions and attitudes within the group, they risk being labelled as homosexuals or socially unacceptable in general. In a homosocial relation, boys send and redistribute pictures of girls to prove their sexual activity and gain status among their peers (Cooper et.al., 2016). Intimate pictures provide physical evidence that a boy can gain a girl's trust and get her to share something he desires. The girl in the picture is not important, because the only thing of relevance is the heightening of one's own status (Sørensen: 200-210). A boy might also 'have' to redistribute a picture if he is unable to handle what he sees and feels he has to share it, without it being

deliberately done to gain status. The common element for these examples is that of homosociality within these groups and pages, as suggested by the empirical data.

#### *6.3.2.7 Summary*

Gender is one of the main themes in the driving forces behind the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent. The gendered explanations behind the phenomenon are: 1) The internet is considered to be dominated by men at the expense of women. Examples of this are found in women hate pages or sexist Facebook groups, where the redistribution of intimate pictures occurs. Here, boys ask other boys for specific pictures of girls, and exchange the ones they have. 2) There is a gendered double standard in terms of how women's bodies are presented online. Women must follow narrow codes for sexuality, being not too risky, nor too prude. If women have intimate pictures redistributed online, these codes are 'broken', which in turn legitimises the high level of harassment they may experience in the aftermath. Thereby, a high level of shame and guilt, compared to the male body, surrounds the female body. 3) The high exposure to sex and pornography in modern society. Watching women's naked bodies online has become normalised, and many fail to realise that it is wrong to redistribute intimate pictures without consent. 4) There is a persistent attitude of redistribution of intimate pictures being the victim's fault, i.e. victim blaming. The perpetrators also fail to realise how severe the consequences are for the victim. 5) Social capital. Boys gain status by redistributing intimate pictures to friends, and by obtaining these pictures in the first place. 6) Male bonding and homosociality. Boys bond with each other, and reject potential suspicions of homosexuality over the sexist objectification of women. Intimate pictures are used as entertainment and to gain status among peers. The fear of bullying and harassment prevent unwilling followers from speaking out against these practices. An example of a group where this takes place is that of Offensimentum, where intimate pictures have been redistributed and sexist behaviour is known to occur. All of these themes together contribute to the explanation of the driving forces behind the phenomenon of redistributing intimate pictures without consent.

## **7. Discussion**

In the following section, I will discuss some of the themes raised in the interviews but which are not covered by the theory and, as a result, not analysed in the previous section. These themes have been identified as important in terms

of disclosing the phenomenon of redistribution of intimate pictures without consent.

They are: responsibility, the criminal act of redistribution of intimate pictures without consent (also in relation to child pornography), how it is not only young people who share intimate pictures, as well as what is being done and what should be done in this area, from the interviewees' points of view.

## **7.1. Responsibility**

An important aspect that has not been addressed by theory in this project is responsibility. This theme continuously came up in all of the interviews in connection with the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent. There is a lack of data on who can be held responsible for the evolution of the phenomenon. As analysed in previous sections, victims are often blamed because they have shared the intimate pictures in the first place, thus enabling the redistribution of them. However, the three interviewees agree that the focus must be shifted onto the perpetrators, i.e. the ones who are redistributing intimate pictures without consent. Furthermore, as many of the victims and perpetrators are adolescents, the three interviewees stress that the adults have a big responsibility in this area. According to Sørensen, it has become clear how: “(...) us adults, teachers, and other professionals working with children, have forgotten to educate about how legislations and laws are also applied to the online world”. This responsibility extends to all adults, e.g. teachers and others professionals who work with children.

Furthermore, all three interviewees agree how a lot of the responsibility also lies with the parents. Lauritsen explains how his activists have made it their main cause to contact the parents of the people sharing intimate pictures without consent. However, he outlines some of the obstacles he meets in his work: “There were many of our younger activists who were a bit scared of taking contact in the beginning, because they had witnessed some of the reactions of the parents, and these can seem very harsh when you first start (...)”. This indicates that the person who contacts parents about the online actions of their child can receive some harsh reactions. The first response of the parents is often very defensive and aggressive rather than open and realistic about the severity of their child's actions. Lauritsen explains how one of the biggest challenges they have in their work are: “(...) the damn curling mothers who all but polishes (their sons – and the perpetrators) halo while he sleeps, instead of just accepting it. Your son is an ass! Now understand it and do something about it (...)”. These sorts of reactions from parents can also be seen in the DR2 documentary, where a mother to a boy who has redistributed intimate pictures without consent

initially wrote an angry text message to the journalist, threatening with lawyers. However, after speaking to the journalist she realised the severity of the action. Thus, it could seem like there is a responsibility of adults, both parents as well as others working with children, who need to enlighten youth about these issues.

## **7.2. Illegitimacy**

There seems to be a lack of understanding that the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent is illegal. This is tied to a lack of education in terms of online behaviour. The media has only recently begun to report that a person can be charged with redistribution of child pornography, if the victim is under 18. This is an aspect, which many, especially young people, are unaware of. Vahlun says:

“I talk to young people from the 10th grade and up, which means they are about 16-20 years old or something, (...). They do not know that they are doing something illegal. They have no idea. They simply do not know that if they redistribute pictures of their ex-boyfriend or girlfriend to their friends, then it is illegal (...). They are very surprised and frightened (...), especially when they redistribute pictures of someone under 18, which is child pornography”.

Vahlun explains how, when she informs young people how severe the consequences are for the victims, they get very embarrassed and upset, because they have redistributed the pictures and not considered the consequences of their actions. This indicates that there is a knowledge gap with regard to what kids and adolescents know and understand about how to act online, and also what types of legislation apply online, both how it can be considered child pornography if the victim is under 18 years of age, but also how it is illegal to redistribute an intimate picture without consent of a person above 18 years of age. This is further indicated by how parents and teachers and others react when they learn about these things. It is the responsibility of the parents, teachers etc. to understand these laws themselves, as well as to teach the children and young people about them. It is very important to emphasise the consequences for the victims to young people, as seen in the DR2 (2016) documentary, where mediation takes place between a perpetrator and a victim. All of the interviewees agree on how it is important that perpetrators are charged with these crimes and serve as examples to others as to what can happen if you redistribute intimate pictures without consent.

### 7.3. Not only youth

The redistribution of intimate pictures without consent is often framed as something that takes place among young people only, as evidenced by young people being the primary focus group of this project. However, as Vahlun says, they have a counselling service for victims above 18 years, and up until now, she has talked with victims ranging from 29-50 years. Vahlun argues how:

“(...) it is not only teenagers who send and redistribute intimate pictures to each other. It is also married people who redistribute pictures to each other. We also see picture manipulation and pictures being taken unknowingly, pictures being hacked (...). It is not always ‘just’ teenagers who send pictures to each other, and how they must just stop doing that”.

While the focus of this project is on young people in Denmark, it is important to establish that the action of redistributing intimate pictures is not limited to young people. This indicates how this phenomenon is much more widespread than was has primarily been the focus in the media, primarily on teens redistributing intimate pictures without consent. Vahlun says: “(...) this (the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent) is being used in very different ways as well. It is often used in divorce cases in order to hurt each other, and I think this is something on a very different level (...)”. She argues that it is important to not dismiss the phenomenon as something that only occurs among young people. This would neglect the older victims, who in turn might be discouraged from reporting it or seeking help. Vahlun argues that there is a difference between how intimate pictures are redistributed among young people compared to divorce cases for example:

“I think adults know that what they are doing is illegal, but they do not know how severe the consequences are for the person they redistribute the pictures of. They do not know that the victim can end up on an international website and risk being contacted and found on her address and hunted down because she is a woman and her picture is somewhere online (...)”.

This is an important distinction between adults and young people redistributing intimate pictures without consent. This is not to say that all young people who redistribute intimate pictures without consent have no clue what they are doing, or do not know that it is illegal. Some are aware and perhaps do not care. Some adults might also be aware, and others not, but this emphasises how people can have different motivators for redistributing and different understandings of the severity and the consequences for the victims.

## **7.4. What is being done and what should be done?**

### *7.4.1. Technological tools*

“(…) A Facebook tool has been developed, where you can report nudity (e.g. an intimate picture being redistributed without consent) and such, and as soon as they reckon that it has to do with revenge porn, then the pictures gets coded. This means that you cannot repost it, so if someone has redistributes a picture in South America and you try the same thing after it has been reported, then it simply just get deleted”.

This tool could be helpful in terms of eradicating the redistribution of intimate photos online. However, Lauritsen is sceptical about how it works, and how it will work. Furthermore, Vahlun argues how she has debated with the police and thus has made them “(…) create a report button, which was launched here on 1 March, 2017 (…)”.

The reason was that victims found it difficult to report these cases online, because when attaching their intimate photos to show what had been redistributed, it would automatically go to the police station’s spam folder due to the content of the mails. This meant that the police often did not get the cases. Furthermore, the victims felt uncomfortable about going to the police station, as many felt they were met with victim blaming from the police. Therefore, this button has the potential to become very important.

### *7.4.2. Education*

All three interviewees agree how it is very important to educate children as well as their parents, policemen, teachers etc. in this area and consider this as a crucial element for combating it. People must be aware of the consequences of redistributing intimate pictures without consent. Sørensen says that we must continue to debate and discuss these problems and teach people about the boundaries, how to show respect and acceptable online behaviour. According to him, it is important that young people start to think for themselves, through a more thorough education plan in school for example, to make them aware of the boundaries, and how to behave online.

### *7.4.3. Fines and compensation*

According to Vahlun, victims receive compensation, but only 10,000 DKK, which is she argues is way too little compared to the trauma experienced by the victims. She states how this amount is what someone from the whiskey belt (affluent neighbourhood in Denmark) spends on a weekend out in Copenhagen.

She argues how it has to hurt, therefore be much higher, if it is to have any affect and for the perpetrators to understand the severity of it. Additionally Lauritsen argues how the parents of the perpetrators should get a fine, as he is convinced that this would make the parents much more involved in their children's online lives.

## **7.5. Summary**

These different points have been discussed here because they all play an important role in understanding and disclosing the phenomenon of redistributing intimate pictures without consent. I have discussed how parents and teachers, as well as other adults working with children and adolescents, have a lot of responsibility in terms of teaching them about how to behave online, an area where they are currently lagging behind. Furthermore, many people fail to understand that it is a criminal act, and that a person who redistributes a picture of a person who is under 18 years of age can be found guilty in distributing child pornography. Additionally it is also a criminal act to redistribute intimate pictures without consent of a person above 18; it is just not the child pornography paragraph it falls under. I have discussed how it is not only young people who take part in sexting who have their pictures redistributed online without consent; it also happens in divorce cases and other cases. The main difference is that in these cases, the perpetrator (often an adult) is likely more aware that it is illegal. Lastly, I have discussed what actions are being taken in this area as well as what could be done onward from the perspectives of the interviewees.

## **8. Conclusion**

In order to answer the research question, 'what explains the phenomenon of redistribution of intimate pictures online without consent among Danish youth', the analysis has been divided into four subsections consisting of background for the sharing of intimate pictures, motivators for engaging in sharing intimate pictures, and the driving forces, which can help explain the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent, split into technological and gendered explanations.

In the background section, it was found how young people today increasingly communicate in pictures due to recent technological developments, e.g. smartphones, and platforms for sharing, e.g. social media.

Furthermore, due to the above, identity is increasingly created online, as well as in real life, and the online self as the lived self seems to have melted together as one. Thereby, it has become very important to manage favourable impressions of the online self. Additionally, it was found how sex and sexuality is seen to have gone from something private to something public, partly due to the high



exposure and access to sexual content from a young age. Lastly it was found how there is a high level of trust in each other as well as in technology, e.g. mobile phones, which include the expectation that something shared between two people remains private. However, trust can be broken, as in the case of redistribution of intimate pictures without consent. These conclusions form the background and the preconditions for the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent.

In the motivator section it was found how there are a variety of different motivators for why young people engage in sending intimate pictures to each other. From the empirical data it was not clear what the primary motivator was, since it is a very complex area. However, the motivators identified in the theory section were all found in the empirical data. It was found how young people engage in sharing intimate pictures with each other because they wish to appear sexy and desirable and to flirt and gain romantic attention from a love interest. Furthermore, it was also found how other motivators are the wish to remain intimate with a love interest, which has become possible due to technology, as well as to experiment with sexuality, which is something that has always been a part of young people growing up, but today it has gone online, and young people therefore experiment differently than previously. Finally, there is the aspect of being or feeling pressured into sharing intimate pictures, without actually wanting to do so, but viewing it as the price to pay for an intimate relationship.

The last section on driving forces to what explains the phenomenon of redistribution of intimate pictures online without consent was, as mentioned, divided into the technological and the gendered explanations. From the technological explanations it was found how there is a lack of clear boundaries about what should remain private versus what should be public, as well as what behaviours are acceptable online. Through the Internet, our relations have become less face-to-face, thus happening through a screen where we cannot see each other. This seems to have blurred the lines for what is acceptable behaviour online. Examples of this can be found in the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent, but also in cyber bullying and the harsh tone displayed online. This is also in terms of the lack of understanding how actions online affect the lived life as well, in terms of consequences for a victim of having their intimate pictures redistributed online without consent. It was found how people tend to have a lot of trust in communication online, however, others, the perpetrators, disregard this trust, due to the lack of face-to-face relations and lack of consequences of online actions. The breaking of trust can be 'easy' online, because the Internet is a place where one can effortlessly remain anonymous, and where there is abundant room to hide for the perpetrator, but no place to hide for the victim, once exposed. Finally, it was found how a picture, which at first can be viewed as desirable by the person who sends it, can suddenly

become framed as the opposite, and the person in the picture framed as, for instance, a whore. This happens when social rules online are broken e.g. when an intimate picture is redistributed and a girl's sexual body is exposed online, which will be discussed further in the next section on gendered explanations.

This leads to the gendered explanations section, where the empirical material suggests how there are some examples indicating how the Internet can be viewed as dominated by men, at the expense of women as suggested by Wajcman (2009). Examples include women hate pages or sexist Facebook groups, where redistribution of intimate pictures occurs, and where boys ask other boys for specific pictures of girls in exchange for the ones they have. As inspired by Salter (2016) as well as Giddens (1994), it was found how there is a gendered double standard with regard to how women's bodies are presented online. Women must follow the narrow codes online, being neither too risky, nor too prude, and if these codes are broken, for example by having an intimate picture redistributed online without consent, it seems to 'legitimize' the harassment which the victim often experiences. It was also found, how young people today are highly exposed to sex and pornography, and this might contribute to create a perception of how the naked bodies of women online become 'normalized'. Furthermore, this sexualisation can be viewed as resulting in the objectification of the female body, adding to the notion of how perpetrators might fail to realise the wrongness of redistributing intimate pictures. Additionally, it was found how there is a high level of victim blaming when an intimate picture is redistributed without consent. The attitude that it is the victim's own responsibility if an intimate picture is redistributed online without consent, removes the responsibility away from the perpetrator, possibly encouraging him to continue redistributing, hence enabling rape culture.

Social capital is also found to play a large role in explaining the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent. The empirical material suggests how a boy is able to gain status among his peers if he obtains intimate pictures and redistributes them to his friends, which is also something which can be found on the Facebook group Offensimentum. This can be related to the term male bonding and homosociality, i.e. where a group of guys objectify women in a sexist way and use women's intimate pictures as entertainment in order to gain status, enhance their masculinity and reject potential suspicions of homosexuality. These conclusions all offer possible explanations as to what can explain the online redistribution of intimate pictures without consent among Danish youth.

## 9. Recommendations

### *More and better education for youth and parents*

There is a general need of more education on digital life. This should be a requirement for children in primary as well as secondary schools. Furthermore, parents, teachers and professionals who work with children should also be offered classes in digital life of children and adolescents. Similar educational programs are already offered by several NGOs, but should be a requirement for all schools and children/youth. An educational program on digital life could be divided into three sections: 1) risks of the Internet, how to set your privacy settings online and how to report a picture online; 2) moral and ethics: how to behave online in an acceptable manner, how to recognise what is unacceptable behaviour and discussions about consent and trust. It is important to use specific cases as work assignments, which forces the students to reflect about morality and ethics themselves and 3) legislation and consequences: how it is a criminal act to redistribute an intimate picture of a person under the age of 18, which is considered child pornography, but also other legislation. Ultimately, this means that the boundaries between real life and online life must be set out and explained. If something is not acceptable in real life, it is not acceptable online either.

### *Tighten the laws on cybercrime*

Following the ideas of Vahlun, a recommendation could be to tighten the laws on cybercrime, more specifically the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent. The Danish Government has created some suggestions for legislation, e.g. to increase jail time from six months to two years. However, more sanctions will be needed. As an example, Vahlun suggested to acknowledge the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent as a violence crime on par with physical, sexual assault.

### *Cooperate with social media services*

It is important to create more and stronger cooperation with social media services or apps, e.g. Snapchat, Facebook and Instagram. It is important that the social media services take responsibility and join the fight against the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent online. Social media services must cooperate with for example NGOs, schools and local authorities to create strategies to combat the redistribution of intimate pictures online without consent.

### *Recognise victim blaming and slut shaming*

Victim blaming and slut shaming need to be recognised throughout society and in the media as a gendered problem. It is essential to recognise that the attitude towards women who have pictures redistributed without their consent differs greatly from the attitude towards men.

### *Focus on the perpetrator*

This is a follow-on from the previous recommendation. Rather than victim blaming, there is a great need to remove the focus from the victim who has sent the pictures, and instead focus on the person who redistributes them without consent.

### *Combat unacceptable youth culture*

This is a very difficult issue, as it is immensely complicated to combat 'locker room talk' and the misogynist and sexist attitudes, which seem to prevail in some groups. Again, education is key. It is important to educate young people about how it is cool to be the one to say stop and to not want to be a part of for example redistribution of an intimate picture online without consent. Rather than leaving a group, people must be encouraged to speak up, stop unacceptable behaviour, such as the redistribution of intimate pictures without consent, and to educate their friends and relations about the consequences for the victims.

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