

Book Review: Revenge pornography: Gender, sexualities and motivations

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3 1 *Revenge Pornography: Gender, sexualities and motivations* by Matthew Hall and Jeff
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5 2 Hearn represents a vital first step in bringing to light the impact of, and potential
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7 3 motivations underpinning, the non-consensual distribution of private, sexual images.
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10 4 Seeking retribution of another by sharing their most intimate pictures has rapid,
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12 5 pervasive, and often times irreversible effects on the victim, both socially and
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14 6 professionally. Through ten well-structured, and clearly-conceptualised chapters, this
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16 7 book establishes the social and legal positions in which revenge pornography takes
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18 8 place, and offers a discussion into the possible motivating factors to offend, as
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20 9 informed by empirical research.
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26 11 Hall and Hearn are to be applauded for their explicit working-definition of revenge
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28 12 pornography – acknowledging both the limitations of the term *revenge*, given that not
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30 13 all offences are carried out as a means of retribution, and the existence of other,
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32 14 sometimes overlapping, non-consensual image-based offences, such as *upskirting*. It
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34 15 is through this mechanism that the authors are able to offer direct and focused
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36 16 discussion of this sexual phenomenon. By association, this also implicitly suggests a
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38 17 demand for further investigation into, and understanding of, related offences – a
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40 18 timely contribution given the recent work of legal scholars, such as Clare McGlynn,
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42 19 into *upskirting* and *deep-fake pornography*.
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49 21 The book is situated after the passing of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015,
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51 22 which made the non-consensual distribution of sexually-explicit images a criminal
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53 23 offence in England and Wales – although the legal positions of other countries are
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55 24 also discussed. Moreover, it is made clear that the book is contextualised in an age
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57 25 where technology has established itself as a key tool in finding (e.g., Tinder, Plenty of
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3 26 Fish) and facilitating (e.g., video calling, 'sexting') sexual relationships. While such
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5 27 technologies have the potential to allow relationships to survive over long distances or
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7 28 periods of absence, and in some cases bring about meaningful relationships between
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9 29 individuals of different cultures, revenge pornography is a negative and damaging
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11 30 potential consequence.
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17 32 Chapters four and five, which bridge the descriptive and empirical elements, really
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19 33 help to make this book stand out. Through these chapters, care is taken to establish
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21 34 core theory into how one constructs social identity, as well as delineate the
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23 35 importance of qualitative research approaches, such as discourse analysis. Though
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25 36 verging on being too basic for some academic readers, by including these two
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27 37 chapters, the authors make the second half of their book accessible to a wider
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29 38 readership. This is important given the commonality of revenge pornography in
30
31 39 modern society. Better-enabling individuals to engage with this material might help to
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33 40 bring about understanding of the impact that such offences have on the victims, as
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35 41 well as go some way to dispelling myths that place blame on the victims for
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37 42 producing sexually-explicit images in the first place.
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44 44 The second half of the book moves on to discuss possible motivations for committing
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46 45 acts of revenge pornography and draws on first-hand accounts of offenders who freely
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48 46 distributed images of their (ex-)partners and acquaintances. Through no less than
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50 47 thirty, albeit brief reports, a consistent story of power and control (or loss thereof) is
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52 48 constructed as the main reason for breaking this bond of trust. In the majority of
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54 49 accounts, the perpetrators of revenge pornography justify their actions as a means of
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56 50 either taking back control or seeking retribution for previous wrong-doings; thus
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3 51 minimising the severity of their actions. However, what is missing from these
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5 52 accounts, are any indications that private, sexually-explicit, and compromising images
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7 53 have been shared in order to *brag* or *reminisce* about positive relationships or sexual
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9 54 encounters; two factors briefly highlighted in the beginning of the book. This would
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11 55 have been a welcome addition, especially given that sexual arousal appears as a staple
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13 56 antecedent in wider sexual offence theory. A core strength of this section, however, is
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15 57 that these accounts are not only provided by heterosexual male offenders (whom
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17 58 research suggests are the predominant perpetrators of revenge pornography), but also
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19 59 by heterosexual females as well as homosexual men and women. This process
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21 60 achieves a more holistic overview of the offence and indicates its ever-increasing
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23 61 presence in modern society.
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31 63 In the closing section of this book, Hall and Hearn fall a little short in their overall
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33 64 summary as they look towards what is next to come in the development of revenge
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35 65 pornography literature. They acknowledge the impact of recent shifts in legislation
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37 66 and go some way to suggesting possible treatment mechanisms of attenuating
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39 67 associated behaviours. However, this frailty is more of a reflection on this ever-
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41 68 evolving means of offending and the lack of offence-specific research in this area.
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44 69 This book is a useful introduction to help understand the nature of revenge
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46 70 pornography and provides several key discussion points for laypersons and academics
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48 71 alike.
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