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Men Talking, Writing, and Imaging Violence against Women

(Dis)continuities Offline and Online

Jeff Hearn, Matthew Hall, and Ruth Lewis

Abstract: How to represent violence—that is, talk about, write about, and image violence—without reproducing violence/violation is a challenge. Violence can be presented, re-presented, and represented in many ways, and through diverse narratives. In this article we analyze the narratives of those using violence, either when subsequently talking about the violence or in doing violation itself. Thus, we write on violence and violation, and we explore how men’s violence and violation are talked of, written, and imaged by men, even while they may well not be aware that they are enacting violence/violation. We attend to some of the continuities and discontinuities in men’s narratives between those talking about their use of immediate, direct physical violence/violation, especially against women, and those doing various forms of digital violence/violation through writing violence/violation. In the latter case, two examples are foregrounded: first, what is popularly known as “revenge pornography,” that is, nonconsensual sharing and distribution of sexual images and texts; and second, “upskirting,” that is, nonconsensual taking of photographs and videos of (usually) women’s bodies and clothing. We draw on or analyze these practices through understandings of men, masculinities, and variable masculinist narratives. The final part of the article compares the three examples and considers their implications, the overlaps and blurrings between offline physical violence and digital violence/violation, and future challenges.

Keywords: imaging, men, online, violation, violence against women, talking, writing

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Introduction

Representing violence—that is, talking about, writing about, and providing images of violence—without reproducing violence is a challenge. This is clear in a wide variety of contexts, including academic work, news reporting, fictional or memory work on violence, the selection of images used in anti-violence campaigns, professional and policy work, book covers, and so on. Violence can be presented, re-presented, and represented, and also read and viewed, in many ways, and through diverse narratives and discourses.

Dealing with the representations of violence and the potential violence of representation is a complex, contingent activity, including for us in this very article: “Displaying the suffering and wounding of others is not straightforward, not least because of the existence of already well-worn, predictable forms of representation” (Rossi 1995: 36; see Heathcote 1994). There are several reasons for disagreements among commentators on how to represent violence; one issue concerns slippages between social practice and representation, and between representations of violence and violent representations; another reflects long-standing divergences among feminists and nonfeminists around pornography, prostitution, commercial sexual exploitation, and sexual violence. These challenges become acute when violence is eroticized, whether in representing what is clearly sexual violence or in the sexualization of violence or violation more broadly. We use the term *violence/violation* to recognize the violation that may be experienced, regardless of how action is framed, conceptualized, or intended, as violence or not (Hearn and Parkin 2001).

These issues present a dilemma for us in writing this article. By representing men’s talking and writing about violence, as well as their written violence, are we reproducing their violence and so committing violence ourselves? Our rationale for presenting verbatim men’s violence is that doing so aids our understanding of how violence is used to inflict harm, maintain gender regimes, and oppress women and girls. We do not present any images. We support Emma A. Jane’s insistence that, rather than protecting readers’ sensibilities by censoring what she calls “e-bile,” we should instead present it in its “unexpurgated entirety”

(2015: 81). This can make for uncomfortable reading in academic work, but it does convey “the real harms done to real victims” (81). By critically confronting the nature of the phenomenon we are investigating, we seek to address and eradicate it.

In this article, we analyze the narratives of men as they use and relate to violence in different ways: talking about violence, doing acts of violence, and reflecting on other men’s violence and violation. We attend to some of the variations in men’s talk about three situations: men talking about their use of immediate, direct physical violence/violation against women partners; their perpetration of and writing about what has come to be labeled “revenge pornography” (but is more accurately labeled as nonconsensual sharing and distribution of sexual images and text) (see Franks 2016; Hall and Hearn 2017; Hall et al. 2023; Tyler 2016); and “upskirting,” that is, covert, nonconsensual taking of photographs and videos (usually) of women’s bodies and clothing, not only literally “up skirts” (Hall et al. 2022).

These three situations of violence and violation provide rich data on how men talk about and write about various forms of violence and violation. In the first case, narratives are drawn from research interviews with men who have used violence against women (VAW). Men are *talking about and accounting* for previous, largely physical violence toward partners and ex-partners; the narratives are largely past-oriented. In the second case, by sharing sexual images nonconsensually, men are doing *written violence*, alongside the visual violence, on a dedicated, custom-built “revenge pornography” website; the narratives are largely present-oriented in one sense, though usually referring to the past. The third case entails men’s *written commentaries* on other men’s previous visual violence on a dedicated, custom-built “upskirting” website; thus, the writing here is both past- and present-oriented. The temporal orientation of different narratives on violence, offline and online, merits further attention and analysis, though this is beyond the scope of this paper (Ólafsdóttir and Hearn 2023).

Thus, we draw on data from three separate studies, conducted by the authors together or separately. Each study is briefly described at the beginning of the relevant section. The data from the different studies are not directly comparable, but, taken individually and together, they

1 provide insights into how men talk and write about violence, how they
2 present violence through images, and how they use talk, writing, and
3 images to do violence. This is even while they may not be aware, or may
4 even consider that they are aware, that they are doing some form of vi-
5 olence/violation. We analyze these practices through understandings of
6 men, masculinities, and various masculinist narratives. This involves
7 recognizing multiple, and sometimes contradictory, relations of men
8 and masculinities, including complicit masculinities, to violence and vi-
9 olation. In saying this, men are understood here as a social category that
10 needs to be both named and deconstructed.

11 The article first discusses our approach to and understanding of vio-
12 lence. It then presents each of the three studies. The final part compares
13 the three situations and considers the implications of the increasing
14 overlaps and blurrings between offline and digital violence/violation.
15

16 **Violences and Violations**

17
18 Analysis of violence, violation, and the gendering of violence has
19 been broadened and developed through feminist and other critical
20 work (Cavanagh et al. 2001; Walby et al. 2016; Stark 2009). Since the
21 early 2010s, this analysis has been extended to include online and
22 digital violence (see, e.g., Bailey et al. 2021; Henry et al. 2020; Lewis
23 et al. 2017; Paasonen 2011; Powell and Henry 2017; Powell et al. 2021;
24 Hall et al. 2023). Recent examinations of online and digital violence
25 are sometimes, but not always, examined in association with direct
26 physical violence. In writing of violence, we are using a broad frame of
27 reference—not only direct physical violence and criminalized violence.
28 Seen broadly, violence includes physical and sexual violence, coercive
29 control, emotional, psychological, and sexual degradation, harassment,
30 rape, sexual assault, incest, sexual coercion, homicide, damaging
31 property, pornography, sex trade, trafficking, war, and representational,
32 economic, environmental, colonialist violence, violence to the self, and
33 more. Violence can be minimal or extensive, life threatening, and lethal;
34 one-off or persistent; sporadic or constant; more or less damaging;
35 random or systematic; and can vary in terms of intention, behavior,
36 harm and damage, experience, and meaning.

Violence, or violences, range from deadly violence, as with homicide; to more diffuse violence, directed more at a group than at a single target; to dispersed violence, such as slow violence, which is hardly recognized as violence at all (Hearn et al. 2022). Moreover, digitalization and digital violence are relevant to all these forms of violence, as we will show, and can be connected with direct physical violence so that clear distinctions between them are not always easy. We explore the (dis)continuities in the forms of violence (e.g., physical, reputational), the target of the violence (e.g., spouse, former intimate partner), the technologies of violence (e.g., weapons, smartphones), the impacts on victim-survivors (e.g., direct or indirect), the medium of representation (e.g., talk, writing, images), audience of representation (e.g., known or unknown men or women), and the performativity of violence (e.g., explicitly misogynist, celebratory). Perhaps most importantly, then, in considering the question What is violence?, we emphasize that violence is not a “thing,” or simply a collection of “incidents” and violent moments, but is better understood as violating social structures, processes, and actions within unequal power contexts.

Despite earlier and long since discredited claims that violence is gender-symmetrical, myriad research (Hester 2017; Walby and Allen 2004) shows that men do most interpersonal, “domestic,” and intimate partner violence (IPV), especially planned, heavy, damaging/injurious, repeated, non-defensive, premeditated, non-retaliatory, sexual, and multiple forms of violence, as well as most economic, collective, institutional, and military violence, which is itself also often interpersonal, sometimes “domestic” (Hearn 2012). Violence is, then, highly gendered, not only in terms of the sex of the perpetrators and victim-survivors but also in terms of the contexts, discourses, explanations, and experiences of it. All such forms of violence have negative impacts, including physical damage and marking, chronic fatigue, psychological distress, problems with intimate relationships, sexual dysfunction, depression, psychological distress, and social isolation.

This article examines how men talk about, write about, and use images to depict violence offline and online. Solely textual and constructionist approaches to violence can reduce the actions, experiences, and impacts to representation, talk, text, image; however, such a reduction

1 has the potential to be dangerous if it obscures the material being and
2 material effects of violence. Violence and representations of violence
3 are both separate from and intimately connected to each other. A strict
4 distinction between and separation of violence and representations of
5 violence needs to be problematized, for example, in assessing men's re-
6 sponses to violence against women. Indeed, representation, talk, writ-
7 ing, and images may themselves constitute violence.

8 A focus on how socially problematic behaviors are self-reported by
9 actors means that textual and constructionist approaches are indispens-
10 able, but those reports have to be analyzed in their social and societal
11 contexts. Self-reports by members of oppressor groups or social actors
12 in dominant, oppressive positions need to be deconstructed, and such
13 oppressions and texts need to be theorized as material- and material-
14 ly based. Thus, a key perspective is to conceptualize violence and rep-
15 resentations of violence as *material-discursive*. Violence involves not
16 only behaviors that are materially experienced and bodily constituted,
17 and representations and texts; rather, violence is also set within socially
18 produced, historical, cultural discourses. Violence involves both doing
19 and representing violence in ways that are simultaneously material and
20 discursive.

21 22 23 **Interview Narratives of Men Talking about Violence:** 24 **Telling It Like It Is, or Not**

25 First, we consider the narratives of men's violence to known women
26 (MVTKW), mainly partners or ex-partners. These narratives derive
27 from interviews with seventy-five men that were conducted in the north
28 of England between 1990 and 1993 (Hearn 1998)—significantly, before
29 digitalization of everyday life and violence was widespread. In most
30 cases, men were contacted by way of cooperation with relevant agen-
31 cies, including criminal justice agencies, and three men's programs. The
32 interviews comprised accounts of the violence and an extensive ques-
33 tionnaire, and they ranged from forty minutes to several hours, with, in
34 some cases, more than one interview. With the interviewees' consent,
35 over one hundred contacts with agencies were made to gather further
36

triangulated information about the men from, for example, prosecution lawyers, police, social workers, and doctors.

When men talk about their own violence toward known women, they do several things. First, most try to establish credibility, with one or more strategies: in a diminished, often more vulnerable, victim position; as potential equal through friendliness or reasonableness; or as a dominant individual, usually trying to establish credibility with the interviewer. With the exception of a few individuals who engaged in total denial, they also give descriptive accounts (no matter how accurate or inaccurate) that provide (re)constructions of violence and that (re)produce certain silences and absences. They also talk with and within discourses of “woman,” gender differentiation, “man,” sexuality, and so on. In particular, they provide accounts—repudiations, excuses, justifications, occasionally confessions—of violence. These strategies may also be a means of recentering men in gender power relations (cf. Cavanagh et al. 2001).

The agreement to be interviewed may be a means of gaining support for reproducing the violence, a chance to tell their side of the story or, for a small number, a means of gaining support for stopping the violence. For men in prison, it may also offer relief from tedium. Or the man may talk as if he is *indifferent* to the violence: the violence may hardly figure as a topic for serious consideration. It may be talked of as mundane, as one might discuss the week’s shopping or the advertisements on television. As a man who reported multiple assaults as part of what might be thought of as taken-for-granted violence to women, said:

A. “I don’t program it [his violence] out. If it happens, it happens, that’s all I can say, you know. Maybe it’ll flare up, say at 9:00 and then if she starts being funny and bashing stuff about, she’ll get another clout about a quarter of an hour after. The more she persists to do it, the more she gets it. Unless when she gets out of my way, then I cool down. She starts [be]coming a bit normal.”

Q. “So it finishes by her getting away from it?”

A. “Yes!”

1 Violence may be talked about in a matter-of-fact way or even indiffer-
2 ently. Violence may also be framed as a mystery:

3 “I don’t know. I’ll tell you when I find out myself. I just don’t honestly
4 know. I can’t . . . I just can’t work that one out. I really can’t. Maybe, and
5 I mean this is just a thought, *but maybe it’s because I loved her so much,*
6 *and I didn’t want to lose her, you know* [emphasis added]. To me that
7 was a way of keeping her, you know, by keeping her in check. It could be
8 something like that.”
9

10 Importantly, the accounts focused overwhelmingly on physical vio-
11 lence and threats, construed as specific “incidents,” isolated snapshots,
12 separated off from the ongoing process of everyday life. At the same
13 time, the violence was often normalized as “necessary” to put the wom-
14 an in her place, with her reported actions deemed as not “in check” or
15 as not performed as a woman “should.” Sometimes these accounts were
16 tortuous in their logic and their narrow, restricted representation of
17 what counted as violence:

18 “I wasn’t violent, but she used to do my head in that much. I picked her
19 up twice and threw her against the wall, and said ‘Just leave it.’ That’s
20 the only violence I’ve put towards her. I’ve never struck a woman, never,
21 and I never will. . . . When I held her I did bruise her somewhere on the
22 shoulder, and she tried making out that I’d punched her, but I never did.
23 I never to this day touched a woman.”
24

25 But even with this limited range, acts were considered to be violent
26 when they were more than a push, led to legal convictions, caused or
27 were likely to cause visible, lasting damage, and when they were under-
28 stood as not sexual. Moreover, VAW was separated off from child abuse
29 (Hearn 1998). In contrast to women’s accounts of receiving violence,
30 psychological, emotional, and economic forms of violence were rarely
31 noted (Hanmer 1996).

32 The structuring of accounts can be conceptualized in several ways.
33 First, there are rather rare direct *repudiations*, in which violence is to-
34 tally denied. However, various forms of *quasi-repudiations* were more
35 common; in these narratives, violence is partially denied, for example,
36

“not knowing,” naturalization, minimization, or relativization (against other violence, previous violence, or the violence of other men, such as the woman’s current partner). In some cases the agency of the perpetrator seemed absent. The phrase “I’m not a violent man” could also be accompanied by recollections of multiple violent acts, with a reluctance to accept violence as part of their identity. And the word “just” also figured alarmingly often, conveying some sense of minimization or relativization:

“. . . up to the last couple of years, I wouldn’t have thought that were a violent incident when I pinned her to the wall, *just something that happened all the time* [emphasis added].”

Most accounts related the violence to what the men saw as *justifications* or *excuses*. In the first case, justifications involved “legitimate” exercise of rights to correct the woman; responsibility is accepted but blame is placed elsewhere, usually on the woman concerned and her not doing what he expected. The woman may be deemed not to act “as a woman,” and this positioned a “not-woman” as available for fault and blame. With *excuses*, blame is accepted but responsibility is placed either “inside” them, as with their own inability to control their anger, use of their hands, arms, and particular parts of their physical bodies, and themselves more generally; or is placed externally, for example, with alcohol and upbringing. Some men address the brutality of others to them in the past, usually fathers, teachers, peers, occasionally mothers. Some men “explained” their violence by reference back to their past, whereby “culture” provides the context for violence or constructs norms of violence. In this sense, they received “support,” even legitimization, from other men and their constructions and recollections of them. Interestingly, the men rarely explained their violence with reference to biology in a deterministic way, even if sometimes referring to bodily sensations.

Occasionally, accounts involved *confessions*, that is, taking *both* responsibility and blame. This was sometimes expressed in terms of speaking of their “real self” that is recognized now but was not then, and sometimes real, unapologetic and straightforward power over women. Some accounts were more *composite* in character, with con-

1 tradictory accounts. Indeed, analytically, justifications and excuses are
2 opposites, even while sometimes combined together in the same broad
3 account. In some cases, a double self was invoked:

4 “I mean other women who I know have been hit, and it’s like, they’ve
5 been hit and that’s it, they suffered physical damage and no long term
6 effects but I feel that because I hit her and *it was out of character* and
7 *in the context where it was*, it’s like . . . who is this person who was like
8 *a completely different alien person* to who she lived with years ago?”
9 (Emphases added)
10

11 To sum up thus far, men’s talk about their previous violence focused
12 on certain kinds of physical violence to the neglect of other forms, in-
13 cluding sexual violence, psychological violence, child abuse, and certain
14 specific “incidents” and moments of violence to the neglect of ongoing
15 routine oppression and control. In addition, their talk was sometimes
16 framed in relation to the personal relationship in question and other
17 aspects of the man’s life. The narratives provide accounts for the man’s
18 violence constructed very largely as certain kinds of acts of physical vio-
19 lence rather than as a violent identity.

20 Since this study was conducted, digital and online violence and vio-
21 lations have become a much more widespread and additional form of
22 control used by domestic perpetrators and by other men who pepe-
23 trate violence against women. It is to these types of online violence and
24 violations that we now turn.
25

26 **Violence and Violation Online: Extending the Arenas of Violence**

27 Information and communications technologies (ICTs) have brought a
28 world-historical change in the relations of sexuality and violence, and
29 sociality more generally. For example, last century, video and magazines
30 were significant vehicles for consuming pornography. This century, the
31 exponential growth in dedicated porn sites makes the online world the
32 significant site for representing and communicating about sexuality and
33 violence.
34

35 The human-enacted affordances of ICTs and computerized com-
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munication networks include compression of time and space; instantaneousness in real time; reproducibility of images and virtual bodies; asynchronicity; faster bandwidth; wireless portability; globalized connectivity; personalization; blurring “real”/“representational,” online/offline, and codex/net (Hearn and Parkin 2001; Wellman 2001; Mays and Thoburn 2013). Email, internet, global positioning systems, spyware, video cameras, online databases, and more can be used to violate, facilitating a proliferation of digital violence and extending the forms and limits of violence/violation.

A meta-analysis of thirty-nine studies on adolescent sexting found 14.8 percent had sent a sext and 27.4 percent had received one, with frequency tending to rise with age (Madigan et al. 2018). A meta-analysis (Mori et al. 2020) of adults aged eighteen to twenty-nine years found that 38.3 percent had sent a sext, 47.7 percent had received one, and 15 percent had forwarded a sext without consent. An increasingly significant aspect of VAW and IPV is now technology-related (Phippen and Brennan 2021; Jane 2016; Powell and Henry 2017). Refuge (2020), the UK domestic violence charity, found in 2019 that 72 percent of their service users had experienced abuse through technology, and 85 percent of respondents surveyed by Women’s Aid in England (Women’s Aid 2020) in 2015 reported that the abuse they received online from a (ex-)partner was part of a pattern of abuse experienced offline (Hadley 2017). In this situation, distinguishing between offline and online violence is not always straightforward or even possible.

While physical violence is enacted through use of the body as a technology (e.g., arms, hands, fists), along with weapons (e.g., sticks, guns) and less purpose-built items (e.g., kitchen utensils, telephones), there are many less directly physical forms of violence/abuse—for example, coercive control, control of money, friends, and family—that employ psychological, economic, and other human “technologies” and affordances, such as belittling, surveillance and resource-control. Digital violence goes a step further with non-immediate technologies and affordances, and many open-ended, undefined possibilities for violation. We now move on to examine specific kinds of digital gender-sexual violation, and how men write about and do violence in that context. The

1 writing here is short and to the point, often using online abbreviations
2 and codes but still telling a story, a focused narrative, from the man's
3 point of view.
4

6 **Writing Commentaries on Online Image-Based Abuse: Inverting the Story**

7 This second set of data derives from a study, conducted during 2016 and
8 2017, of what appeared to be the largest dedicated so-called revenge por-
9 nography website, MyEx.com (Hall and Hearn 2017, 2019b; Hall et al.
10 2023; Hearn and Hall 2019). Ethical approval for this study, led by the
11 second author, in collaboration with the first author, was granted by the
12 university ethics board. The MyEx.com site (taken down in 2018) con-
13 tained at least 12,500 images, along with written commentaries, about
14 90 percent of which were posted by men about women. While it is not
15 always possible to verify the sex of online contributors, this figure is
16 based on the contributor's name, self-identified sex, or other interpreta-
17 tions of the textual exchanges. A minority of posters were men-to-men,
18 women-to-men, or women-to-women.

19 Here, we present a sample of exemplars of men-to-women written
20 textual data accompanying the visual images. Several inclusion criteria
21 were used to create a sample of texts from the website: (1) was more than
22 a headline or title; (2) was written in English; (3) was nonconsensual (in
23 order to exclude, for example, self-identified swingers); and (4) claimed
24 to be about a former intimate partner who had cheated on them. This
25 narrowed the textual corpus for men-to-women ($n = 4,437$). We con-
26 ducted a discourse analysis of these (Potter 1996). Broadly speaking,
27 discourse analysts aim to explore how "versions of world, of society,
28 events and inner psychological worlds are produced in discourse," and
29 so there is "a concern with participants' constructions and how they are
30 accomplished and undermined" (Potter 1996: 146). Our analysis fol-
31 lowed three steps (Edwards and Potter 1992): locate the central themes
32 that are named and/or implied in the talk; focus on the discursive ac-
33 tivities within each section; and examine how respondents constructed
34 accounts, produced descriptions, managed stake (interest), and framed
35 specific activities. We followed this approach when identifying the re-
36 curring discourse patterns (e.g., relating to masculinized notions of

gender and sexual relationships) and how these men account for their actions, such as a legitimate form of “equalizing” action, without self-portrayal as vindictive or seeking to harm, and often also presenting a warning to others regarding infidelity, promiscuity, lack of hygiene, and so on. The texts are presented below as they appeared online, including spelling and grammatical mistakes. The following extracts are illustrative of blame allocation drawing on discourses positioning women as sexually promiscuous:

“Recently broke up because I was too controlling apparently, well I wouldn’t check her phone or tell her to close her fb [Facebook] if she didn’t flirt with every guy!!! As she is now done with me, no point keeping these to myself”

“This waif of Oxygen is my ex of 15 years. She has been cocked more times than John Wayne’s Gun. She has been shot over more times than Bagdad. She has seen more loads than your Mums Washing Machine. Enter at your own Risk!”

The first poster positions himself as the injured party presenting himself as being discarded “As she is now done with me.” Her reported claim for ending the relationship “because I was too controlling” is undermined, and his monitoring of her social media rationalized, by positioning her as promiscuous. The second poster’s account also relies on blaming her sexual promiscuity for his actions, downplaying his culpability by cloaking it in (attempted) masculinized humorous and boastful talk (for the audience’s benefit) and as a warning to other men. The following extracts are illustrative of similar blaming strategies on the loss of money, power, and fatherhood:

“This woman is a nasty lying piece of work, she led me on to bleed me dry of money then put me into a false sense of security then abandoned me when I was ill, I now have panic disorder and anxiety from what she put me through”

“My Slut ex who has ruined my life! She took my kids, ruined my life and now bitches about me to everyone since the divorce”

1 In both extracts, the man positions himself as victim: first, in writing
2 “bleed me dry of money” and eventually “abandoned me”; second, in
3 writing of himself via a three-part list of reported misdemeanors: “took
4 my kids,” “ruined my life,” and “bitches about me.” A three-part list can
5 be a means of bolstering claims (Jefferson 2004). The women’s alleged
6 misdemeanors in these posts and others were typically framed by and
7 linked to dominant discourses of masculinized, hierarchical, heterosex-
8 ual intimate relationships. Reported loss of personal power in the rela-
9 tionship was typically presented as emasculation.

10 While the narratives on MVTKW discussed earlier were mediated
11 through the interview setting and reflect men’s retrospective account-
12 ing, these written narratives accompany nonconsensual distribution
13 of visuals. These written texts focused much more specifically on the
14 particularity of resentments, clearly articulated in relation to a specific
15 grudge over specific events, that “justified” the nonconsensual distribu-
16 tion. They were directed to a variable audience: the ex-partner, friends
17 and family, other men, and unknown imagined audiences. The writing
18 is, in some senses, agentic, self-determined, and preplanned, not least
19 through being written down, and can be understood as performatively
20 doing violence and violation, rather than being spoken responses in a
21 research interview.

22 These written electronic texts, though much shorter than the inter-
23 view responses presented earlier, thus bore similarities to the justifi-
24 cations and excuses used by men accounting for their control of and
25 physical violence toward women and presented women as not meeting
26 their needs (cf. Hearn 1998; Anderson and Umberson 2001). As with
27 physical VAW, reading the detail of sexual image- and text-based on-
28 line violation makes clear the will to have, or regain, power and con-
29 trol. The gender-sexual power relations of physical IPV and revenge
30 pornography exploit the paradox of intimacy and violence—specifically,
31 how the person most intimate, most open, most vulnerable can be hurt,
32 damaged, and violated through that very closeness. The initial known-
33 ness of the victim-survivor is part of its power, and power to violate.
34 However, where sexual image- and text-based online violation differs
35 from direct physical violence is that with the former the private and in-
36

timate is made public, and thus it is virtual, symbolic IPV. In this way, the damage experienced by the victim-survivor comes not just from the ex-partner but also from the sexually explicit images being viewed by the victim, the postee, as well as friends and acquaintances, and by an unknown and imagined audience.

Both the interview accounts and these written posts articulated claims of credibility (to the interviewer and to the homosocial online audience, respectively), and both presented the perpetrator’s vulnerability. However, whereas the interview accounts were characterized as repudiations, quasi-repudiations, justifications, excuses, and confessions, typically via highlighted snapshots of violent “incidents,” the online posts were more precise in their explicitly misogynist characterizations of the allegedly misdemeaning woman concerned. Thus, the narrative is precisely inverted, away from the doing of the violence, even compared with those earlier narratives that effectively blame the woman. Many reported or alleged misdemeanors are tied to and invested in masculinized, hierarchical, heterosexual, intimate relationships and contexts.

The violence in these electronic postings is double-layered—in the nonconsensual sharing and distribution of sexual images, photographs, and videos, and in the misogynist written texts accompanying the images, often directed to unspecified, unknown audiences of assumed male viewers and readers, which sometimes receive supportive dialogical responses. This double-layering is a feature of nonconsensual sharing of images, including of upskirting, to which we now turn.

Upskirting: Compounding Violence to Strangers

The third site of representation and narration concerns “upskirting,” as it has come to be named, and its organizing through dedicated websites. For current purposes, we refer to our study of the website The Candid Zone, founded in 2018, which appears to be one of the largest dedicated “upskirting” and voyeurism websites, containing more than 28,000 specific threads with more than half a million posts (as of August 17, 2019) (Hall et al. 2022, 2023). Ethical approval for the study, led by the second author, in collaboration with the first and third authors, was granted by

1 the university ethics committee. All content on The Candid Zone was
2 “wiped” by the owner in December 2019, after a woman activist threat-
3 ened to expose the posters on the website.

4 Given the number of threads, our analysis focuses on the thread
5 with the most responses, in terms of replies (n = 1,101) and views (n =
6 34,583), titled “YOU MAY WANT TO SIT DOWN FOR THIS ONE!!,”
7 from February 2 to August 17, 2019, when we collected our data.

8 We adopted a thematic approach to the analysis, because it is a flexi-
9 ble method that allowed us to systematically identify patterns of meaning
10 (themes) in the dataset (Guest et al. 2012). Thematic analysis’s flexibil-
11 ity was also useful because it allowed the analysis of themes from top-
12 down, category-driven, pre-given definitions of forms of violence, as
13 well as themes from bottom-up, perpetrator-driven accounts and pat-
14 terns of meaning. We identified two key themes—homosociality and
15 *craftsmanship*—along with a number of subthemes. We emphasize the
16 “man” in “craftsmanship” to highlight the gendered nature of this con-
17 cept as it is performed in the posts we examined. The homosociality sub-
18 themes identified, and their occurrence in the dataset, are gratitude (n =
19 952), respect (n = 763), courage/risk-taking (n = 239), envy (n = 165), and
20 advice seeking (n = 298). *Craftsmanship* subthemes identified are subject
21 (n = 642), as well as camera angle (n = 94) and lighting (n = 76).

22 Harvey Sacks (1992) pointed out that those who speak first provide
23 the context within which other responses should be read, and so we be-
24 gin with the poster VC’s post, which is composed of text accompanying
25 his video and photographic stills of single frames from the video of the
26 victims’ genitalia.

27 “I don’t really ever do skirts and uppies, but I mean look at this amazing
28 beauty. She has to be a model, right? Anyway, I don’t shoot dresses and
29 skirts because I don’t think they shape the ass the way I like. But, this is
30 an exception! The dress kept riding up which is why she was constantly
31 pulling it down. It was a really windy day so I’m sure it was really drafty
32 up in there. It was also fairly cold which is why she had serious goose
33 bumps on those long legs for days. I was doing a follow and felt like I
34 was getting way too obvious so I went out in front and stopped at this
35 vendor table and just hoped they would also stop . . . and they did! I
36

couldn't believe my good fortune. They gave me all kinds of opportunity to get close ups. The denim girl was a bonus . . .”

VC's filming of the women is justified and normalized as an opportunity others in the peer group would likely have also taken because of the attractiveness of one woman in particular: "I don't really ever do skirts and uppies, but I mean look at this amazing beauty." Most comments about the women whose images were reproduced focused on their attractiveness; relatively few disparaging, (explicitly) abusive comments were posted. Sexual objectification of the women and girls was a serious topic for discussion, with no apparent awareness of violation present and represented. VC's account also relies on presenting the women as complicit: "They gave me all kinds of opportunity to get close ups." Victim-blaming was common across The Candid Zone, acting as a means for the perpetrators to protect themselves against self-destructive impulses such as guilt, thus externalizing risk of internal harm (Berkowitz and Cornell 2005). In framing his video "work" as skilled and "risky"—"I was getting way too obvious"—VC bolsters his peer-group status evidenced by the range of positive responses that followed: gratitude, respect, courage, envy, advice seeking, and admiration for craftsmanship.

Gratitude can be experienced through recognition of a sacrifice, giving compliments, showing appreciation, acknowledgment of skills and talent, and so on: "Good god that is just fantastic work!!!! Very nicely done, and another big thanks for the share." Gratitude is often accompanied by *respect*: "Standing ovation for you sir! Very well done! Hundreds of [thumbs] ups for you." Respect is also normalized by aligning it with others in the forum through noting the "Hundreds of ups for you." Risk-taking, regarding being caught, especially as "upskirting" is illegal in many countries, increases masculine peer-group status: "VC I sauté [misspelling of "salute" or a mixing of "salute" and "santé"] you!! That was an awesome and fearless follow of a stunning subject! Thank you." VC's abilities, qualities, and achievements also evoked *envy* for some viewers: "This is dream stuff, talk about right place, right time, you lucky bastard 🍷 epic cap[ture] and thanks for sharing 📷." Gratitude, respect, envy, and risk-taking elevated VC's homosocial status.

1 More concretely, many posters also engaged in *advice-seeking* and
2 guidance on filming videos and taking photographs, equipment to use,
3 where to film or photograph, and so on.

4 “This is superb mate. How did you record that? Can you mention about
5 this? Your techniques?”

6
7 Linked to this was the enhancement of homosocial status through peer
8 recognition of technical skills, *craftsmanship*:

9 “Good God i thought I was sitting down. Excellent capture of a perfect
10 body and perfect beauty. A+”

11
12 This post and others like it express admiration for the “quality” of the
13 subject in the film, while references to the subject’s physical and facial
14 features were common and constitute women’s sexual objectification.
15 Steven L. Arxer (2011) notes that sexual objectification can be a hall-
16 mark of male homosocial interaction. In some responses, attention was
17 also given to the camera angle and lighting:

18 “wow you hit pure gold. Great subject, great angle, and great lighting. A
19 big thanks for this one.”

20
21 “Ohhh man, you nailed with this one!!!! She is hot as hell, and the
22 angles are simply incredible! Excellent contribution sir, thank you very
23 much 😊”

24
25 The respectful reference to the original poster as “sir” by several of the
26 responders reflects the homosocial nature of their admiration of his
27 skills. In terms of more specific technical mastery of angles and lighting,
28 commercially produced pornography acts as a benchmark by which
29 to compare amateur-produced videos and images (Jacobs 2007; Dines
30 2010). Accordingly, visuals deemed of high, seemingly professional
31 quality are celebrated, bolstering homosocial status.

32 Intrusion, violence, and violation of women are treated here as cur-
33 rency for male (virtual) bonding, by way of imaging and writing as well
34 as explicitly celebratory reflection on others’ violating actions.

Concluding Discussion: Doing/Representing Violence

The three sites of representing, narrating, and doing violence examined here can be compared in many ways (Hall and Hearn 2019a; Hearn and Hall 2022). Table 1 summarizes seven further key aspects of similarity and difference between the three sites. The violence in these three sites and situations, and in how men talk and write about and perform them, show both similarities and differences. In each case, masculinized, hierarchical, oppressive, controlling, patriarchal, and violent narrations are in clear evidence.

With MVTKW, the talk recounts and accounts for the largely physical, *damaging violence*, sometimes potentially *deadly violence* (Hearn et al. 2022), and often (re)produces violating talk (repudiations, justifications, excuses); it can be a double violation that may provide grounds for further violence by the man. Image-based sexual abuse (“revenge porn”) can also be understood as constituting further *damaging violence* and a double violation: in the nonconsensual sharing and distribution of sexual images, and in accompanying misogynist written texts. Upskirting can be considered as providing triple violation: initially, by photographing or videoing without consent; then, the posting (sharing and distribution) of the upskirting images, often with associated written text; and, finally, commentaries by other posters on those postings. The celebratory, collective, and homosocial comments of intrusion, violation, and violence add a further dimension, or layer, of violation compared to the other two forms. Importantly, sometimes the victim-survivor may not learn of the digital violence at all or not until much later, so bringing complications of delayed impact: these representations can also be considered *diffuse violence* in contributing to cultures in which violence is accepted and normalized, and thus may enable further violence to women. Thus, even when online violence is not known by those targeted, it still has material and violent effects and consequences.

Violence and violations perpetrated online or offline share many features in terms of how men enact them, talk and write about them, and present images of them. However, the methods used vary somewhat,

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Table 1. Comparison of the Sites of Men's Violence

	<i>Violence to known women</i>	<i>“Revenge pornography”</i>	<i>Upskirting</i>
<i>Doing violence</i>			
Initial violence	mainly certain kinds of physical violence reported	nonconsensual sharing and distribution of sexual images	nonconsensual taking, sharing and distribution of sexual images
Target of violence	(ex-)partner	(ex-)partner and unknown others, as in hacking	strangers
Technologies of violence	offline, mainly use of body, weapons, things, social controls; and increasingly online too	website online, via smartphone and similar devices	camera, website online, smartphone and similar devices
Likely impact on victim-survivor/women	major direct impact; impact on women more generally	probable major direct impact, but victim-survivor may not become aware of it; impact on women more generally	less likely direct impact, likely that victim-survivor does not become aware of it; impact on women more generally
<i>Representing/doing violence</i>			
Medium of representation	talk	visual images, accompanying written text	visual images, accompanying written text, written commentary from other contributors
Audience of representation	interviewer	various: woman/known others/(un)known men	other men
Performativity of violence	talk reproducing violence through (quasi-)repudiations of, justifications of, excuses for violence	misogynist accompanying texts (relationship control, sexualizing women, loss of power)	celebratory commentary texts (homosocial, craftsmanship, women getting “just deserts”)

Note: shaded areas indicate qualified similarities.

from direct physical and sexual violence to the person, other physical
violences to property, and so on, and social controls, to use of text, im-
ages, and mutual sharing (largely between men) online, as well as vari-
ous hybrid forms, as discussed. Moreover, online violence has physical,
bodily consequences (e.g., Bates 2017); the physicalities of the violent
digital spaces can easily translate into more direct physical violence
and threats to safety. In addition, the sites of online violence demon-
strate some of the increasing interconnections between online and of-
fline social interactions. These interconnections become even more
pertinent with greater blurring of offline violence and digital violence.
The range of violences—in this context, violence against women—has
in recent years developed through increasing interconnections of on-
line and offline violence. Multiple crossovers between physical violence
and violent representations and representations of violence may mean
that online/offline distinctions may not always be meaningful. More-
over, violence can be in the same, often private, space, as is the case with
physical attack, or, as is the case with digital violence, it may be near-
by, public, or remote, with production, distribution, and consumption
sometimes in different jurisdictions (Hearn and Hall 2021).

Current technological developments—including with the mano-
sphere, dark web, artificial intelligence, deepfakes, immersive
and virtual realities, the Internet of Things, big data, holographic
innovations—complicate matters considerably, and create more space
and opportunities for men to enact violence against women, as well as
to talk and write about it, and to provide images thereof. The impacts
of their talk, writing, and images are experienced by individual women
but also, more diffusely, by women as a group, who learn that the digital
world is saturated with abuse of women. Violence is not only physical,
direct, and material, and not only represented, indirect, discursive; it is
material-discursive, albeit in somewhat different ways, in offline, online,
and offline/online violence, and in talk and writing about and images of
violence that may in turn constitute violence.

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32
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36

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