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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

What's in a Name? Drawing on Women's Lived Experiences to Introduce and Define Cyber-Located Sexual Violence (CLSV)

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Abstract

Feminists have long since drawn on women's lived experiences to support advancing the concept of Violence Against Women (VAW) to incorporate previously overlooked behaviours/actions. Still, finding the right language to use when naming and defining VAW facilitated by technologies presents a challenge. For example, stretching the concept of sexual violence to include non-physical behaviours/actions occurring online and via Internet-connected devices is questioned within dichotomous binary thinking advocating an offline/online, real/not-real duality. This paper reflects my attempt to meet the aforementioned challenge, providing a working term and definition that applies continuum(s) thinking to the various unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions occurring online and via Internet-connected devices that women in Ireland experience. I draw on findings from a quantitative multiple-choice questionnaire distributed in Ireland in October 2023 that invited women to share their understandings and experiences of the various behaviours/actions outlined in the questionnaire. N=397 women participated, including N=281 who had experienced unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions occurring online and via their devices. The respondents unequivocally understood the behaviours/actions outlined, both comment-based and image-based, *as sexual violence*. I interpret these findings through the lens of continuum(s) thinking, recognising that all forms of sexual violence exist on continuum(s) of experiences, making them episodic and maintaining a sense of fear and threat in women's lives. This paper offers an insight into the lived experiences of women in Ireland and the potential to shift how we understand safety and (sexual) violence. It contributes to the expansion of our legal, social and cultural understandings of sexual violence.

Key Words: Cyber-located Sexual Violence (CLSV), Continuum(s) Thinking, Violence Against Women (VAW), Image-Based Sexual Abuse (IBSA), Quantitative Research in Ireland

Introduction

All forms of violence should be *described and named,* especially insidious forms overlooked due to their non-physical nature. Naming violence helps us identify what various behaviours/actions are wrong and the seriousness of those behaviours/actions, situating that knowledge within our ‘cultural understanding of what [is] socially acceptable’ and what is not (Dunn 2021, p.40). Still, finding the right language and terminology to use when naming and defining emergent violence and situating it within Violence Against Women (VAW) discourse ‘remains a challenge’, not least due to the critiques of the term VAW (see Boyle 2019, p.22). This paper contributes to meeting this challenge, providing a working term and definition positioned in VAW discourse that draws on the lived experiences of women in Ireland concerning comment-based (via written messages, voice notes, and video messages) and image-based (via images and videos) unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions that occur online and/or via Internet-connected devices. As with all umbrella terms, I recognise that VAW has limitations. Nevertheless, it best reflects the existing literature on who is targeted in the various behaviours/actions discussed in this paper, the impact those behaviours/actions have on women, and the questionnaire findings outlined below.

In this paper, drawing on N=397 questionnaire responses to twelve questions from respondents in Ireland who identified as women most of the time[1], I answer the Research Question (RQ), ‘How far do women in Ireland consider unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions online and/or via Internet-connected devices to be sexual violence?’. The findings indicate that the respondents unequivocally understand the various non-physical cyber-located behaviours/actions outlined in the questionnaire, including comment-based and image-based, as sexual violence. I introduce the term *Cyber-located Sexual Violence* (CLSV),[2] defined as ‘*A form of VAW occurring online and/or via Internet-connected devices, encompassing non-physical sexually-based behaviours/actions, including image-based and comments/threats/sexual requests, experienced as negative, sexual, unsolicited and/or coerced at that time, or at a later time’.* This paper centralises the lived experiences of women in Ireland to advance the concept of sexual violence, incorporating often overlooked behaviours/actions by revealing that women in Ireland understand multiple forms of CLSV as sexual violence.

Background

Technology-Facilitated Violence (TFV) reflects the ‘range of behaviours where digital technologies are used to facilitate both virtual and face-to-face’ harms (Henry and Powell 2018,

[1] My research is transgender women inclusive, recognising the socially constructed and shifting nature of gender identity.

[2] This term was referred to in a prior publication (Hayman 2023) as Cyber Sexual Violence (CSV). I shifted to CLSV to distinguish the acronym from Child Sexual Violence (CSV) and highlight the cyberspace-location of CLSV.

p.195). TFV exists within multiple continuums, for example, Online Violence Against Women (OVAW), ‘an umbrella term for numerous abusive acts committed against women and girls online’ (Jurasz 2024, p.11); Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence (TFSV), where the harms are sexually-based (Henry and Powell 2015); and Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) that highlights the significance of the gender identity of the victim-survivor as a reason for violence (United Nations (UN) Population Fund n.d.). In my research, I situate CLSV within VAW discourse. VAW reflects ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to [those identifying as] women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life’ (UN 1993, Article 1).

Like VAW, there are multiple approaches to defining sexual violence. The UN (2017) defined sexual violence as:

> Acts of a sexual nature…that cause [engagement]...in an act of a sexual nature by force, or by threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power, or by taking advantage of a coercive environment or…incapacity to give genuine consent (p.8).

The feminist-inspired approach emphasises the importance of believing victim-survivors who report experiencing sexual violence: ‘The act of sexual violence…[has] occurred when a person claims that an act or experience is one of sexual violence’ (Bourke 2007, p.4). It is this feminist approach to sexual violence victimisation I employ in this paper by centralising the lived experiences of women in Ireland concerning CLSV.

Conceptualising CLSV

CLSV captures and emphasises the cyberspace-located spatial and temporal dimensions of various sexually-based behaviours/actions (Harris and Woodlock 2021). That is not to say the harm experienced by a victim-survivor of CLSV is restricted to cyberspace, but that the behaviours/actions that constitute CLSV are cyberspace-located and non-physical (see Powell and Henry, 2017). Cyberspace is complex, existing within and between the interconnection of people, the Internet, software and hardware, and it is not distinct from our offline world (Powell and Henry 2017). The use of ‘cyber’ in CLSV rather than ‘online’ or ‘technology-facilitated’ draws attention to the messy interconnections and compatibility between people, their devices, and the Internet, where the ‘interplay between the user and the provider [is] so in simpatico’ it is impossible to distinguish between offline/online, rendering such dualist perspectives redundant (Bowie 1999).

CLSV includes comment-based and image-based behaviours/actions, including sexualised electronic vitriol (unsolicited sexual comments/threats/sexual requests), referred to as ‘e-bile’ (Jane 2014; 2017), and Image-Based Sexual Abuse (IBSA) (McGlynn and Rackley 2016). IBSA ‘encompasses all forms of the non-consensual creation and/or distribution [and

threats to create/distribute]…private sexual images’ (McGlynn *et al.* 2017). E-bile captures ‘the sexualised threats of violence, and the *recreational nastiness* that has come to constitute a dominant tenor of Internet discourse [emphasis in original]’ (Jane 2014, p.532). Jane (2014; 2017) characterises ‘flaming’, ‘trolling’ and ‘cyberbullying’ as e-bile. Notably, the text in e-bile is situated in social, cultural, and historical contexts that influence their meaning and impact (Smith 1990). Citron (2014) offers an example of socially, culturally and historically situated e-bile experienced by body-positive activist and influencer Anna Mayer: ‘Guys who might be thinking of nailing her [should know she has] untreated herpes’ (p.1-2). This e-bile should be interpreted in the social, cultural, and historical contexts of Internet discourse, VAW, sexism, heterosexism, fattism, and social stigma around Sexually Transmitted Infections, among others.

Galtung’s (1969) seminal work on violence is central to conceptualising CLSV as VAW: ‘*Violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realisations are below their potential realisations* [emphasis in original]’ (p.168). Galtung (1969) identified that violence occurs when there is a difference between someone’s potential in life and their actual situation. Oyedemi (2016) further explains that any impediment to bodily, psychological, emotional and cultural health and well-being is violence. As CLSV harms victim-survivors in multiple ways (see McGlynn *et al.* 2017), including psychologically, their well-being (their potential) is lower than if they had not experienced CLSV. In fact, the mere existence of CLSV influences the freedom women feel able to exercise on the Internet, whether they are directly victimised or not. Hence, like Galtung (1969) and Oyedemi (2016), my approach to violence rejects narrow conceptions that suggest it is only physical in its nature and harms.

CLSV is a form of VAW when perpetrated against those who identify as women. As adopted at the eleventh session of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1992), gender-based discrimination is referred to as ‘violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately’. Existing literature demonstrates the behaviours/actions characterised in CLSV (see Table One) disproportionately affect women in both its prevalence and negative impacts and is highly gendered in its nature, for example, sending unsolicited penis images (colloquially known as a ‘dick pic’) to women (see Citron 2014; McGill 2021; McGlynn *et al.* 2017). The European Commission’s Directive on VAW and Domestic Violence (2022) highlights that women ‘more frequently experience cyber violence based on their sex or gender, in particular, sexual forms of cyber violence’ (p.2). McGill (2021) outlines the gendered ‘double-standard’ facing women and girls who experience forms of CLSV in Ireland: While the perpetrators, often men, are proclaimed to be ‘heroes’ or ‘legends’, the women and girls victimised are ‘shamed and ostracised’ (p.1). Gender identity matters in the prediction of who will experience CLSV, the impact CLSV has on victim-survivors, how victim-survivors are treated in the aftermath, and the fear women experience due to the prevalence of CLSV in society (see Vera-Gray and Kelly 2020).

However, there exist challenges in naming CLSV *as violence*, specifically sexual violence. For example, in January 2024, it was reported in the media in the United Kingdom (UK) that a girl’s avatar was virtually ‘gang raped’ by avatars controlled by men in the Metaverse (as cited in Camber’s Daily Mail newspaper headline, 2024). In response to the UK police investigation, Camber’s (2024) newspaper article questioned ‘whether police should be pursuing virtual offences – given police and prosecutors are currently struggling with an enormous backlog of *actual rape* cases [emphasis added]’ (para.9). While the police investigation of a so-named virtual rape is notable, such questioning in the British mainstream media of whether this is a crime that the police should investigate is telling given the recent ratification of the Online Safety Act in the UK. It reflects the ongoing sentiment in mainstream media discourse that crimes in cyberspace are not as harmful as those occurring offline nor as worthy of police attention and resources. This sentiment exists despite the UK police highlighting the girl experienced the ‘same psychological and emotional trauma as someone who has been raped in the real world as…[virtual reality]…is designed to be completely immersive’ (Camber 2024, para.4). Nevertheless, Camber’s (2024) questioning of whether the police investigation into the ‘virtual rape’ was worthwhile in one of the most widely read mainstream newspapers in the UK is telling, indicative of the widespread minimisation of the harms of CLSV in social, media, and legal discourse (see Powell and Henry 2017).

The absence of physical contact within CLSV often prevents its characterisation as sexual violence, and stretching the concept of sexual violence to include non-physical behaviours/actions occurring online and via Internet-connected devices is questioned within dichotomous thinking advocating an offline/online, real/not-real duality. In Ireland, the recording, distributing, or publishing of intimate images or threats to distribute or publish without consent *is illegal* (Hayman 2023). These behaviours are commonly understood as IBSA (McGlynn *et al.* 2017). However, Irish law does not acknowledge IBSA and other forms of CLSV as crimes of sexual violence due to their non-physical nature. This failure to account for IBSA as sexual violence ‘is surprising since [the law] is known as Coco’s Law in honour of Nicole ‘Coco’ Fox, who died by suicide after experiencing an online hate campaign, including [CLSV]’ (Hayman 2023, p.37). That IBSA is not approached in Irish law as a crime of sexual violence as it is non-physical is disappointing, given the embodied corporeal impacts it had on Coco.

I reject binary/dualist understandings of sexual violence as physical, instead utilising the concept of continuum(s) thinking. Engaging with the ‘feminist political stretching of the concept of violence to incorporate hitherto normal, unnoticeable actions and interactions’, I position CLSV as existing on multiple continuums, including the Continuum of Violence (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004), the Continuum of Sexual Violence (Kelly 1998a; 1988b), and other TFV and TFSV continuums (see McGlynn *et al.* 2017). I assert that sexual violence exists beyond the physical by centring victim-survivors’ lived experiences of CLSV. Through centring such perspectives in this paper, like that of Anna Mayor, the girl whose avatar was virtually ‘gang raped’, and the women who responded to my questionnaire, I identify that CLSV exists on various continuum(s), whereby women’s experiences of multiple sexually

violent behaviours/actions across their lifetimes provide the context in establishing specific behaviours/actions of CLSV as sexual violence.

The Feminist Politics of VAW

Naming and defining VAW draws on feminist politics and theory, consequently facing a backlash from opponents of feminism and resulting in debates among feminists (Frazer and Hutchings 2020). For example, Boyle (2019) critiques the use of VAW due to the ‘too-frequent conflation’ of VAW and ‘gender-based violence’, which perform erasures, including the failure to gender the perpetrator (p.32). In drawing on the lived experiences of women in Ireland to introduce and define CLSV as a form of VAW, I do not seek to overlook the gender identity of the perpetrators, minimise the CLSV experiences of multiple gender identities who do not identify as women, or endorse a gender binary of victimhood (see Frazer and Hutchings 2020). However, whilst acknowledging the limitations of the term VAW, I do seek to highlight the gender identity of the questionnaire respondents, situate CLSV within VAW discourse in Ireland, and acknowledge my commitment to openly ideological research (Lather 1986). Using the term VAW is political; it demonstrates a refusal to be silent about the so-called normal interactions, including those in cyberspace, that women experience as violence (see Htun *et al.* 2012; Kelly 1988a; 1988b; 2017; Mardorossian 2002).

To attempt to combat the critiques of research on VAW, an intersectional lens confronts epistemological assumptions that essentialise women (Vera-Gray 2017). Intersectionality aligns with the continuum(s) thinking applied in this paper in problematising the dualist/dichotomy - us and them - perspectives found in essentialism (see Collins 1986). Continuum(s) thinking further recommends challenging dichotomous assumptions (Kelly 1988a; 1988b). It supports recognising the fluidity and indistinguishability in the ‘boundaries’ between women who exist in a coalition of ‘affinity, not identity’ (Haraway 2016, p.17). Intersectionality and continuum(s) thinking offer a means for engaging in feminist research on naming and defining forms of VAW while seeking to avoid essentialising women in that work (see the critiques of Boyle 2019).

Moreover, continuum(s) thinking supports a nuanced exploration of the ‘grey areas’ between non-physical comment-based and image-based CLSV and physical forms of sexual violence whilst avoiding ‘equating speech with rape’ (Boyle 2019, p.28). A notable contribution to continuum(s) thinking, the Continuum of Sexual Violence (Kelly 1988a; 1988b), identifies how sexual violence happens across women’s lifetimes and is temporal, whereby sexual violence experienced in adulthood recalls childhood experiences, reestablishing the harms and impacts in women’s lives (see also Vera-Gray and Fileborn 2018). As Kelly (2017) explains, ‘One’s life and sense of self are changed, and continue to be changed, by the legacies of violence and abuse’ (p.xi). Consequently, the meanings women make of their CLSV experiences are related to their past and future experiences, to reality and what may happen (possibility), thus maintaining a pervasive sense of fear and threat in women’s lives

(Vera-Gray and Fileborn 2018). After all, any woman who uses the Internet or an Internet-connected device is arguably at risk of CLSV.

Research Methodology and Methods

Feminist Research Practice

In line with the doctoral research project this paper relates to, I adopted Feminist Research Practice as the methodological approach in this paper. My Feminist Research Practice acknowledges that the research is not feminist because of the topic, questionnaire respondents, or myself but because of *how I undertake the research* (Harnois 2013). I centralised the lived experiences of the women who responded to the questionnaire, employed a collaborative and participatory approach to the questionnaire development through engaging with organisations like Safe Ireland, and used an intersectional feminist theory lens in data analysis. Additionally, I wrote this paper to inform the debate on improving women’s lives in Ireland through better understanding their experiences of sexual violence in its multiple forms.

Quantitative Questionnaire

A multiple-choice questionnaire about unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions occurring online and/or via Internet-connected devices informed this paper (see Table One). N=397 respondents who self-identify as women most of the time and live in Ireland answered 12 questions discussed further below. These 12 questions formed the opening section of a more expansive questionnaire that explored women’s experiences of CLSV. Of the N=397 respondents, N=281 women identified they had experienced some form of CLSV and answered additional questions about their experiences. I do not discuss the results from these other questions in detail in this paper. Due to the collection of personal data, the questionnaire was anonymous and compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation in the tools I used (Microsoft Forms) and data storage. I undertook a Data Protection Impact Assessment to demonstrate a rigorous consideration of ethics, including concerns around privacy and confidentiality, in line with my Feminist Research Practice. The University of Galway’s Ethics Committee granted ethical approval for my doctoral research project in September 2023.

I disseminated the questionnaire online between October 2nd and 22nd 2023, through multiple social media channels, including X (formally Twitter), LinkedIn, and Instagram. Participants were further recruited by widely disseminating the questionnaire in my networks within Ireland. These networks included academic institutions, activist groups such as Cyber Awareness Ireland, and civil society organisations, including the Rape Crisis Network, Women’s Aid, and Safe Ireland. I also shared posters about the questionnaire with community libraries throughout Ireland. This recruitment process may have resulted in respondents who were more likely to identify the behaviours/actions explored as sexual violence. The demographic details collected from N=281 respondents included gender identity, sex,

sexuality, age range, educational experience, and employment status. Most notably, 52 percent of respondents were aged 18-24, increasing to 76 percent 18-34. Of the N=214 respondents aged 18-34, 72 percent identified as a student/researcher or student/employed, suggesting that the questionnaire recruitment process resulted in university students in Ireland being the majority of respondents. These respondent demographics further suggest the questionnaire reached women who may be more likely to critically evaluate existing norms about sexual violence in Ireland.

I adopted the phraseology of ‘unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions [occurring] online and/or via Internet-connected devices’ from the well-tested questionnaire applied in a large research project in multiple English-speaking countries, including Australia, New Zealand, and the UK (see Henry *et al.* 2020; McGlynn *et al.* 2021; Powell *et al.* 2019; Powell and Henry 2019). I piloted my questionnaire with eight individuals between June and August 2023, making changes based on the feedback. I analysed the questionnaire in December 2023-Februrary 2024 using IBM’s SPSS quantitative analysis software.

In the questionnaire, I asked: (1) ‘*Do you think the following are examples of sexual violence occurring online and/or via Internet-connected devices?’* (See Table One). Respondents had the option to select one answer from (A) *‘Yes, this is sexual violence’*, (B) ‘*No, this is not sexual violence*’, or (C) ‘*I am unsure’*. I guided the respondents with, ‘In this section, I seek to understand whether you think sexual violence can occur online and/or via Internet-connected devices. There are no right or wrong answers’. Due to the exploratory intention of the questionnaire, I did not provide one definition of sexual violence to be followed, and the respondent’s understanding of the words ‘sexual violence’ was not examined in detail in the questionnaire (though in my doctoral research project, I interrogate the questionnaire findings using qualitative methods). Still, given the focus of the questionnaire and reflecting societal knowledge of sexual violence in Ireland, I made a reasonable assumption that the respondents who chose to engage with this research and answer A, B or C understand what sexual violence entails and its potential to harm, whilst noting that these understandings may not all be the same.

Findings

CLSV is Sexual Violence

The results indicate that respondents overwhelmingly understand the behaviours/actions listed in Table One, bar the first behaviour/action identified by italics, as sexual violence. Eighty-eight percent of respondents identified that ‘someone threatens to comment online and/or message others another person’s contact details and say they are available for sexual acts’ is sexual violence. Respondents rated all other behaviours/actions as sexual violence with 90 percent or higher (see Table One). The highest scoring behaviour/action understood as sexual violence with 98 percent was: ‘Without permission,

someone posts online and/or sends to others a nude/semi-nude/sexually explicit image/video of another person (including ones that have been altered to resemble another person)'. Of the behaviours/actions that were threatened (rather than acted upon), 93 percent identified those as sexual violence. For the behaviours/actions that included action (rather than a threat to act), 94 percent identified those as sexual violence. This finding suggests that the respondents recognised *the threat to perpetrate* behaviours/actions *as sexual violence* as much as acting upon those threats.

I undertook a cross-tabulation analysis of the respondents who identified they had experienced CLSV (N=281) compared to those who did not (N=116). Strikingly, there was an overwhelming consensus in both groups that the various comment-based and image-based behaviours/actions identified in the questionnaire constitute sexual violence. I included an additional question asking respondents: '*Have you ever witnessed any of the unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions online and/or via Internet-connected devices mentioned above happening to another person?*'. Notably, with Chi-square/Phi and Cramer's V statistical significance (<.001), of those who had experienced CLSV, 77 percent said that they had witnessed the behaviours/actions happening to another person, compared to 41 percent of those who had not experienced CLSV. This 36 percent difference may indicate that CLSV victim-survivors are more perceptive to others experiencing similar victimisation. This finding warrants further investigation during the next stage of my doctoral research project.

The only behaviour/action that scored less than 88 percent to (A) 'Yes, this is sexual violence' was the assault on an avatar: 'Someone online/in a virtual world/gaming environment comments that their avatar/game character did something unwanted and sexual to another person's avatar/game character'. Fifty-five percent of respondents said they were either unsure that this was sexual violence or they did not think this was sexual violence. This finding is interesting in the context of the so-named virtual 'gang rape' discussed earlier in the paper. While applying the Continuum of Sexual Violence (Kelly 1988a; 1988b) supports considering an assault on an avatar as a form of sexual violence, the questionnaire findings do not currently support this. However, firstly, I used the language 'comments' rather than 'simulated' or 'acts out' to capture the comment-based behaviours/actions describing an assault on an avatar. Yet, this choice of language may not capture the full nature of an assault on an avatar, as suggested in Camber's (2024) article above (an assault in virtual reality). Secondly, the questionnaire was live before the case in Camber's (2024) article occurred. Since October 2023, there has been a growing awareness of IBSA facilitated using Artificial Intelligence (AI), largely due to the viral sexual videos of Taylor Swift in January/February 2024 (colloquially referred to as 'deepfake pornography') (see Montgomery 2024). In addition, at the time of writing, primarily due to this increase in awareness of the harms of the IBSA facilitated using AI, the UK is recommending legislative adjustments that criminalise the *creation* of so-called sexualised 'deepfakes' (see Gov.uk 2024). With this in mind, I propose that if I conducted this questionnaire again today, an assault on an avatar may be more widely understood as sexual violence by respondents.

Omitting the assault on an avatar, an average of 92 percent of respondents identified that comment-based and 95 percent of respondents that image-based behaviours/actions are sexual violence. There was no significant difference between these comment-based (written, voice notes, and video messages) and image-based behaviours/actions identified as sexual violence (see Table One). This finding suggests that the respondents recognise the range of behaviours/actions that constitute CLSV as sexual violence rather than only considering IBSA, which is more often discussed in media discourse in Ireland. In the existing literature, comment-based examples of unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions occurring online/via Internet-connected devices are rarely defined using the language of ‘violence’. Instead, terms like ‘e-bile’ or ‘hate speech’ are frequent (see Citron 2014; Jane 2014; 2017). In contrast, this finding suggests that the comment-based behaviours/actions featured in my questionnaire are also understood as constituting sexual violence in Ireland by the women respondents.

Table One: The Behaviours/Actions and Results in Full

Behaviours/Actions	**Answer = Yes, this is sexual violence**	**Answer = No, this is not sexual violence/I am unsure**
Someone online/in a virtual world/gaming environment comments that their avatar/game character did something unwanted and sexual to another person's avatar/game character.	45%	55%
Someone threatens to comment online and/or message others sexually explicit details about another person.	92%	8%
Without permission, someone comments online and/or messages others sexually explicit details about another person.	93%	7%
Someone comments online and/or privately messages another person unwanted sexually explicit comments/threats/sexual requests.	95%	5%
Someone threatens to comment online and/or message others another person's contact details and say they are available for sexual acts.	88%	12%
Without permission, someone comments online and/or messages others another person's contact details and says they are available for sexual acts.	91%	9%
Someone comments online and/or messages others that they want to do something unwanted and sexual to another person and/or encourages others to do so.	92%	8%
Someone sends another person an unwanted nude/semi-nude/sexually explicit image/video.	90%	10%
Someone threatens another person that if they do not send a nude/semi-nude/sexually explicit image/video to them, something bad will happen.	95%	5%

Without permission, someone creates a nude/semi-nude/sexually explicit image/video of another person (including ones they alter to resemble another person).	96%	4%
Someone threatens to post online and/or send to others a nude/semi-nude/sexually explicit image/video of another person (including ones that have been altered to resemble another person).	96%	4%
Without permission, someone posts online and/or sends to others a nude/semi-nude/sexually explicit image/video of another person (including ones that have been altered to resemble another person).	98%	2%

Discussion

Naming and Defining CLSV

The women in this study unequivocally understand CLSV as sexual violence. My CLSV definition draws on this notable finding and the existing literature (see Jane 2014; McGlynn *et al.,* 2017), highlighting that CLSV exists on various continuum(s) of experience. It identifies the nature of CLSV, including comment-based and image-based behaviours/actions. It draws on the lived experiences and interpretations of the women respondents by gendering CLSV and centralising their experiences of the various behaviours/actions that constitute CLSV. I will further investigate this CLSV definition during the next stage of my data collection for the doctoral project; I anticipate it will change and adapt based on future findings.

Nevertheless, the questionnaire findings support situating CLSV on the Continuum of Sexual Violence (Kelly 1988a; 1988b). The respondents understand even arguably ‘unremarkable’ acts as sexual violence. For example, a man sending a woman a ‘dick pic’ may be ‘unremarkable’ in today’s dating scripts in Ireland (see Dunphy 2022). Yet, the women respondents in my questionnaire who did not want to receive this image understood it and experienced it as sexual violence. Situating CLSV on multiple continuums (of violence), including Kelly’s (1988a; 1988b) Continuum of Sexual Violence, offers greater insight into the findings, highlighting the potential significance of women’s previous experiences of sexual abuse and violence in all its forms. This significance is further suggested as 11 percent of the women in the questionnaire who experienced CLSV identified that it included physical violence, and 54 percent stated they knew the perpetrator. Through the continuum(s) thinking

lens, it is not only the individual incident/s of CLSV the women reported in their questionnaire responses that give CLSV its meaning as sexual violence, but also the context in which some women experienced CLSV that proceeded and surrounded it.

Significance and Recommendations

The questionnaire findings support that the term Cyber-located Sexual Violence (CLSV) is valid to refer to the various unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions occurring online/via Internet-connected devices that women in Ireland experience. Significantly, before this questionnaire, it was unknown whether women in Ireland considered CLSV as sexual violence. The recent Sexual Violence Survey in Ireland that examined sexual violence prevalence and impact did not include such non-physical behaviours/actions (Central Statistics Office 2022). Hence, I firstly recommend incorporating CLSV in future large-scale research on sexual violence in Ireland among the general population to validate the findings in this paper across multiple gender identities and social locations *and* establish the prevalence of CLSV victimisation in Ireland.

The findings further suggest that laws in Ireland have not kept pace with the public’s understanding of sexual violence, although further research in this area is also recommended. Contrary to perspectives that stretching the concept of sexual violence to include non-physical behaviours/actions is, and should be, avoided, the findings presented illustrate that some women in Ireland are willing to name CLSV behaviours/actions as sexual violence (see Boyle 2019). If we expand the understanding of sexual violence in Ireland, this could enable victim-survivors of CLSV to access more tailored and better-funded support. Moreover, expanding the approach to sexual violence in Ireland could encourage a shift in the way we think about safety and various forms of violence. Instead of considering that the most important forms of violence to address in Ireland are visible and physical forms, a more nuanced approach that incorporates the findings outlined in this paper could expand our legal, social and cultural understandings of sexual violence in Ireland and beyond. By acknowledging that CLSV is sexual violence, Ireland could firmly rebuke the widespread minimisation of CLSV by centring the lived experiences of victim-survivors.

Summary

The results from my multiple-choice questionnaire demonstrate that the women respondents overwhelmingly understand unwanted negative, sexually-based behaviours/actions occurring online and/or via Internet-connected devices as sexual violence. Notably, of the N=397 respondents, N=281 had also experienced CLSV. Interpreting the findings through the lens of continuum(s) thinking supports recognising that the respondents relate their experiences and understandings of CLSV to their past and (possible) future sexually violent experiences. The continuum(s) thinking approach helps us appreciate how a ‘dick pic’, though non-physical and often impersonal, is interpreted as a sexually violent behaviour/action

without minimising the harm it causes *or* equating it to other forms of sexual violence, such as rape (Kelly 1988a; 1988b). Applying the findings, I introduced and defined the term CLSV in this paper as ‘*A form of VAW occurring online and/or via Internet-connected devices, encompassing non-physical sexually-based behaviours/actions, including image-based and comments/threats/sexual requests, experienced as negative, sexual, unsolicited and/or coerced at that time, or at a later time’.* Overall, this paper demonstrates that some women in Ireland understand sexual violence as existing beyond the physical forms prioritised in social and legal discourse, locating it firmly on Kelly’s (1988a; 1988b) Continuum of Sexual Violence, and providing important findings to support shifting how we understand safety and (sexual) violence in Ireland.

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