



**Kaunas University of Technology**  
Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities

# **Interplay between Image-Based Sexual Abuse, Consent and Online Disinhibition Effect in the Lithuanian Context**

Master's Final Degree Project

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**Joana Barkauskaitė**

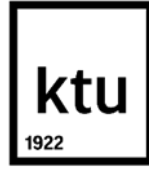
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Supervisor

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**Kaunas, 2024**



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Digital Culture (6211NX032)

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## **Interplay between Image-Based Sexual Abuse, Consent and Online Disinhibition Effect in the Lithuanian Context**

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### Summary

This master's thesis examines a new, yet pervasive form of sexual abuse specific to online spaces in Lithuania, that challenges the idea and comprehension of consent, and reasons for displaying lack of self-regulation. **Aim of the research** – to assess the connection between image-based sexual abuse, understanding of consent, and reasons for toxic behaviour in the context of Lithuania. **Relevance of the research** – image-based sexual abuse has become a rapidly growing digital phenomenon with primary purpose to inflict emotional distress, humiliation, or harm to the victim, especially marginalized groups in Lithuanian society. Therefore, it must be viewed not only as an example of digital abuse, but also as an expression of heteropatriarchal society and culture. Non-consensual image sharing is gaining attention on academic level, yet rarely is connected to the issue of no redefinition of sexual consent, and online disinhibition effect as a motivation. Furthermore, there are no research made on this subject in the context of Lithuania, therefore it is necessary to analyse and evaluate the situation. **Research problem** – research on interplay between image-based sexual abuse, consent and online disinhibition effect is necessary, but is it enough to make changes? **Research methods** – analysis of literature review, which later is explained by quantitative research analysis. **Theoretical framework for the research** – this paper takes an extensive look at revenge pornography, consent, online disinhibition effect and feminist theories on sexual pleasure and gender as an idea, by combining theoretical frameworks, which include the works of researchers such as McGlynn, C., Franks, M. A., Suler, J., Reicher, S. D., Krien, A., De Beauvoir, S., Butler, J., Citron, D. K., Mulvey, L. and Hasinoff, A. A. and others. **The structure of the research** – research is divided into five chapters: Definitions, History, Forms and Laws in Lithuania Regarding Image-Based Sexual Abuse; Feminist Theoretical Framework in Understanding Gender, Pleasure and Sexual Violence Against Marginalized Groups; Understanding Consent, Online Disinhibition Effect and its Relation to Image-Based Sexual Abuse; Empirical Research and Analysis Regarding Image-Based Sexual Abuse, the Understanding of Consent and Behaviour Online in the Context of Lithuania. **Objectives of the research** – 1) To provide definitions of image-based sexual abuse and its forms, accurately portraying representation of this phenomenon; 2) To analyse the background and legal awareness of image-based sexual abuse in Lithuania. 3) To evaluate if the definition of sexual consent is applicable in online interactions. 4) To delve into the motivation behind image-based sexual abuse, especially online disinhibition effect, its history and influence on impulsive and aggressive behaviour online. 5) To explore how gendered dynamics within online interactions influence the negotiation and violation of consent. **Conclusions** – Theory analysis revealed the various definitions of image-based sexual abuse, yet commonly used phrases such as revenge pornography and non-consensual pornography, lean towards victim-blaming rather than keeping the perpetrators accountable. Lack of specific laws

in Lithuania also add to the issue, as pornography creation and distribution is still illegal in Lithuania (Article 309). There is still lack of sexual education and awareness in terms of image-based sexual abuse, yet survey results showed that 64 out of 72 respondents do not think that education alone is sufficient to deal with it. Additionally, 77,8% of respondents agree that this phenomenon should be considered as a crime. However, 41 out of 72 respondents do not know any laws and regulations that could be applied to fight it. Almost all respondents (93.1%) believe that the sense of anonymity online leads to reduced inhibition, with 50% attributing this to an increased likelihood of engaging in sexually abusive behaviour. A paradox in 2 of respondent's answers emerged, in terms of violence, with one expressing the belief that not all people generally understand that abuse is not just physical, while another holds the perspective that abuse is solely physical. 17 respondents argue that misogyny is the main reason for gendered violence which could be explained by the notion that throughout history women were (and still are) expected to exist for men's pleasure. Additionally, one respondents answer represents the duality of fighting traditional ideologies, yet subconsciously still being a part of it.

Barkauskaitė, Joana. Sąveika tarp vaizdais paremtu seksualinio smurto, sutikimo ir internetinės dizinhibicijos efekto Lietuvos kontekste. Magistro studijų baigiamasis projektas / asist. pdr. Runa Chakraborty Paunksnis; Kauno technologijos universitetas, Socialinių, humanitarinių mokslų ir menų fakultetas fakultetas.

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## Santrauka

Šiame magistro darbe nagrinėjama nauja, tačiau Lietuvoje paplitusi seksualinės prievartos forma, būdinga internetinei erdvei, kuri kvestionuoja sutikimo idėją ir supratimą bei savireguliacijos trūkumo internetinėje erdvėje priežastis. **Tyrimo tikslas** - įvertinti, ar sutikimas ir internetinės dizinhibicijos efektas turi sąsajų su vaizdais paremtu seksualiniu smurtu, Lietuvos kontekste. **Tyrimo aktualumas** - seksualinė prievarta naudojant atvaizdus tapo sparčiai plintančiu skaitmeniniu reiškiniu, kurio pagrindinis tikslas - sukelti emocinį stresą, pažeminimą ar pakenkti aukai, ypač marginalizuotoms Lietuvos visuomenės grupėms. Todėl šis reiškinys vertintinas ne tik kaip skaitmeninės prievartos pavyzdys, bet ir kaip heteropatriarchalinės visuomenės ir kultūros išraiška. Dalijimasis atvaizdais be sutikimo sulaukia vis didesnio dėmesio akademinio lygmeniu, tačiau retai kada siejamas su seksualinio sutikimo sąvokos supratimu internetinėje erdvėje bei internetinės dizinhibicijos efektu kaip motyvacija. Be to, Lietuvos kontekste nėra atlikta tyrimų šia tema, tai tik padidina tokio tyrimo poreikį, kad suvokti situaciją. **Tyrimo problema** - vaizdais paremtu seksualinio smurto, sutikimo ir internetinės dizinhibicijos poveikio sąveikos tyrimai yra būtini, tačiau ar jų pakanka, kad būtų galima keisti situaciją? **Tyrimo metodai** - literatūros apžvalgos analizė, kurią vėliau papildė internetinio klausimyno, užpildyto 72 respondentų, analizė. **Tyrimo teorinis pagrindas** - šiame darbe nagrinėjama keršto pornografija, sutikimas, internetinis dizinhibicijos efektas ir feministinės apie moterų seksualinį malonumą bei lyties teorija, remiantis tokiais autoriais: McGlynn, C., Franks, M. A., Suler, J., Reicher, S. D., Krien, A., De Beauvoir, S., Butler, J., Citron, D. K., Mulvey, L. ir Hasinoff, A. A. ir kt., darbus. **Tyrimo struktūra** - tyrimas suskirstytas į penkis skyrius: Apibrėžimai, istorija, formos ir įstatymai Lietuvoje, susiję su vaizdais paremtu seksualiniu smurtu; Feministinė teorinė analizė skirta suprasti lyčių, moterų malonumo ir seksualinį smurtą internete prieš marginalizuotas grupes; Sutikimo supratimas; Internetinės dizinhibicijos efektas ir jo ryšys su vaizdais paremtu seksualiniu smurtu; Kiekybinis tyrimas ir analizė, susijusi su vaizdais paremtu seksualiniu smurtu, sutikimo supratimu ir elgesiu internete Lietuvos kontekste. **Tyrimo uždaviniai** - 1) pateikti vaizdais paremtu seksualinio smurto ir jos formų apibrėžimus, tiksliai atspindinčius šio reiškinio reprezentaciją; 2) išanalizuoti vaizdu paremtu seksualinio smurto ir teisinio sąmoningumo pagrindus bei to įstatymus Lietuvoje. 3) Įvertinti, ar visuotinai suprantamas seksualinio sutikimo apibrėžimas taikytinas internetinėje erdvėje. 4) Įsigilinti į priežastis leidžiančias veikti vaizdais paremtam seksualiniam smurtui, ypač į internetinės dizinhibicijos efektą, jo istoriją bei įtaką impulsyviam ir agresyviam elgesiui internete. 5) Ištirti, kokią įtaką deryboms dėl sutikimo ir jo pažeidimui turi lyčių dinamika internetiniame bendravime. **Tyrimo išvados** - teorijos analizė atskleidė, kad vaizdais paremtu seksualinio smurto apibrėžimai yra įvairūs, tačiau dažniausiai vartojamos frazės, tokios kaip *keršto pornografija* ir *pornografija be sutikimo*, yra labiau nukreiptos

į aukos kaltinimą, o ne žmonių, kurie taip elgiasi atsakomybę. Prie šios problemos prisideda ir konkrečių įstatymų trūkumas Lietuvoje, nes pornografijos kūrimas ir platinimas šioje šalyje vis dar yra neteisėtas (309 straipsnis). Taip pat, Lietuvoje vis dar trūksta lytinio švietimo ir informuotumo apie vaizdais paremtą seksualinį smurtą, tačiau apklausos rezultatai parodė, kad 64 iš 72 respondentų nemano, jog vien švietimas nėra pakankama priemonė su tuo kovoti. Ypač kai 77,8 proc. respondentų sutinka, kad šis reiškinys turėtų būti laikomas nusikaltimu. Nors 41 respondentas iš 72 nežino jokių įstatymų ir taisyklių, kurie galėtų būti taikomi kovojant su vaizdais paremtu seksualiniu smurtu, didžioji dauguma (93,1 %) mano, kad dėl anonimiškumo jausmo internete sumažėja savęs slopinimas (savo elgesio suvokimas ir savireguliacija), o 50 % respondentai sieja su didesne tikimybe įsitraukti į seksualinį smurtą internete. 2 respondentų atsakymuose išryškėjo paradoksas: vienas iš jų išreiškė įsitikinimą, kad ne visi žmonės apskritai supranta, jog prievarta yra ne tik fizinė, o kitas atsakiusysis laikosi požiūrio, kad prievarta yra tik fizinė. 17 respondentų teigia, kad pagrindinė smurto lyties pagrindu priežastis yra mizoginija, kurią galima paaiškinti nuostata, kad per visą istoriją iš moterų buvo tikimasi (ir vis dar tikimasi), jog jos egzistuos vyrų malonumui. Be to, vienas respondentas, kuris yra vyras, yra puikus pavyzdys, kaip patriarchalinė sistema išsiskynusi nustatant moters vertę interneto kontekste - paklaustas apie seksualinius ir santykių lūkesčius Lietuvos visuomenėje, savo nuomonę pradėdamas kaip feministes įžvalgas, jis ją užbaigė sakiniu apie tai, kad anketą užpildė tik todėl, nes jam patiko, kaip tyrėja atrodė savo profilio nuotraukoje.

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## **Introduction**

### **Relevance of the Research**

Revenge pornography, in the last decade, has become a rapidly growing digital phenomenon that has attracted the attention of not only the general public, but also scholars. This abusive behaviour in online spaces include non-consensual distribution of explicit images and content with the primary purpose of inflicting emotional distress, humiliation, or harm to the person depicted. Heteropatriarchal ideology that is still prevalent in today's society shows that marginalized groups, especially women, are disproportionately vulnerable to this evolving form of sexual exploitation. Therefore, this phenomenon raises inevitable questions about privacy, consent, technology, and what makes perpetrators feel invisible in the digital age.

To understand image-based sexual abuse it is important to view it not only as an example of technological abuse, but also as a deeply interconnected expression of society and culture, especially in terms of gender relations and depths of human psychology. In relation to this abuse, victims must deal with broken autonomy, trust and disrupted well-being. Additionally, non-consensual image sharing, and creation can blur the lines between traditional ethical and legal boundaries by challenging principles such as consent, privacy, and diverse cultural norms, and requires thorough research to explain its complex dynamics and motivations behind it, especially in Lithuania, where image-based sexual abuse can lead to victim-blaming.

### **Research Problem**

Image-based sexual abuse poses a serious risk to people's well-being, their right to autonomy and societal understanding of consent. It also important to evaluate responsible technology usage and how others should be treated in the digital space. Feeling anonymous online with lack of regulations only enables perpetrators to act upon harming others. Furthermore, this problem highlights a serious gap in the academic research about image-based sexual abuse in Lithuania, calling for a detailed analysis of the various facets of the problem, local laws, as well as motivation behind it.

**Research Aim** – to assess the connection between image-based sexual abuse, understanding of consent, and reasons for toxic behaviour in the context of Lithuania.

### **Objectives Of Research:**

1. To provide definitions of image-based sexual abuse and its forms, accurately portraying representation of this phenomenon.
2. To analyse the background and legal awareness of image-based sexual abuse and Lithuania.
3. To evaluate if the definition of sexual consent is applicable in online interactions.
4. To delve into the motivation behind image-based sexual abuse, especially online disinhibition effect, its history and influence on impulsive and aggressive behaviour online.
5. To explore how gendered dynamics within online interactions influence the negotiation and violation of consent.

## 1. Definitions, History, Forms and Laws in Lithuania Regarding Image-Based Sexual Abuse

*Revenge pornography*, also known as non-consensual image sharing or image-based sexual abuse, has become a major concern in the information era. According to C. McGlynn, E. Rackley, and R. Houghton's 2017 study, the dissemination of intimate sexual or erotic content without the explicit consent of the involved party, which is primarily perpetrated by former romantic partners but is not limited to them, constitutes a manifestation of aggression. The significant rise of this phenomenon is caused by how technologies are integrated into everyday life and communication. Therefore, a review of image-based sexual abuses various definitions, history, forms, and Lithuanian laws or the lack there of, governing image-based sexual assault, is necessary.

### 1.1. Legal Definitions of Image-Based Sexual Abuse

To understand *revenge pornography*, it is important to know its meaning which contains the non-consensual dissemination of private sexual or erotic content, often perpetrated by former romantic partners to cause distress (Chandler D., Munday R.; 2016). However, it is crucial to broaden the perspective, as limiting the context exclusively to intimate relationships fails to acknowledge complex dynamics associated with this phenomenon. The recognition of linguistics used, particularly the way *revenge pornography* is formed, should not be overlooked, as it has the capability to convey negative connotations which could contribute to victim-blaming.

Scholars within the field argue that the selection of specific vocabulary may, unintentionally, attribute responsibility to the victim as opposed to the perpetrator, thus perpetuating harm against individuals who have already experienced the distress of *revenge pornography*. One of those scholars is Mary Anne Franks, a law professor and advocate for cyber civil rights. She has argued that the term *revenge pornography* can be misleading and may put the blame on the victim. She proposes using the phrases *non-consensual pornography* or *image-based abuse* as alternatives to redirect the focus away from the idea of revenge and towards the violation of consent and privacy. But even Frank's given terminology could be misleading - to say that sharing intimate content without consent is pornography could have negative connotations to the victim as it is not pornography and is not meant to be distributed and shared with the masses. As proposed by Michael C. Rea in 2001 “[...] sexually explicit pictures, performances, and literature can be pornographic, it seems clear that not all such items must be.” (p. 121). As he further notes it is important to understand what it means for a content to be pornographic and be treated as such being pornography and treating it as pornography means. Even though an intimate picture is meant to be arousing, that does not mean it is pornography:

“Any attempt to interact with someone in a friendly way (i.e., not simply for profit, not simply for the sake of doing the person harm, etc.) counts as an attempt to foster intimacy. Thus, someone who sends a complete stranger a nude photo of himself or herself with the aim of initiating a purely sexual relationship (and with the reasonable belief that this aim will be recognized and will be among the reasons for viewing the photo) does not send a pornographic photo, even if the photo is in fact viewed primarily as a source of arousal by the target audience” (Michael C. Rea; 2001 p.136).

To simplify, just because a person creates an intimate relationship by sharing naked pictures of themselves does not mean that they are distributing pornographic content. Having that in mind – non-consensual image sharing should be considered sexual assault as it is happening without explicit consent.

Danielle Keats Citron, a legal scholar, has also critiqued the terminology *revenge pornography*. She suggests embracing more neutral language, such as *cyber exploitation*, to place the emphasis on the harm done by the perpetrator. Another scholar, a Professor of Law Clare McGlynn, claims that the expression *revenge pornography* is an inadequate and problematic label because it fails to capture the full range and severity of image-based sexual abuse, and the legal definitions of *revenge pornography* often focus on narrow criteria, which can lead to under protection of victims and correct legal intervention. And indeed, when talking about such harmful phenomenon it is important to pay attention to what label we put on it and how we phrase it to pinpoint key indicators where main concentration does not always have to be why it happened as usually it blames the victim of being naive or at fault. For this reason, over time there were more definitions coined to describe revenge pornography, and its usage differs with time to try and be more sensitive to the victim while being accurate to the subject:

- Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA);
- Digital image abuse (DIA);
- Intimate image abuse (IIA);
- Technology-based image abuse (TBIA);
- Technology-facilitated abuse (TFA);
- Intimate photo abuse (IPA);
- Nude image abuse (NIA);
- Involuntary pornography (IP).

The choice of words used to describe revenge pornography, or more accurately image-based sexual abuse, holds significant implications in how it is acknowledged and addressed. Even with alternative definitions coined by scholars like Mary Anne Franks, Danielle Keats Citron, and Clare McGlynn it is important to use more neutral terms such as *image-based abuse* or *cyber exploitation* to stay accurate towards the situation. These definitions focus on the violation of consent and privacy, shifting from victim-blaming keeping perpetrators accountable. Still, given the uncertain nature, about when and who coined the first phrase, there is a potential to misuse these terms until the most accurate one will be agreed upon to describe these violent acts.

## **1.2. History of Non-Consensual Image Sharing**

The phenomenon of image-based sexual abuse itself is not a new event. Such threat to women was first recorded in 1888 when one of the most well-known photographers, Le Grange Brown, was arrested for falsifying, exhibiting and selling pictures of “undraped women” (L. Hooks, 2021). This distribution of manipulated content could be called the first deepfakes recorded as the photograph’s cutouts of young women’s heads and other women’s naked bodies combined together resembles falsification of sexual content in digital space. This situation sheds light on the ongoing challenges women have faced and still are facing concerning privacy and safety. A few years later a message to women was published in Ladies’ Home Journal “While the great majority of professional photographers are men of honour and responsibility[...] Women should always know the standing of the man to whom they entrust their negatives[...] The negative once in his possession (if he is so disposed) he has the means of causing them great mortification by using it for base purposes.” (J. Lake, 2021). It is a timeless reminder of the importance of trust and accountability especially when such misuses happen.

About a century later, in the 1980s, “Hustler”, a pornographic magazine, whose targeted audience are mainly men, initiated the practice of publishing explicit photographic content featuring naked women, whereby the acquisition and submission of said media were executed without the explicit consent of the subjects portrayed. This controversial act involved the procurement of such images through illicit means, as some were obtained via theft perpetrated by unfamiliar individuals, while others were provided by former romantic partners as a means of exacting vengeance for a multitude of motives. Surprisingly, these compromising images were later reproduced and widely published, revealing not just the obscene imagery but also the personal details of the women involved.

Individuals are no longer constrained or restricted by their geographical location in the twenty-first century, thanks to the introduction of new technology and widespread usage of the internet. This breakthrough has beneficial effects to perpetrators yet threatening to the victims. But the focus should be the negative effects in the context of non-consensual image sharing, as the ease and rapidity with which such content can be created and shared through technologies have transformed it into a highly valuable commodity, functioning as a form of currency for blackmail purposes. This transformation in the accessibility and exchangeability of sexual content has valuable implications on the perpetuation of harm and humiliation in modern society, though calling it anything other than sexual image creation abuse would be inaccurate. Researchers Michael Salter and Thomas Crofts (2015) argued that in 2010, digital revenge pornography received considerable attention with the creation of the “IsAnyoneUp?” website, which allowed the submission and distribution of photos of ex-partners without consent. On this website, photos were published anonymously, and the person doing so could provide all the personal details of the person in the photo, such as name, address, place of residence and social media links, followed by the message “Thank you for being evil”, which is an incentive to continue and behave inappropriately in cyberspace. The now closed cyber exploitation site “IsAnyoneUp?” featured images from thousands of people, and at its peak was getting thirty million page views a month. In 2017, there were as many as 10,000 web pages focused on fake sexual content sharing (Franks, 2017, p. 1260). Unsurprisingly, the extremely easy access and use of the internet, social media and vast selection applications have become convenient platforms for the distribution of sexually offensive images. In addition, the distribution of videos and images on various virtual platforms makes it extremely difficult to identify the perpetrators due to the anonymity of the process and the ease with which it can be done by secondary distributors.

The concept of deepfakes was introduced in the nineteenth century, before its digital prevalence. This early example is one of the many showing the persistence of gender-oriented issues tied to trust and accountability which were further growing almost a century later. Now, in the twenty-first century, with the amplified accessibility of non-consensual sexual content, it has become a currency for blackmail. The rise of websites like “IsAnyoneUp?” facilitated anonymous posting of private content along with victims’ personal details without consent, risking broken concepts of safety in cyberspace. The historical continuum of image-based sexual abuse explains the enduring challenges mostly women have faced regarding their privacy and safety. Feminist scholars emphasize gender as a socially constructed system of power relations. For example, Sandra Bartky’s analysis of the feminine body, published in 2017, examines how societal norms dictate expectations for femininity, the idealization of it, as well as women being considered fragile and ornamental. Therefore, leading to the objectification and commodification of women, and later making them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. And even though there is a limitation on LGBTQ+ research, one of the few stood out – “Law, Privacy, and Online Dating: ‘Revenge Porn’ in Gay Online Communities” done in 2019 by A.

E. Waldman showed “[...] that gay and bisexual male users of geosocial apps are more than twice as likely as LGB persons generally to be victimized by revenge porn.” (p. 988).

### **1.3. Forms of Cyber Exploitation**

#### **1.3.1. Image-Based Sexual Abuse and Laws in Lithuania**

Within image-based sexual abuse, an examination of its most prevalent manifestations is inevitable. At its core, image-based sexual abuse revolves around intimate image and/or video sharing. Therefore, it is essential to explain specific categories and numerous examples that frequently manifest within the cyberspace. However, as a primary consideration, it is important to recognize what makes an intimate image. For example, the eSafety Commissioner of the Australian Government defines an intimate image or video as focusing on and showing:

- “You nude or partly naked – such as a naked selfie or a topless photo if you identify as female or non-binary.
- your genitals, bottom, or breasts – even if you have underwear on (this includes upskirt shots)
- you during a private activity – such as undressing, using the toilet, showering, having a bath or getting sexual.
- you without clothing of religious or cultural significance, if you would normally wear it in public (such as a hijab or turban).” (2021, p. 6).

The eSafety Commissioner of the Australian Government (2021) also suggests that for an image or video to be viewed as intimate, the environment that the victim was in must be considered private. To explain further, if the victim online posted it themselves, it is unlikely to be considered intimate as the person has put it out in the open themselves.

Having established what constitutes an intimate image, it is imperative to delve into an understanding of the various ways in which image-based sexual abuse manifests. According to Mary Anne Franks (2014), the most common situations are:

- Photographing or filming without consent, such as using a hidden camera;
- Taking photos or videos with consent, but this information is stolen, for example, by hacking into a person's computer or social media where such images are stored;
- The photo or video is taken with consent and is intended only for one person to see, but is intentionally forwarded to others;
- Exploitation of such content, with the ulterior motive of coercing monetary compensation or obtaining other forms of advantageous treatment;
- Some academics hold the belief that, in specific situations, the act of non-consensual image sharing may not be categorized as image-based sexual abuse, given certain conditions are met. For instance:
  - If a person shares intimate content of someone in order to prevent, detect or investigate a crime;
  - If people believe that it had already been shared and the victim has been paid by signing a contract.

The situation in Lithuania exhibits a contrast in comparison to other countries, for example South Africa, Japan, or Northern Ireland, where revenge pornography is a crime. In Lithuania specific

legislations regarding *revenge pornography* are not made yet. The only laws that could apply to it are about destroying reputation, distributing visual content without consent and acts of sexual harassment:

- Article 2.22 of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania, which stipulates that a person may be photographed only with his consent, and his personal photos are made public only with his permission. On the other hand, if it is done in a public space, it is permitted to take pictures, but not to distribute them, if it violates the dignity of the person;
- Article 2.23 of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania, which specifies the right to privacy and secrecy of life, and its publication is permitted only after obtaining permission;
- Article 152. Sexual Harassment says that anyone who harasses a service-dependent or otherwise dependent person with vulgar or similar actions, suggestions, or hints in pursuit of sexual communication or gratification.

Even though image-based sexual abuse is not of pornographic content but of intimate image sharing it is crucial to understand what the laws about said content creation and distribution in Lithuania are, as in mass media the only two terms for this abusive act are *revenge pornography* and “non-consensual pornography”. In Article 309 “Possession of pornographic content” is seen as a criminal act and is punishable when:

- A person has the intention of distributing, producing or purchasing and distributing pornographic content;
- A person has created, obtained, held, displayed, advertised, offered, or distributed pornographic content depicting a child or a person dressed as a child, or has obtained or provided access to child pornography content via information and communication technologies or other means;
- A person who, with the intention of distribution, has produced or purchased, or distributed a substantial amount of pornographic content that depicts a minor child;
- A person displays or advertises pornographic content.

Image based-sexual abuse can be explained by the creation and/or distribution of consensual and non-consensual intimate images and videos. In Lithuania, legal implications are context-specific, which emphasizes the need for legal reforms concerning consent and privacy in image-related matters. Acts related to purchasing or massively distributing pornographic content are punishable, especially when those images depict or imitate a minor. Nonetheless, visual cyber exploitation of any kind might be considered a crime in Lithuania as non-consensual image sharing could be made with malicious intent which in any case it results in violation of dignity an honour. Additionally, if image-based sexual abuse is widely understood as *revenge pornography*, it could legally shift in punishing the victim rather than the perpetrator.

### **1.3.2. Deepfakes and Its Commodification**

Regarding non-consensual image sharing, it is important to mention non-consensual image creation. With the expansion of technological possibilities and easy access to various software and mobile applications, they are not always used for the right purposes. One example would be deepfakes, also known as synthetic media, which has been mentioned already. The term itself was created in 2017 on the Reddit platform by one of the users u/deepfakes, who also created a forum with the same term for



“pasting” the faces of famous women on naked bodies using artificial intelligence (Ajder H., Patrini G., Cavalli F., Cullen L., 2019). As everything has an end, in 2018 this forum was removed, but this only encouraged the proliferation of such content, apps and services.

In 2019, a study conducted by the Amsterdam-based cybersecurity company Deeptrace, now known as Sensity, showed that as much as 96% of deepfake content is precisely revenge porn, which affects famous women. After the closure of the forum on Reddit, the first website of its kind was registered in early 2018. However, a year later, there was a noticeable surge in interest, with over 130 million visits to the first four deepfake websites combined.

However, this is not the end, because deepfakes have become a commodity, and an open access program on the “Github” webpage is responsible for this. Although it is free, users are still required to give a monetary donation. Additionally, popular softwares, intended for creating synthetic media, come with details on how to create such content, as well as discussion servers in “Discord” platform, as a result of which even novice “creators” can become seamless masters of non-consensual image creation. Of course, it doesn't matter if the people manipulating the content are professional programmers or just beginners, because it ultimately reaches consumers through the online marketplace. The sellers themselves are private individuals who advertise on “4chan” or other anonymity-based platforms. It is surprising that such creations can be easily accessible on surface net, since the dark web demand for such content is extremely low (Volkert R., Ajder H., 2020).

Non-consensual image creation manifests a symbiotic relationship with the improvements of deep learning image translation algorithms. Most common image-to-image translation computer-based software is “DeepNude” that was launched in 2019. Even though the demonstrated version was free the pictures were overshadowed by watermarks which one could “remove” by paying 50 USD. Even then pictures had a small watermark to indicate its fakeness. This paradox of hostility between consideration and ill-will highlights a multifaceted behaviour, which begs the question of underlying motivations and morality – for the creator's own legal safety. Although the original “DeepNude” was taken down, its successors live on by being independently repackaged and distributed through open sources or piracy websites with varying price points. Therefore, further violating and attacking women. R. Volkert and H. Ajder (2020) argues that these algorithms cannot perform similar translations on images of men, having been specifically trained on images of women.

But what does the distribution of deepfakes look like on pornography websites? For example, on one of the most popular pornographic websites, Pornhub, when entering “deepfake” into the search bar, a message is received warning that “Actual or staged depictions of coerced or non-consensual sexual acts or the use of a person's likeness without their consent is not permitted on our site. We take image-based sexual abuse and non-consensual intimate imagery very seriously” (Pornhub, 2024). It was decided not to make deepfakes accessible on “Pornhub” in 2018, because deepnudes became seen as image-based sexual abuse, but it was still possible to see such content on their platform for quite some time. Another popular pornography-based website's “XVideos” owners are not concerned about the use of manipulated sexual content containing faces of famous women as it displays many of them for consumption.

Given these examples non-consensual image creation has emerged as a significant concern because of its potential misuse. Deepfakes, mostly meant to manipulate and falsify image-based content of women, have become a commodity with underscored accessibility of various softwares and resources

for such creations. And there should be a question raised as to why do mostly women fall on the victim side? One can only guess that the issue lies with the overarching heteropatriarchal structure of the society where women are deemed as objects, especially sexual objects, is responsible for patronizing image-based sexual violence. As Jean-Paul Sartre suggests “[...]the revelation of the Other is the Look. I experience him as subject when he looks at me and as object when I look at him.” (p. 12). This argument suggests that every time a perpetrator looks at the victim, the latter is reduced to an object amongst other objects, due to the perpetrator's perception and lack of acknowledgement of the victim's inner life.

While the demand on dark web is still low, deepfakes are thriving in surface net threatening the reputation and well-being of women. For instance, the loss of employment or prospects in new positions, which stems from widespread practices of employers to screen possible employees' backgrounds which results in exclusion from interviews or job offers (Citron D. K., 2014). The early stages of “DeepNude” have shown the contradiction between the creators' morale which raises questions about motivations and ethical considerations of the creators. The continued distribution of deepfakes online (including on popular pornography websites) reflect the complex nature of deep learning image translation algorithms and invites to take action in order to deal with falsified content.

### **1.3.3. Other Forms of Sexual Assault Online**

Sexual cyberbullying, doxing and cyber sextortion are the consequences of current state of information age in the context of image-based sexual abuse. Those forms of cyber exploitation, as well as the ones mentioned earlier, are more commonly affecting women, and in some cases adolescent men by manipulating and threatening them or their family. Therefore, it is important to understand and address the way these forms manifest issues, especially in the context of gendered abuse.

Sexual cyberbullying is relatively a new subject in research field, thus is at early stages of comprehension. Still, it gains attention as it is an inevitable example of toxic behaviour online. Sexual cyberbullying can look like harassment, stalking, attempted solicitation, coercion and extortion (Ehman, A. C., & Gross, A. M., 2018). For such acts to define the most accurate terminology of revenge pornography would be cyber exploitation especially in the form of forced sexting, a messaging of sexual nature. A research analysis by Thomas S. E., (2017) shows that 90.1% of young women (median age of 15) get these types of requests. “[...] this study found that young women face multiple, often conflicting, pressures to both send and refrain from sending sexual images. Pressures to send photographs came from a desire to gain relational benefits as well as from direct requests from young men in the form of assurances of love and trustworthiness, persistent requests, anger displays, harassment, and threats.” (2018, p.202). Sadly, sexting is not a one-time request but rather an ongoing coercion and in other words a psychological rape. This gendered cyber exploitation is the result of ongoing offline violence against women and girls (UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development Working Group on Broadband and Gender, 2015), especially when 1 in 3 women have dealt with violence throughout their lifetime. And this statistic indicates the systemic misogyny that is so deeply rooted in our heteropatriarchal socio-cultural life.

While not inherently a form of cyber exploitation, doxing can be a part of a more extensive behaviour towards sexual cyberbullying and harassment. Doxing itself is short for document tracing or dropping documents which involves sensitive and/or private information sharing. It may be used in conjunction

with non-consensual image abuse to manipulate the victim in sharing explicit content. For example, Y distributed X 's intimate images and personal information, such as name and address, on the now non-existent "IsAnyoneUp?" which led to physical harassment, threats, and stalking. The main intent of doxing is to humiliate, threaten, intimidate, or punish the other person (Douglas, D. M., 2016). And as non-consensual image sharing sometimes comes with personal details this event not only makes the victim feel ashamed but more importantly unsafe. This implies that the people who are affected by non-consensual image sharing are victims to not only digital violence but also offline violence, as well as threatened well-being. Furthermore, the gendered nature of such violence becomes apparent as "[H]arassers post women's nude images because they know it will make them unemployable, undatable, and at risk for sexual assault" (Citron D. K., 2014, p. 17).

Another form of cyber exploitation is cyber sextortion short for cyber sexual extortion. It is more commonly known as online sexual harassment or online sextortion – a fusion of cyberbullying and doxing in the form of blackmail and corruption. Sextortion occurs when the real-life antagonist threatens to publish explicit content, for example to gain something themselves. Even though women and girls are more likely to be the victims of deepfakes distribution and other forms of image-based sexual abuse, 91 % of males in Canada, especially underaged men in particular, are the victims of cyber sextortion. This happens through enticement, phishing emails "a scalable act of deception whereby impersonation is used to obtain information from a target" (E. EH Lastdrager, 2014), or piracy, for example when thinking that they are chatting with a young girl who happens to be a perpetrator. Throughout those short conversations the sextorters persuade the victims to share explicit content in exchange for the same. But what they actually share is the force to fear for victims' own reputation and privacy. Sextorters demand "exchangeables" depending on the victim 's gender. "If a young girl is victimized, the sextorter typically demands additional sexual photos and videos. If the sextorter targets a boy, they almost always demand money instead." ("Online Harms: Sextortion" from cybertip.ca, 2023). Usually the course of actions is: 1) enticement which leads to threats of leaking sexual content if not compliant; 2) powerplay by sharing screenshots of victims personal details to the victim; 3) manipulation by offering gifts or threats to share images to others. After all these steps, if the victim caves in, the sextorter demands for more.

There are different tactics used based on the victim's age as well. For example, minor-focused sextorters use slower paced grooming strategies, while cybercrime focused sextorters are more direct and use phishing to gather sexual content. "Minor-focused sextortion offenders most often targeted minor victims, procured images through slower paced grooming strategies, and demanded their victims comply with an assortment of sexual behaviour[...] Cybercrime cyber sextortion offenders were more direct in their interactions. Rather than building a relationship with the victim or using grooming methods, they relied on technology facilitated scams and hacking to steal images from victims and coerce them into providing more." (O'Malley, R. L., & Holt, K. M., 2020, p. 17). It is not surprising the victims of sextortion are most commonly younger people. "Even though research in this area is extremely limited, adolescents appear to be the age group most vulnerable to online grooming." (Whittle H., Hamilton-Giachritsis C., Beech A., 2013). This could be explained by the possibility to groom them, as they are more susceptible to be drawn into a manipulative cycle. However, every instance of cyber sextortion entails an element of dominance and manipulation over the victim and is a part of larger continuum of image-based sexual abuse.

Sexual cyberbullying, doxing, and cyber sextortion are a manifestation of information age, displaying consequences it has within the context of image-based sexual abuse. These diverse, yet sometimes

interchangeable, forms of cyber exploitation pose a risk to the victim's safety. While they can look somewhat harmless at first, but by sharing not only visual content without consent but also personal details such as full name, address, etc., it causes danger to safety in general. Therefore, heteropatriarchal structures, such as idealization of femininity, objectification and commodification of women are still felt today. Of course, it is important to understand different forms of image-based sexual abuse, still it is crucial to shift the narrative from the victim to the perpetrator and analyse systemic issues in society.

## **2. Feminist Theoretical Framework in Understanding Gender, Pleasure and Sexual Violence Against Marginalized Groups**

The sexual awakening and revolution of women (and their sexual pleasure) is a topic, intertwined with the struggles for autonomy and identity. It is a common statistical understanding that women are the main victims of image-based sexual abuse, but the question arises - how did it come to that? This is not to say that men or non-binary people are more worthy to experience it but to contemplate and delve into deeper layers of such scenarios, far deeper than “that is how nature works”. In order to understand the reasoning behind this phenomenon it is imperative to analyse sociocultural aspects that shaped women into being treated as fragile objects existing for men's sexual pleasure. Historically established gender norms that are still followed in societies to this day, are one of the main reasons for gender inequality and for that there is a need to rely on feminist theoretical framework.

### **2.1. Sexual Revolution and the Construct of Gender**

One of the most influential works “The Second Sex” by Simone de Beauvoir gives valuable insights on how historical and social structures have shaped and constrained women’s sexual agency. According to Beauvoir, “Many women, in order to show by their successes their equivalence to men, try to secure male support by sexual means; they play on both sides; demanding old-fashioned respect and modern esteem, banking on their old magic and their new rights.” (1949, p. 175). The statement explains how women navigate in contradicting demands - trying to adhere to traditional roles while simultaneously embracing modern identities thus attempting to validate their own worth through both conformity and resistance. Simone de Beauvoir claims that man assumes the position of the self, acting as the subject whereas woman is regarded as the object, representing “the Other”. In fact, men are considered as the rational ones, the doers, and creators while women are the emotional ones, waiting to be saved. This foundational idea in feminist theory emphasizes devaluation of women, that they are put in opposition to men rather than standing as equals. Being as “the Other” has historically stripped women of agency over their bodies, and as consequence women are not proactive participants in the process of creating their own sexual narratives.

De Beauvoir suggests that “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” (1956, p. 273). Sure, there are, most of the time, physical differences between biological sexes (e.g., genitalia) but are there any when the topic turns to biologically gendered traits? As Judith Butler suggests in “Gender Trouble” that gender is a performance shaped by cultural and social norms, as well as gender itself “is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities.” (1999, p. 6). This idea suggests that there is a “correct” way to be feminine in patriarchal society and raises a question of how we understand the materiality of bodies and the cultural meanings attached to them. This does not mean denying the materiality or biological aspects of bodies but recognizing that how they are interpreted and give meaning to these aspects is culturally and linguistically mediated. Furthermore, even physical differences between sexes are not always binary - what about intersex people who biologically have both male and female characteristics (e.g., chromosome patterns, internal reproductive organs, or genitals)? The idea of gender as a performance challenges the very categorization of gender, suggesting that it is not inevitable or natural but rather open for redefinition.

Gender identity as already mentioned, is fundamentally a social construct that can enable toxic behaviours, such as toxic femininity and toxic masculinity, within the binary gender system. While it is crucial to acknowledge the difference between gender and sex, it is also important to recognize that an individual's biological sex does not necessarily determine their gender identity. Sex generally refers to biological differences, while gender refers to one's own gender identity. If one looks at the physical differences between the binary sexes historically, the traditional role of men as hunters and women as caretakers can be examined through the lens of biological determinism "Biological reasons for purported sex differences were offered, such as women's smaller brains and lack of heat (Aristotle); their half-formed genitals (Galen), or their physical weakness and passivity (Aquinas)." (Greene, S., 2020, p. 15). On the other hand, did men go hunting because they were stronger and smarter, or because biologically women have the ability to become pregnant? An argument would be that women needed to protect their pregnancies, and later nurture their child. The representation of femininity as an expression of caretaker, as well as being inferior is not an essential or core quality of a female, but simply a biological obligation that has historically confined them to domestic spheres, reinforcing gender roles.

In modern society, the necessity for traditional gender roles has diminished. With the existence of grocery stores and baby food, the historical reasons for one being masculine and/or feminine (e.g., men to go hunting and women to stay at home) are no longer relevant and valid. This shift raises questions about the essential characteristics of the sexes, and the extent to which they are socially constructed. The representation of femininity as synonymous with compassion and care, or inferiority is a lifelong debate of nature versus nurture. According to D. Joel (2011) "There are no "true" "male" and "female" brains out there to discover" (p. 4). Therefore, a question arises about which of gendered traits are of natural essence? Considering the presented theories, they are an outdated heteropatriarchal system in which women are expected to fill the traditional roles of caregiving and simultaneously contribute to household income. Therefore, creating a paradoxical situation where women are given the illusion of equality but remain bound by traditional expectations.

These foundational feminist thoughts contribute to an ongoing discourse about gender, sexuality, and gendered power dynamics, influencing various research and study fields, from sociology and psychology to literature and cultural studies. Additionally, creating an open discussion about personal identity and societal norms (by questioning the taken-for-granted aspects of these identities). Their valuable insights lead to a deeper understanding and continuous reevaluation of traditional ideology about power and gender dynamics. Additionally, these insights are still relevant in today's society.

## **2.2. The Politics of Women's Sexual Pleasure**

Women's sexual pleasure has a long history of being regulated and oppressed by heteropatriarchal systems. Androcentrism favours male pleasure above anything else, and it is still prevalent in many countries' sexual discourses. The idea that penetrative intercourse is the main, if not the only, indicator of sexual activity and satisfaction is a key feature of a culture that is dominated by men, thus the expression of women's sexual pleasure in is still more of an afterthought than a mutual experience in heterosexual relationships: "Heterosexual men were most likely to say they usually-always orgasmed when sexually intimate (95%), followed by gay men (89%), bisexual men (88%), lesbian women (86%), bisexual women (66%), and heterosexual women (65%)." (Frederick et al., 2017, p. 1). In order to understand the difference between these sexual dynamics it is crucial to analyse influential feminist theories about gendered cultural norms as well as sexual representation in pornography.

The heteropatriarchal system, that is a combination of heteronormativity and patriarchy, reinforces traditional gender roles that impact women's sexual autonomy and pleasure. Heteronormativity views heterosexual relationships as the norm, only further marginalizing other sexual orientations and identities. Patriarchy, on the other hand, states male dominance in various spheres of life. Judith Butler's seminal work "Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'" (1993), examines how gender and sexuality are constructed through discursive practices. Women's sexual pleasure is restricted by being confined within heteronormative and patriarchal boundaries which determine what is acceptable. According to Butler, sexuality is to some degree always constituted in and through the discursive limits of the speakable and the visible, and therefore one cannot presume that it is an unmediated event or experience.

"For sexuality cannot be summarily made or unmade, and it would be a mistake to associate "constructivism" with "the freedom of a subject to form her/his sexuality as s/he pleases." A construction is, after all, not the same as an artifice. On the contrary, constructivism needs to take account of the domain of constraints without which a certain living and desiring being cannot make its way. And every such being is constrained by not only what is difficult to imagine, but what remains radically unthinkable: in the domain of sexuality these constraints include the radical unthinkability of desiring otherwise, the radical unendurability of desiring otherwise, the absence of certain desires, the repetitive compulsion of others, the abiding repudiation of some sexual possibilities, panic, obsessional pull, and the nexus of sexuality and pain." ( 1993, p. 94).

Therefore, acknowledging women's sexual pleasure is possible by understanding these traditional limits, and recognizing the patriarchal rules that dictate what women should want and how to want it.

In "Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution" Sheila Jeffreys argues that how women act sexually is a learned response to male-dominant heterosexuality "[...] None the less women are instructed to try to develop male sexual responses in order to be the 'ideal lover'. [...]" (2011, p. 118). She also critiques the sexual revolution for failing to liberate women from patriarchal sexual norms claiming as it delivered more of the same old male-cantered sexuality. Shere Hite's research, "The Hite Report on Female Sexuality (1976)" on female sexuality complements Jeffrey's ideas by suggesting that there is a large gap between the reality of women's sexual experiences and the narrative of the dominant culture, which overlooks and misinterprets that reality. Similar ideas about systemic power imbalances could be found in Anne Ferguson's article "Patriarchy, Sexual Identity, and the Sexual Revolution" (1981) which accompanies already given arguments with the idea that sexual revolution only created new ways to control women's bodies and sexuality.

Systemic heteropatriarchal expectations regarding women's pleasure are related to the issues of gender identity, power, and representation. Therefore, provided critical frameworks are still necessary to understand and challenge ideologies that shape, and often limit, women's sexual agency. It is an ongoing process of advocating for a more inclusive and empowering comprehension of women's pleasure that truly reflects and respects their experiences and desires.

### **2.3. Pornography: Hypermasculinization, Normalization of Stereotypes and Violence**

An important subject when analysing image-based sexual abuse involves ideology of pornography industry. In most cases, there is a clear dynamic not only between gender but also between race, religion, age. For example, when analysing gender dynamics, Gail Dines (2010) has argued that women in porn "are astonishingly immune to being called cunts, whores, cumdumpsters, sluts, bitches, hot slits, fucktubes, squirty skanks, and stupid hoers." (p. 16), which indicates the

normalization of women's' derogation and exaltation of men. It may be important to consider if some of these sayings could be a form of degrading kink. However, often women in the porn industry are humiliated not only in front of the cameras, but also outside of them. This derogatory way of treating women can lead to sexual objectification, or as Brian McNair (2009) suggested – *pornofication*.

First of all, “[...] mainstream porn is typically produced by straight, white males for a predominantly straight, white male audience [...]” (W. DeKersedy, M. Corsianos, 2015; p. 13), which means that the creators of pornographic content cater to the most likely consumer – a (white) man. There are countless features of pornographic content that are meant to exaggerate men's masculinity, but the most prevalent categorization could be:

- Catering to straight male fantasies – according to Corsianos (2007), women are often portrayed in one-dimensional hyper-sexualized images without any “sexual agency”. This type of fantasy not only portrays women as one-dimensional but also reinforces unrealistic standards to both men and women by: 1) depicting the women as always ready and willing to have sex; 2) portraying women as always sexually satisfied by even the slightest touch. This statement correlates with Laura Mulvey's male-gaze theory of women being represented only as sexual object. Therefore, proving the point of women being as “the Other”, an object for sexual fantasies to transpire;
- Power and control fantasies – “You don't have sex with women because you desire them: sex is the weapon by which you get even with them, or, even, humiliate them.” (Kimmel, 2018. p. 182). Portraying women as submissive and accepting of any level of derogation, has the possibility to subconsciously normalize it. In still heteropatriarchal society this powerplay can become a valid argument in cases of image-based sexual abuse, and abuse in general.;
- Including racialized themes – “Some include old racist themes about the enormously endowed and animalistic black man and the always sexually available animalistic black woman. Other examples include well-endowed black men with white women that appear more common and popular. These may serve as more evidence of “revenge porn” [...]” (W. DeKersedy, M. Corsianos, 2015; p.15). Mainstream pornography can often rely on racist stereotypes by emphasizing black men's physical abilities, and a black woman's desires in an animalistic and dehumanizing manner. In scenarios where the white man cannot have the white woman, she is still being dominated by a man which reflects not only racial but also gender-based hostility;
- Constructing masculinity – pornography plays a central role in shaping and reinforcing traditional notions of masculinity, often promoting aggressive, dominant, and hypersexualized behaviours “I'd like to show what I believe the men want to see: violence against women. I firmly believe that we serve a purpose by showing that. The most violent we can get is the \*\*\*\* in the face. Men get off behind that because they get even with the women they can't have. We try to inundate the world with \*\*\*\* in the face.” (R. J. Stoller, I. S. Levine, 1993, p. 22);
- Violence as male privilege – “Domination and submission are made sexual, sometimes in explicit representations of rape and violence against women, but always in the objectification and commodification of women and their sexuality” (, 2013, p. 2).

Such exaggeration of masculinity raises several fundamental problems not only for women, but also other, even more marginalized groups “[...] in addition to age, race and ethnicity also matter when it comes to pornography consumption.” (W. DeKersedy, M. Corsianos, 2015; p.13). For example,



almost every (if not every) popular pornography website has different categories, with labels, such as “black”, “ethnic”, “Latina/Latino”, to further satisfy the targeted audience’s imagination. However, the titles of pornographic films rarely indicate that the female actress is white, and almost never when both actors are white. With such categorization another issue emerges – the racial fetishization. One could say that this is a preference, or even flattering but C. M. Holmes argues that “Racial fetishism also contributes to the existing American rape culture, which tolerates and even validates sexual violence perpetrated upon black female bodies.” (2016, p. 2). Thereby an even greater illusion that all women desire and deserve brutality or violence during the sexual act is created.

Still, the main issue is not with pornography, as a form of media to share sexual fantasies, but a lack of sexual education in schools. In the Lithuanian context there is valuable research about the need of sexual education in schools made in 2023 by “Baltijos Tyrmai”, a Lithuanian research group, for “LRT” public broadcaster. The survey results showed that “[...] 43 percent of the population (18 years and older) agree that there should be sex education in Lithuanian schools, and the same part (44%) disagrees with it and thinks that it is a family matter.” (A. Murauskaitė, 2023). The results could reflect intergenerational differences in attitudes towards the topic. Younger generations, who might be more exposed to global perspectives through various digital media platforms, could be more open to school-based sexual education while older generations could be resistant due to traditional values.

Dines (2010) mentions that the representation and popularity of pornography in the mass media has its positive aspects - it helps to reduce the stigmas associated with pornographic content that started in previous decades, and also opens up new perspectives for playfulness and experimentation that users would not have thought about before. However, pornography has the power to take the place of a "teacher" from whom countless inexperienced young people can get their knowledge and be prepared. Therefore, what is seen in pornographic films, can act as a guideline for “normal” sexual behaviour, and as a result, one may feel pressured to implement this “normal” behaviour in their own sexual experiences e.g., assuming a partner likes derogatory words. If this hypothesis is true, then the phenomenon of image-based sexual abuse for perpetrators can be understood as nothing more than a state of dominance.

### 3. Understanding Consent

The already explained image-based sexual abuse phenomenon has a key indicator of it being against a victim's will – lack of consent. According to Melanie Beres (2007) sexual consent is an agreement to be involved in a sexual activity. There are many ways to be sexually active online, for example sexting – sending sexual messages without actually having an intercourse. This type of cybersex oftentimes can go hand in hand with visual content, which is the main manifestation of image-based sexual abuse online.

#### 3.1. The Definition of Consent in Literature

In today's age the concept of consent has its complexities, especially when the topic of image-based sexual abuse arises. Personal interactions occur not only in the physical but also digitally, thus the data that people share became a valuable commodity. Additionally, the rise of intimate visual transactions online has transformed the nature of consent, therefore raising questions about autonomy and privacy in cyberspace.

For the most part, consent as an idea is consistent in literature – freely given and without any coercion. Muehlenhard et al. (2016) adds *consent interpretation* as a valuable aspect of mutual agreement, and explains the general nature of it as:

- “an internal state of willingness” – consent as an intention;
- “an act of explicitly agreeing to something” – consent as an affirmation;
- “behaviour that someone else interprets as willingness” – consent as an implication (p. 462).

There's a fine line when trying to interpret another person's willingness to engage in any sexual activity, especially in the digital space, where body language can't be seen unless it is a video call. In the context of image-based sexual abuse, actions interpreted as consent have a risk of being misunderstood, and in Lithuania, where there are no specific laws (only implied) about non-consensual sexual image sharing, such behaviour can lead to not only violation of autonomy but also victim-blaming.

According to D. Archard (1997) “[...]consent need not be given to that from which no act of dissent is expressed[...]" (p. 5) meaning that consent can only be given if there are any doubts about engaging in a particular activity. He also adds that “Consent need not require the dispositional mental state of agreeing[...]" (1997, p. 6). This argument suggests that consent should be understood with more flexibility, necessitating the consideration of a specific situation rather than relying solely on implications and assumptions. David Archard's arguments could be further extended by referencing philosopher Tom Dougherty (2015) “[...]consent must be intentional; everyone should agree that an intention is necessary for morally valid consent. But the “performative view” denies that a mere intention can be sufficient, countering that valid consent also requires communication” (p. 229). Interpretations of consent could be more exciting rather than a person being straightforward and asking questions, yet no communication can lead to non-consensual acts and mistrust.

Kukla, Q. R. (2021) suggests that sexual consent should not be analysed in ideal conditions, as the common understanding of it is that it *can only be given* without feeling pressured “Consensual sex, for my purposes, is sexual activity in which each party is participating with agency, takes themselves to be doing so, communicates successfully that they are doing so, and can use communication to

successfully stop the activity or any part of it as soon as continuing would no longer be an expression of their agency.” (p. 273). However, this notion does not work in male-centric world “[...] if we believe that sexual consent always requires full decisional autonomy, then women could never consent to heterosexual sex under patriarchy.” (p. 280). Therefore, sexual consent should be understood as an act of negotiation under gendered power dynamics, social norms and ideologies rather than an oversimplified boundary. Acknowledging that consent is a part of traditional social structures reflects the complexities of a sense of autonomy and how marginalized groups are affected by it.

Consent encompasses both explicit and implicit agreements in a sexual context, and non-consensual image sharing is fundamentally about violating them. Since relationships are built on trust, it is implied that consent to distribute intimate content will be given if a person voluntarily sends their partner a sexual photo of themselves. However, under heteropatriarchal structures it is important to acknowledge that a sense of autonomy and possibility to give consent is not a simple act but rather an expression of expectation.

### **3.2. Ethics of Sexual Consent Online**

Not all internet users comprehend what consent is in a physical space, so digital consent in the context of image-based sexual abuse is still not considered as a topic of research. The reason for this disregard could be the *social-technical gap*, which means “[...]the great divide between what we know we must support socially and what we can support technically.” (M. S. Ackerman, 2000, p. 180). The main issue is lack of social cues that could be used in a digital space. Non-verbal cues, such as body language, are non-existent, therefore, apart from explicitly agreeing, it is oftentimes hard to understand hesitation and discomfort.

Even though, Zygmunt Bauman does not discuss sexual consent specifically, his analysis of the fluid and modern life can be related to the topic of how people understand consent online in sexual interactions. In “Liquid Modernity” (2000) Bauman suggests that liquid modernity is based on:

- Uncertainty – the fear of change which leads to loss of common ground;
- Consumerism – relationships are viewed as a transaction;
- Individualization – an autonomy and personal freedom;
- Fluidity – the transient nature of relationships which implies that what is agreed upon at one moment is not constant or permanent;
- Fragmentation of time and space – a disregard of traditional, geographically bound communication compared to digital connections.

Consent oftentimes is being treated as a onetime event when it should be considered as an ongoing one. Arguably, with relationships evolving implied consent does not always equal agreement. Still, if image-based sexual abuse is done to an ex-partner, shouldn't it be a common knowledge to not share intimate content regardless of the current status of a relationship? An argument can be made that common sense cannot be understood as an ultimate sense, and even if something seems comprehensible to the majority, it is not necessarily obvious altogether.

The world is constantly changing, especially with the now popular, artificial intelligence, so the general perception may not have the time to close the gap on common sense of consent, and as a

result victims lose their privacy, autonomy and their boundaries are violated. Additionally, lack of research, and information in general, about sexual consent online are of urgency. There are many articles about non-consensual image sharing, how to prevent it, but few explain what sexual consent is and, most importantly, how to accept those boundaries.

#### **4. Online Disinhibition Effect and its Relation to Image-Based Sexual Abuse**

Internet has become an integral part of people's lives, providing convenience, accessibility, and ease of communication with others. As time goes on, cyberspace allows one person's identity to embody multiplicity, so perpetrators can remain anonymous and “non-existent”. Therefore, the main focus is put on the uploaded content and not the individual responsible. Negative behaviour and messages can now reach a larger audience due to the snowball effect of being shared online. Content is accessible from anywhere in the world even long after it was created or published because it is not limited to a physical location.

##### **4.1. Theoretical Framework: Online Disinhibition Theory**

Before going into the online disinhibition effect itself, it is also important to acknowledge the underpinning theories of online disinhibition in computer-mediated communication. Most theoretical approaches to explain this phenomenon are based on pre-existing theories:

- Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effect (SIDE) – the deindividuation concept can be credited to the French researcher Gustave Le Bon (1895). He argued that being in a crowd leads to a state of immersion, when the usual restraints on an individual's behaviour are removed – being part of a community diminishes the feeling of responsibility, and the aggressive behaviour is then attributed to the whole group. As a result, a person allows oneself to act differently than they would alone. The notion deindividuation, in psychology, was coined by Festinger et al. (1952) “to explain why males who remember less individuating information show more hostility toward their parents.” (Joinson, A. N., 2007, p. 84). Festinger et al., (1952) argued that a de-individualized person in a group setting is more likely to experience a reduction in internal constraint, meaning that the individual separates themselves from the environment and its norms by releasing the constrained side of the personality. According to Zimbardo (1969) (who expanded the understanding of this idea), anonymity, excitement, sensory overload, mind-altering drugs, and a reduction in self-focus can lead to deindividuation with uninhibited behaviour. Later, deindividuation theory was coined to understand the role of decreased attentiveness (Diener, 1980) and decreased awareness (Prentice-Dunn & Rogers, 1982). Prentice-Dunn and Rogers argue that deindividuation is caused by: a decrease in cues to a sense of responsibility (for example, anonymity or being part of a group reduces concern about the reactions of others) and a reduction in self-awareness (a reduction in self-regulation and standards for oneself);
- Social Identity Theory (SIT) – it expands Zimbardo's (1970) deindividuation theory. SIT can be explained by the cognitive aspect which states that interacting with others activates different perceptions of established norms and behavioural goals due to group uniqueness or a focus on individuality. The strategic aspect states that anonymity strategically diminishes
- hierarchies and operates against existing of social behaviour norms without resistance (Spears and Lea, 1992). Therefore, the explanation of computer-mediated communication behaviour comes from the SIDE model (Reicher et al., 1995). This gives rise to the concept of anonymity, where there is no focus on the self as a separate identity, as social identities are encouraged to be part of a group (Reicher et al., 1995). As Joinson A. N., (2007) explains “This leads to the regulation of behavior based on the norms associated with the salient social group.” (p. 87). Therefore, a person's actions depend on the group or community a person is in, and the norms set by that group, and not on their own personal attitude or beliefs, which

perfectly reflects the person of today. An example for the last statement would be “4chan” – a website created by Kristofer Pulos in 2003, where individuals anonymously share photos and texts that are not always censored, in some cases controversial and oftentimes do not meet social norms.

However, acknowledging that a person is deindividuated is not enough in the context of communication and behaviour online. There is a need to consider how said person perceives the digital environment and social cues it. In 1986 Richard L. Daft and Robert H. Lengel introduced media richness theory, that describes the reproduction of information sent through a communication medium. Media richness theory explains how the Internet as a medium has gaps of control because users are not reminded of self-regulation and self-control as often as in physical world. Social behaviour is determined not only by conscious intentions and control and self-control, but also by several subtle cues of control (Holler & Beattie, 2003). This statement correlates with media richness theory, that examines the importance of communicated information in the media – it often lacks social cues that could be communicated face-to-face, such as body language or eye contact. As it is harder to focus on your behaviour online, it makes it harder to control yourself. Of course, there are various aids to communicate the desired emotion or mood, such as text highlighting, uppercase or lowercase letters, and perhaps most significant indicator of state of being, emojis. Disinhibition effect is associated with the lack of awareness of social cues inherent in the online environment, where there is no contextual information about the individuals with whom one interacts. As cyberspace lacks the control of established norms that are clear; they do not manifest online as they would in physical space.

#### **4.2. Intrasexual competition concept analysis to understand revenge pornography**

Digitality has an aspect of deconstructing oneself, separating physical being from how one looks, moves, speaks, thinks, and feels. Users can manifest themselves more freely than they would in reality. Such a phenomenon is called the online disinhibition effect, which explains uncensored communication and inappropriate behaviour (Joinson, 2003, 2007; Suler, 2004) and can be applied to explain image-based sexual abuse. The already mentioned example of photos published on the “IsAnyoneUp” webpage, most of which depict women, only reinforces the disinhibition effect of the Internet in cyberspace and the influence of anonymity that allows free movement. In addition, the distribution of videos and images on various virtual platforms makes it extremely difficult to identify the perpetrators due to the anonymity of the process and the ease with which they are distributed by secondary distributors.

According to A.P. Buunk and M. Fisher (2009), intrasexual competition theory describes competition between same-sexes to gain the opposite-sex attention. It is primarily driven by the desire to both find and keep a possible partner, and the need to compete for resources such as status, popularity, and money to achieve this goal (Arnocky & Vaillancourt, 2017). Intrasexual competition theory might be relevant when analysing the dynamics of image based sexual abuse, if it is viewed as a tool within the sexual competition. Arguably, every competition has a prize, therefore, “the prize” of the it is a possible partner. Fisher and Cox (2011) distinguished four strategies associated with intrasexual competition:

- “Self-promotion – enhancing personal attributes, such as physical attractiveness, to ensure success over competitors;

- Competitor derogation – refers to actions that reduce the value of competitors and their opportunities to acquire the desired partner;
- Competitor manipulation is a strategy that can be used to reduce or eliminate the need for competition. It can also be used to delay an ongoing fight for a desired partner. If a person cannot compete effectively against their rivals, the person will choose to delay their actions, for example, when there are fewer competitors around;
- Mate manipulation – this strategy is used by individuals who feel defeated in intrasexual competition, as a result of which they remove the target of the competition, so no competition is necessary;” (p. 22).

In addition, intrasexual competition theory adds to SIDE, SIT and media richness theories, in the context of image-based abuse. According to Buunk and Fisher “[...]it seems probable that being strongly intrasexually competitive may be adaptive under certain conditions, yet maladaptive under other conditions” (2009, p. 39). In cases of image-sexual abuse, the perpetrator may express their dissatisfaction through competitive or derogatory behaviours that would be inappropriate in offline social contexts. Therefore, by sharing intimate content online perpetrators may humiliate:

- possible partners, which in many cases are women. When this humiliation occurs as image-based sexual abuse, it can lead to “slut-shaming” – an accusation of women and girls being too sexual. This newfound perception may not align with traditional views on women i.e., an expression of morality and purity. Therefore, it enables men to treat women as sex objects or as Simone De Beauvoir has put it “The Other”, but not anything close to a human being.
- to their competitor – by sharing intimate pictures of the desired person without consent. It could lead to feelings of shame for liking the desired person, therefore their active interest and action towards the victim might go away.

Of course, these statements could be half-true as intrasexual competition theory is male-specific and analyses heterosexual relationships. As earlier mentioned, research about *revenge pornography* show – women are more common to fall on the victim spectrum of image-based sexual abuse, where oftentimes the perpetrators are men. With competitive nature and lack of social cues, the perpetrator might manipulate possible partners in order to receive their intimate content, and later on the perpetrator shares it online.

#### **4.3. Online disinhibition theory review and its facilitation towards non-consensual image sharing and creation**

Suler (2004) proposed an integrated approach that combines different theories into one. Suler focuses on aspects related to anonymity that are common to many interactions happening online. Additionally, this approach acknowledges these aspects impact on a person’s behaviour with others. The term itself is called online disinhibition effect, which indicates a failure in self-regulation. Vohs et al. (2008) define self-regulation as “[...]the process by which one response is overridden, allowing for a different response to take its place.” which means that there is a “struggle between impulses and restraints” (cf. Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991). Online disinhibition occurs when a person tries to control their communication but fails, most commonly resulting in toxic behaviour. Therefore, there are two different approaches to this phenomenon:

- Positive disinhibition effect – people share their secret emotions, desires, fears, or attempt to help others. Cyberspace can act as a therapeutic place because it is where people can deal with internal issues more honestly;
- The toxic effects of disinhibition are uncensored and rude language, disproportionately sharp criticism, or anger. Being interested in things one would not be interested in physical spaces – pornographic pages, pages promoting violence and hatred, and image-based sexual abuse.

The latter approach of computer-mediated communication is more widespread, so it is important to analyse the effects of online disinhibition, as outlined by J. Suler, and how they manifest in the context of image-based sexual abuse. J. Suler has proposed six online disinhibition effects and their manifestations:

1. Dissociative anonymity – people can hide their identity and remain anonymous online. There is a feeling that they are freer to express themselves and their inner (maybe intrusive) thoughts. At the same time, dissociation between one's own “I” is possible in cyberspace, as one separates from the personality that exists in physical space and becomes or creates a persona that does not exist in “real life”. This is perhaps the most relevant reason as to why one would share and/or create non-consensual intimate images – the internet gives an illusion of a psychologically safe space. Anonymity, or a sense/illusion of it, is a common feeling associated with disinhibited behaviour online. However, to grasp the impact of anonymity on such behaviour in cyberspace, there is a need to consider the various forms of its expression:
  - “Virtual Private Network (VPN) – changes the computer's identifying IP address and does not show browsing history, therefore it is harder to track down a person, because the location is changed, and the entire browsing history simply “does not exist”;
  - Encrypted messaging apps – All communications have direct encryption in an open-source protocol, and app developers do not see messages or calls, there are no advertisements or trackers as well;
  - Encrypted Browsers – The extremely common TOR browser that encrypts a person's IP address and web activity three times;
  - Authorized server – encrypts the IP address, as a result it is difficult to trace the direct identification code of the computer;” (A. Vigderman, G. Turner, 2024)
  - On the other hand, uncountability and anonymity can act as an illusion or belief, simply because one is in cyberspace, physically removed from physical identity;
2. Invisibility – especially in text media where people do not have to present themselves visually, for example email and chat rooms. No one sees a face, no one hears a voice, it is easy to detach from the real self. At the same time, the reaction of others to what is made public is invisible. In many cases, others do not see what is being done on the Internet, even if intimate erotic photos or videos of another person are made public, it is difficult to understand who did it, especially if the content is of a famous person. An example for such phenomenon would be “4chan” website, where all users are completely anonymous, or in other words, invisible;
3. Asynchronicity – Delayed communication because it does not occur in real time. If a person does not see another user's reaction - it reduces inhibition. Real-time communication has more influence on expression, behaviour, and information disclosure. At the same time, something that was made public a few years ago can become exposed unexpectedly and become a virus that can be seen all over the Internet or social media. It is common for a celebrity's private



sexual content to be made public without his or her knowledge and thus becoming a ticking bomb that explodes and becomes readily available and visible to the entire world. On the other hand, news websites could also contribute to this, which indirectly and unconsciously encourages people to be interested in and search for this kind of content;

4. Solipsism – without live communication, one can hear others' voices in one's mind, and assign a certain image regardless of whether one has seen that person or not. The other person is assimilated into one's psyche and can become an imaginary character that becomes real. Image-based sexual abuse is a great example of this - most people watch movies and TV shows and have favourite actors or actresses, influencers or people in other fields that they are interested in. Online personality in one's perception can become perceived as a character, a role. For example, Bella Thorne, an American actress and singer who is known for her defiant personality and appearance to the common person, may seem like someone who would not mind having intimate photos or videos of herself made public, as she presents herself as free and carefree on social media. Even without knowing a person and seeing a small part of their life on the Internet, it is easy to create an idea about them, as the famous person may be perceived as a character who exists for our entertainment;
5. Dissociative imagination – the feeling that one's online identity is an imaginary character. The personality is divided between the real and online worlds because everything that happens on the Internet is not real, so the existing rules become irrelevant. A person who shares revenge porn dissociates from themselves, their partner, or the significant other whose content they are sharing. The perpetrator's physical self may be caring and friendly, while their online self may be vindictive and malicious. Since identity in cyberspace can be an imaginary character, it is easy to fall into any role, especially when one is full of anger or other strong emotions. In the end the perpetrator remains anonymous and non-existent while the victim of image-based sexual abuse becomes viewed only as the picture or video;
6. Loss of authority – in the physical realm, authority is expressed through symbols such as: clothing, body language, status quo. The absence of this on the Internet can create an illusion of equality, as a result, it is easy to resist authority and question it - to act outside the rules, and at the same time it is possible to disrespect a person whose personal content is made public. Authority also decreases when countries do not have legal laws protecting victims of revenge pornography, for example, in Lithuania such activity is not criminalized, only when talking about child pornography, and the victim is older, in order to sue the perpetrator, one must rely on existing legal restrictions that are not directly related to IBSA. One thing that could be considered valid is General Data Protection Regulation (EU GDPR) – “Article 17 GDPR. Right to erasure (‘right to be forgotten’)” (European Data Protection Board, 2020). Under Article 17, in the matter of image-based sexual abuse, victims have legal mechanisms to address the dissemination of their personal data (non-consensual intimate images) and request responsible parties (e.g., website administration) the deletion of such content from the internet.

#### **4.4. Examining Disinhibition Effects: Micro-level and Macro-level Perspectives**

A sense of anonymity seems like a significant factor in understanding image-based sexual abuse, yet Joinson and Paine (2007) suggest that online disinhibition is at the micro-level of its effect. Furthermore, they argue that feeling anonymous is far too simple of a concept in terms of being toxic online. They suggest that in addition to examining the micro-level effects of online disinhibition, it is

also imperative to evaluate the macro-level i.e., more extensive circumstances of micro-level behaviour. Therefore, Joinson and Paine distinguished four aspects (that influence each other) in order to understand online disinhibition effect in depth: trust, control, cost, and benefit.

Firstly, they suggest a possibility to buy a sense of autonomy and pseudonymity online “[...] often we “purchase” access to an environment in which we can act in a disinhibited manner by leaving our personal information with a trusted gatekeeper [...]” (Joinson, Paine, 2007, p. 89). To give an example in the context of image-based sexual abuse, it is the possibility to create different identities while using various social media platforms, which could lead to phishing or even catfishing victims.

The second process identified by Joinson and Paine is related to the cost and benefit of activities. Many "off-limits" activities on the internet, like image-based sexual abuse, as mentioned earlier, have real-life costs. Publicized content can cause embarrassment and make the victim vulnerable to others. Cyberspace is a well thought out place in terms of cost-benefit balance as it reduces the expected cost of behaviour i.e., self-awareness and self-control. “[...] it is likely that people will disclose information without full awareness or control” (Joinson, Paine, 2007, p. 237). In the context of image-based sexual abuse it correlates with an ease to make another person's private intimate content public if the perpetrator lies about their identity, and the recipient (in this case, the whole internet, or certain people e.g., friends) do not know who the sender of such content is.

The last important aspect in macro-level behaviour is control. “Walther (1996) argues that hyperpersonal social interaction online occurs, at least in part, because of the increased control afforded by asynchronous, visually anonymous.” (Joinson, Paine, 2007, p. 89). This means that lack of control over computer-mediated communication removes consent and another person's privacy. Therefore, it is important to understand the motives and psychological processes of individual users and their specific social context in the subject of image-based sexual abuse e.g., a painful divorce, strong antipathy.

People, that lack self-regulation and self-control, and do not realize that their communication and behaviour is (or soon is going to be) inappropriate, can be explained by the online disinhibition effect and its origin theories. It is a multidimensional phenomenon, yet (unconscious) lack of self-control adds to the broader perspectives on online disinhibition, as this lack of self-control can be used to explain all online disinhibition effects. Since this occurs before the self-check process, all self-check cycles as constituents do not work. The strength of an individual's goals and norms and their impulse control are irrelevant if the individual is unaware that their communication and behaviour is inappropriate but has enormous consequences for the victim of image-based sexual abuse. If the perpetrators are truly not aware of their inappropriate communication tactics online, there is no space to change said behaviour. Furthermore, the sense of invisibility and anonymity only gives green light for image-based sexual abuse to happen. On the other hand, all of this raises inevitable questions as to how negotiate responsibility, vulnerability, and trust in intimate relationships, and how to respond when the betrayal of this trust is amplified with the help of new technologies. Additionally, these technologies nowadays are integrated into social and sexual life, therefore they can function as a new medium for toxic behaviour to occur.

## **5. Empirical Research and Analysis Regarding Image-Based Sexual Abuse, the Understanding of Consent and Behaviour Online in the Context of Lithuania**

**Hypothesis.** Sense of anonymity and dissociation from self in online interactions blurs the lines of the comprehension of consent and leads to non-consensual image sharing and creation.

### **5.1. Research Organisation and Methodology**

The research utilized a quantitative approach through an online survey method from May. The survey includes 22 closed-ended questions to gather demographic information and measure participants' experiences and opinions regarding image-based sexual abuse, consent, and online disinhibition. 6 open-ended questions allow participants to provide qualitative insights. Statistical analysis, including percentages and median ranges are employed to interpret the survey results. An online survey was chosen to reach a larger number of people. As Dičkus (2011) states, there are main topics that can be clarified by conducting a survey, one of them is user behaviour.

**Research problem and relevance.** The research addresses the need to understand the dynamics of image-based sexual abuse, consent, and online disinhibition in the Lithuanian context. The study explores how demographic factors and cultural influences shape individuals' perspectives, emphasizing the importance of education and awareness initiatives. The findings could contribute to the development of targeted interventions and policies to prevent and address image-based sexual abuse in digital spaces.

#### **5.1.1. Limitations of Quantitative Research**

**Quantitative research has limitations for oversimplification of complex issues.** The study relies on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias and with 6 open-ended questions there is a possibility that respondents are not going to do the survey at all. The possibility of urban-centric nature of the sample could limit objectivity. Additionally, the survey format may not capture the depth of individual experiences and perceptions.

### **5.2. Online Survey Research Method**

To analyse how Lithuanian people comprehend consent, behaviour online and perception of image-based sexual abuse, an online anonymous survey was used. This survey consisted of 4 demographic questions, 18 closed-ended and 6 open-ended thematic questions to obtain the most accurate statistical results (Appendix 1; Appendix 2). The questions were formulated based on a literature and research review. The questionnaire was placed on the website "www.manoapklausait", which is designed to create and conduct surveys. The questionnaire was created on May 6th, 2024, and was valid until May 26th, 2024. The questionnaire was sent to student groups on Facebook and was shared on an Instagram page called "Lygiosios".

**The aim of the research.** The aim of the research is to comprehensively explore the prevalence, perceptions, and influencing factors of image-based sexual abuse, consent, and online disinhibition among the Lithuanian population.

## **Objectives:**

1. Examine public knowledge of legal rights, regulations, and laws in Lithuania, concerning non-consensual image sharing, as well as measure the respondents' attitudes towards its criminalization.
2. Assess the awareness and education levels regarding image-based sexual abuse in Lithuania.
3. Investigate cultural and societal factors, as well as expectations for sexuality and relationships, which could be possibly contributing to the spread of non-consensual intimate content.
4. Analyse respondents' comprehension of consent in online interactions and its relation to image-based sexual abuse.
5. Explore the impact of the online disinhibition effect on the likelihood of engaging in sexually abusive behaviour.

## **Study sample and selection.**

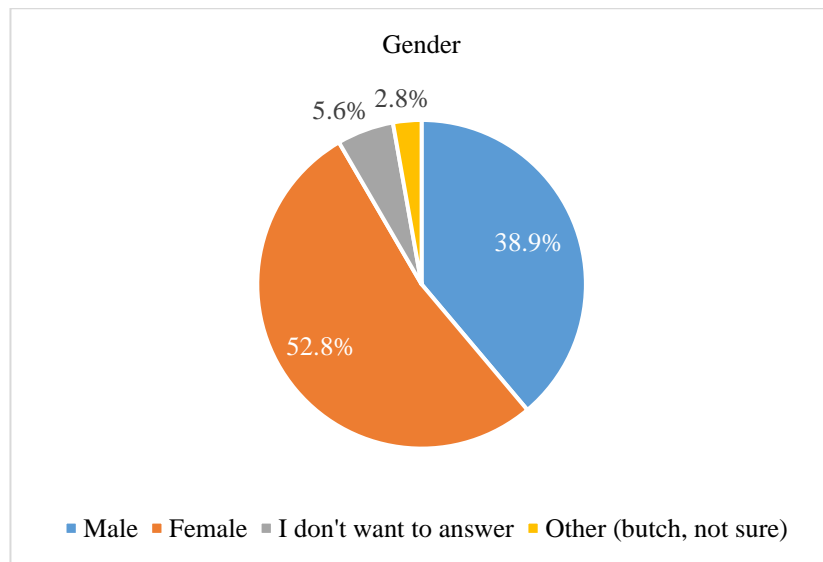
Research respondents - 72 people of various ages. An online anonymous survey was used to conduct the quantitative research. With the help of the calculation tool on the Internet "www.surveymonkey.com", it was possible to calculate the sample of representation. The research sample is calculated based on a margin of error of 5 % with the confidence level of 95 %, the population size is then measured from the age of 18 – 2,554,637. Therefore, to obtain results reflecting the population of Lithuania, a sufficient sample size in an online anonymous survey should be 385 respondents.

**Research organization and progress.** Before creating the online survey, the purpose of the research was set, the objectives were determined, and the questionnaire was drawn up based on the theoretical analysis of the literature. At the beginning of the questionnaire, the title of the thesis, the problem, and the purpose of the work, as well as the fact that the questionnaire is anonymous, are indicated.

### **5.2.1. Online Survey Research Results**

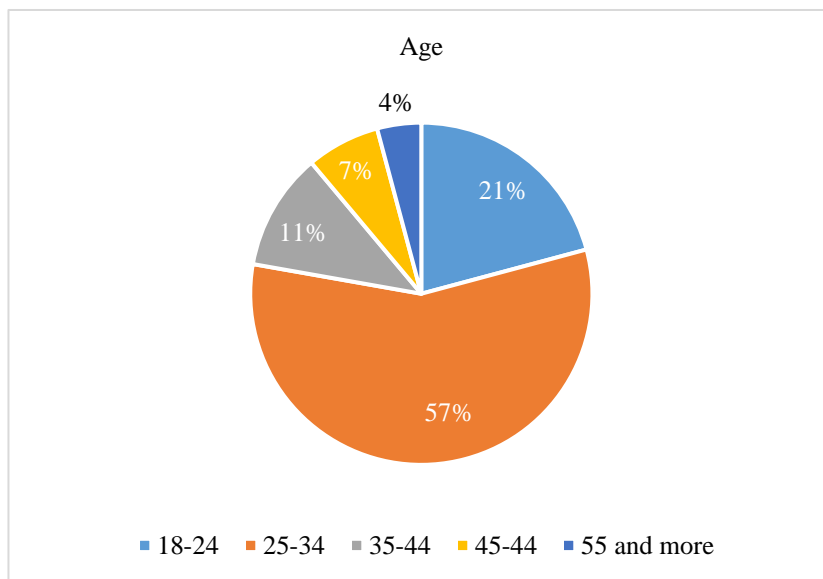
#### **Demographic Analysis:**

The demographic profile of the respondents provides a possible understanding of the sample population in the context of image-based sexual abuse, consent, and online disinhibition in Lithuania. 72 respondents participated in the study, of which 38 (52.8%) were women, 28 (38.9%) were men, 2 (2.8%) chose other, 4 (5.6%) respondents did not want to name their gender (1 Fig.).



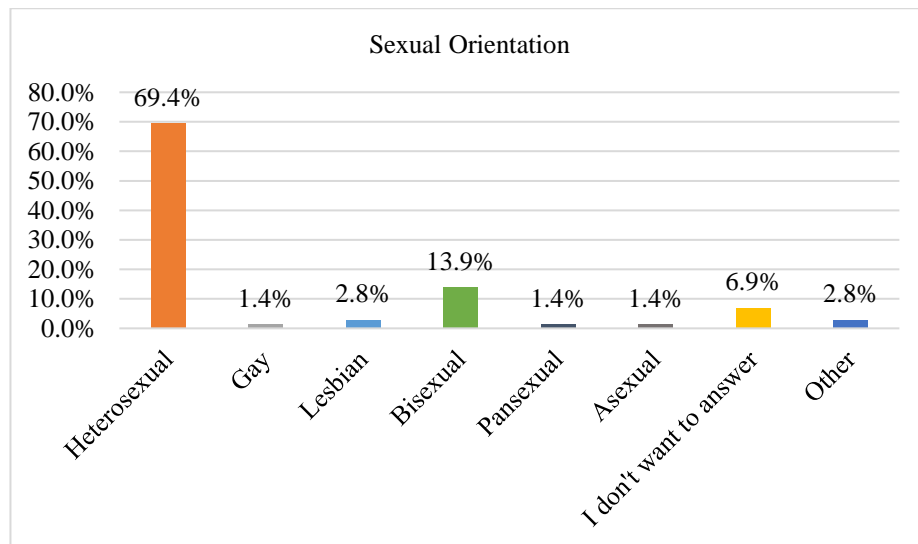
**Fig. 1.** Gender of online survey respondents, percentage. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

The sample age of the respondents was from 18 years, as it is the legal age in Lithuania. The survey results showed that 15 (21%) respondents were 18-24-year-olds, 41 (57%) respondents were 25-34-year-olds, 8 (11%) respondents were the age of 35-44, 5 (7%) of respondents were 45-54, and 3 (4%) respondents were 55 or older (2 Fig.).



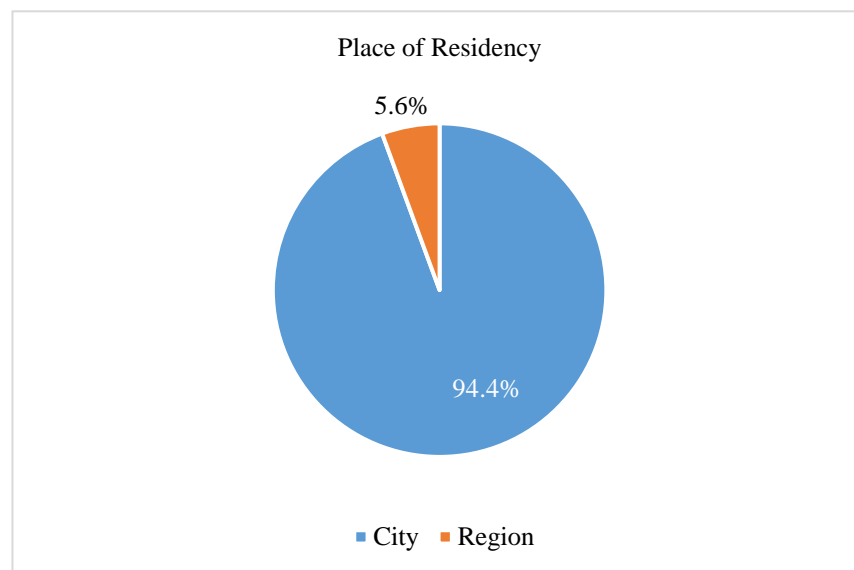
**Fig. 2.** Age of online survey respondents, percentage. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

In terms of sexual orientation, the majority of participants identified as heterosexual - 50 (69.4%), 1 (1.4%) was gay, the same number of respondents chose asexual and pansexual. 2 (2.8%) identified as lesbian, 10 (13.9%) of respondents were bisexual, 5 (6.9%) did not want to answer this question, and 2 (4.9%) participants were not sure of their sexual orientation. (3 Fig.)



**Fig. 3.** Sexual orientation of online survey respondents, percentage. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

The residential distribution of the respondents is characterized by almost unanimous representation of people living in urban spaces, with 94.4% (68) of participants residing in cities and 5.6% (4) living in regions. While this may limit the generalizability of findings to rural areas, it also raises the importance of considering urban contexts when addressing image-based sexual abuse and online behaviour (4 Fig.)



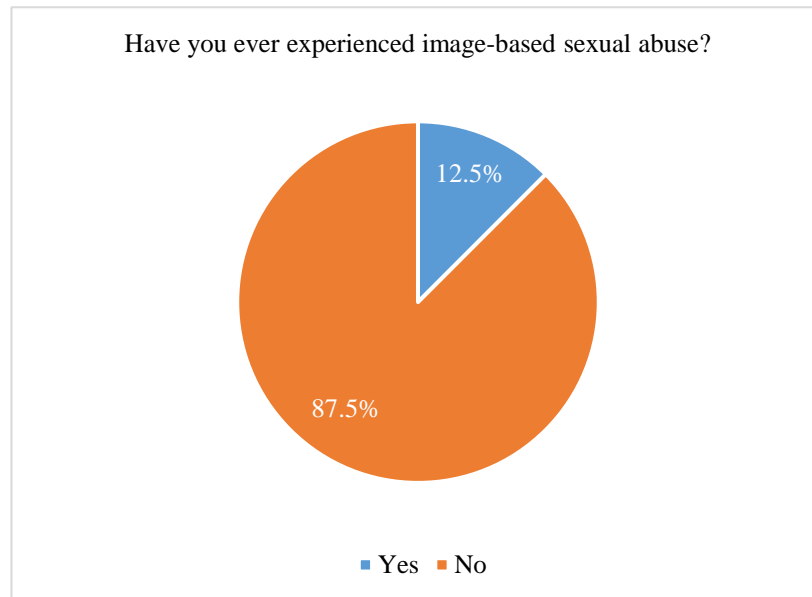
**Fig. 4.** Residence of online survey respondents, percentage. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

The demographics of the sample, even though small, demonstrate a selection that captures a diverse range of gender identities, sexual orientations, and age groups. However, the urban-centric nature of the sample should be acknowledged when analysing findings to the broader Lithuanian population, as there is a possibility that respondents living in cities have more knowledge on image-based sexual abuse, consent, and behaviour online.

### Image-based sexual abuse awareness and experience analysis:

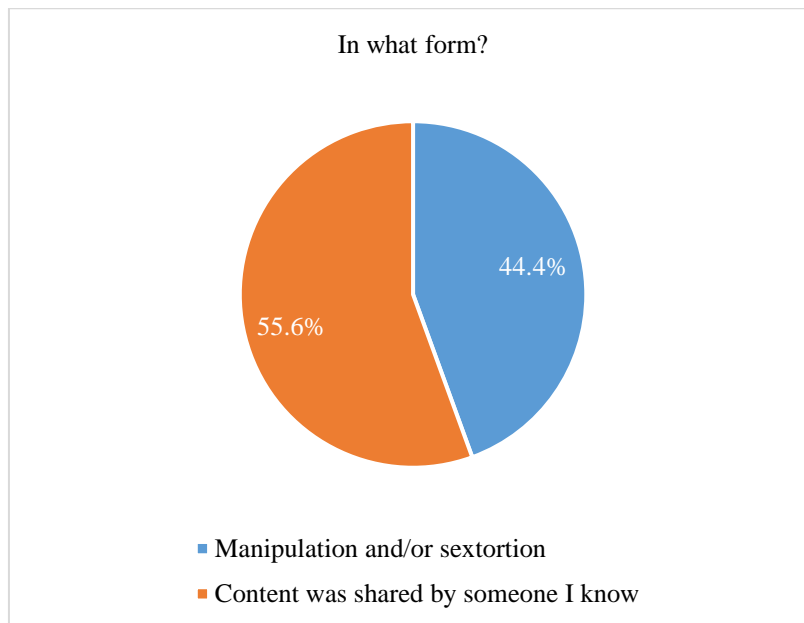
Moving beyond demographics, the study delves into the experiences and opinions of the participants regarding image-based sexual abuse, consent, and the online disinhibition effect.

The high prevalence of individuals (87.5%) has never experienced image-based sexual abuse online, yet 9 (12.5%) of the respondents have been the victims of it. (5 Fig.) 6 of them were heterosexual women, 2 were bisexual women, and 1 was a gay man.



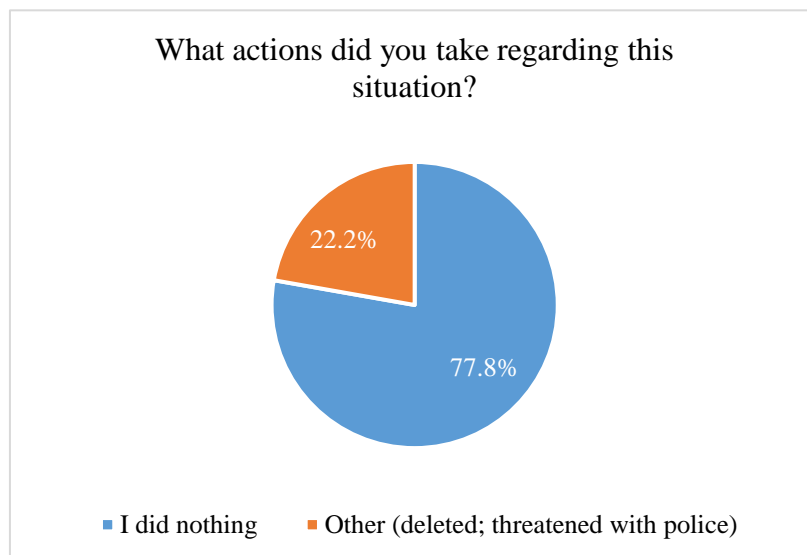
**Fig. 5.** Experiences of image-based sexual abuse online, percentage.  
(compiled by the author based on survey results)

When asked about the form in which the respondents experienced image-based sexual abuse, 4 (44.4%) of the respondents were manipulated and/or sextorted. 5 (55.6%) of the respondents' intimate content was shared by someone they know. (6 Fig.)



**Fig. 6.** The forms of experienced image-based sexual abuse online, percentage. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

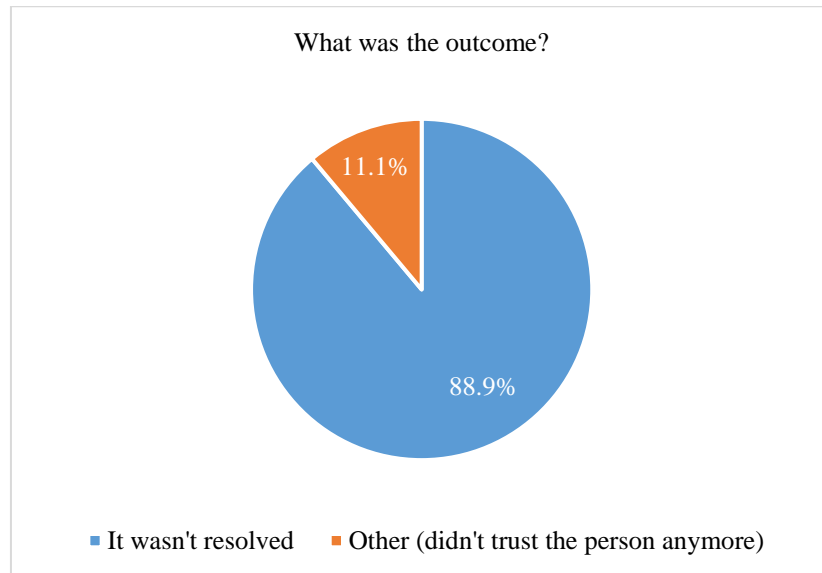
When asked about what actions they take regarding the situation 7 (77.8%) did nothing and 2 (22.2%) of the respondents chose other as an option (threatened the perpetrator; deleted the content). This raises questions as to why victims do not report such violent crimes. An answer for that may be that, as already mentioned in literature analysis, the laws in Lithuania are not always protecting the victim but rather the perpetrator. (7 Fig.)



**Fig. 7.** Actions respondents took regarding the experience of image-based sexual abuse, percentage. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

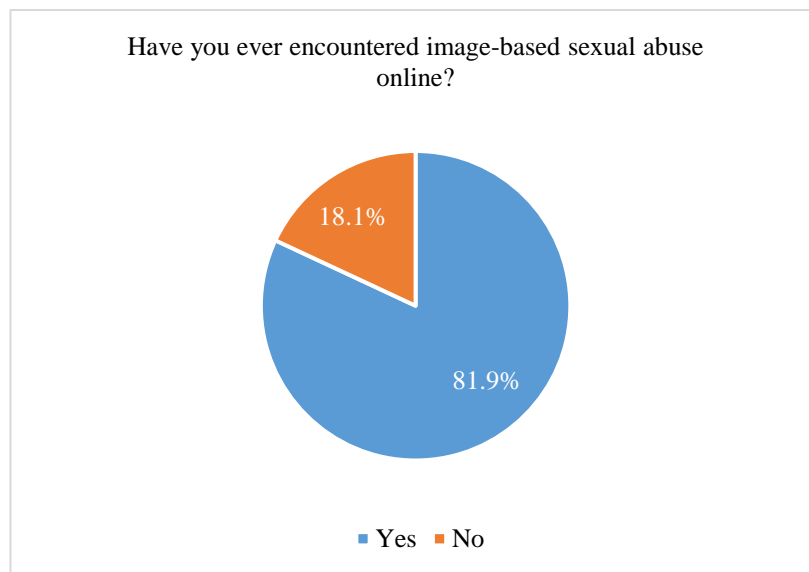
In the end, 1 (11.1%) respondent did not trust the person anymore and 8 (88.9%) respondents were left with an unresolved issue. (8 Fig.)





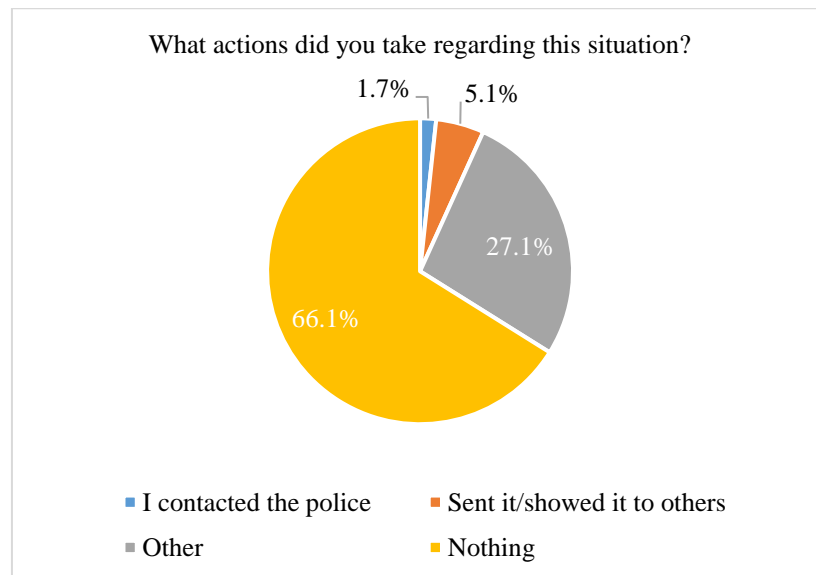
**Fig. 8.** The outcome of the situation, percentage. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

The high prevalence of respondents (81.9%) has witnessed image-based sexual abuse online and it highlights the pervasive nature of this issue in the digital landscape. 9 of the respondents have ever experienced non-consensual image sharing, yet 59 of respondents have witnessed it. It might be because the content was of famous people and not someone close to them. (9 Fig.)



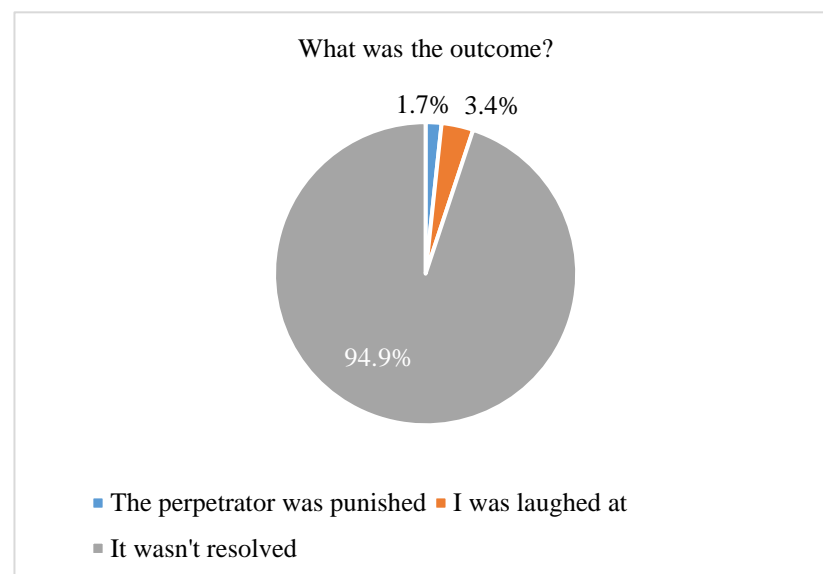
**Fig. 9.** Results of encountering image-based sexual abuse online, percentage. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

When asked about their actions in dealing with this situation, only 1 (1.7%) of the respondents contacted the police, the reasoning could be closely related to the fact that the rest of respondents saw the images of non-Lithuanian people. 39 (66.1%) respondents did nothing after seeing such content, 3 (5.1%) respondents sent it or showed it to others and 16 (27.1%) respondents chose other, stating that they felt uncomfortable, tried to explain why it is unethical or felt like an observer. (10 Fig.)



**Fig. 10.** Actions respondents took regarding the encounter, percentage. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

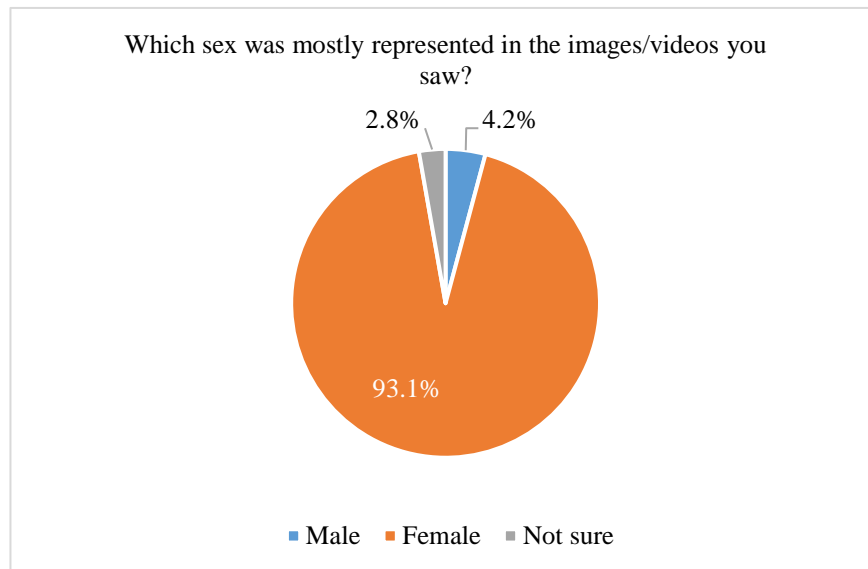
Therefore, 56 (94.9%) people responded that the issue was not resolved. 2 (3.4%) of the respondents were laughed at, which raises various questions regarding the comprehension of the severity of the situation, as well as questions about awareness of image-based sexual abuse in Lithuania. The one respondent who contacted the police answered that the perpetrator was punished, which gives hope that even though there are no specific laws, there are still consequences for their actions. (11 Fig.)



**Fig. 11.** The outcome of the situation. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

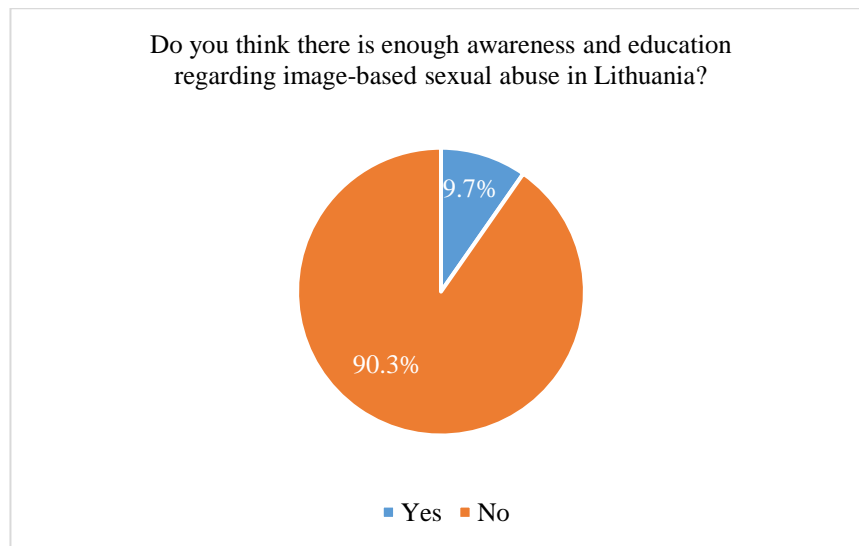
Before analysing answers, it is important to explain the reasoning behind the terminology used while creating the question “Which *sex* is mostly represented in the images/videos you saw?”. Even though, in literature review, it was made clear that gender is a performance and a social construct, there is always a possibility to misgender someone, especially if they are a stranger. Therefore, the word *sex* was used to determine a (possible) biological nature of a victim, and not a social one. 3 (4.2%) respondents identified the victims as male, which could be due to their own sexual preferences. 2

(2.8%) were not sure of which sex the victim was, and 67 (93.1%) of respondents saw the content of females being represented in non-consensual image sharing. The fact that women are usually the victims of image-based sexual abuse, as shown in (12 Fig.), only confirms Simone de Beauvoir's argument that a woman is still viewed as *the Other*, an expression of pleasure and commodity. Additionally, this disproportion of representation is an example of Laura Mulvey's *male-gaze* concept.



**Fig. 12.** Mostly represented sex of a person the respondents saw in image-based sexual abuse online, percentage. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

A concerning number of respondents (65 out of 72) do not agree that there is enough awareness and education in Lithuania regarding image-based sexual abuse, while only 9.7% of respondents agree with this statement. This highlights the importance of equipping individuals with knowledge about non-consensual image sharing. Such statistics also correlates with previously mentioned "Baltijos tyrimai" research done in Lithuania about sexual education, where 44% of respondents do not agree that it should be taught in school but rather at home. Therefore, lack of awareness and education could mean that there is no information as to how to deal with non-consensual image sharing. (13 Fig.)

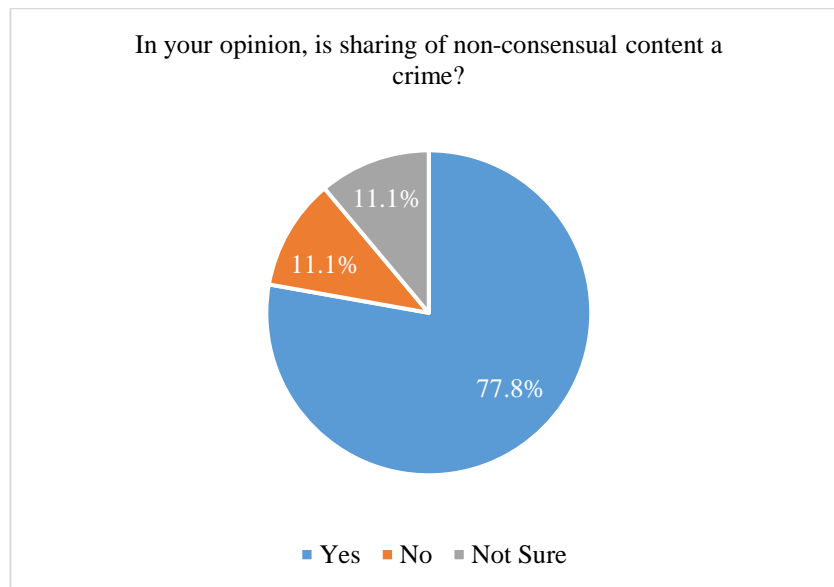


**Fig. 13.** Online survey respondent’s opinion on whether there is enough awareness and education regarding IBSA in Lithuania, percentage. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

In addition, a follow-up open-ended question was necessary to understand respondents’ opinion if education alone is enough to deal with image-based sexual abuse. The answers were these:

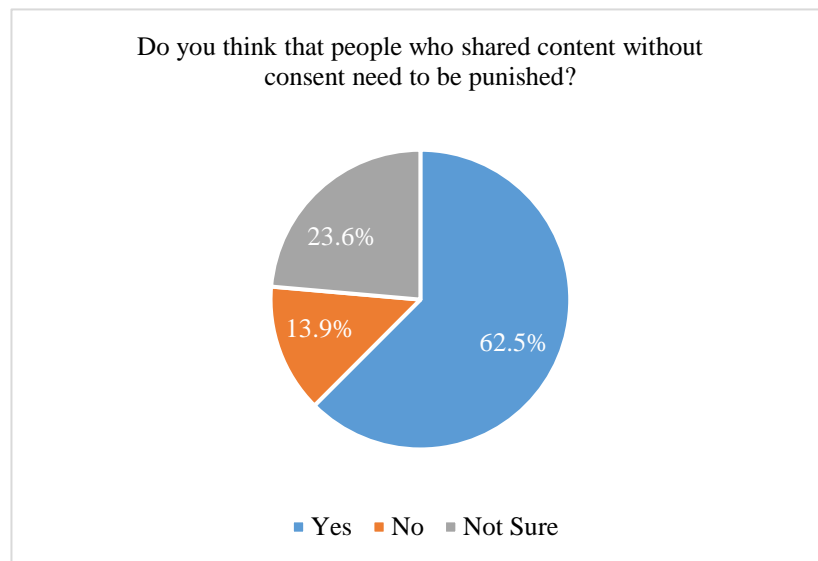
- 64 respondents do not agree that education alone is enough to fight and avoid image-based sexual abuse;
- 28 of those respondents mentioned that there also should be necessary legal changes made to achieve justice and legal safety of the victims;
- 8 respondents out of 72 agree that education alone is a sufficient tool.

Majority of participants view the sharing of others' pictures as a crime, with almost 78% expressing agreement with this notion. 22% of respondents, who are unsure or disagree, may offer unique perspectives that invites to explore and understand the factors influencing their views. (Fig. 14)



**Fig. 14.** Online survey respondents' opinion on whether sharing revenge pornography is a crime, percentage. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

Even though 77.8% of respondents view image-based sexual abuse as a crime, only 62,5% think that the perpetrators should be punished. 17 (23.6%) respondents are not sure and 10 (13.9%) do not agree with punishing perpetrators. (Fig. 15)



**Fig. 15.** Online survey respondents' opinions on whether people who shared content without consent should be punished, percentage. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

Furthermore, the respondents were asked an open-ended question asking to elaborate if they know any laws or regulations in Lithuania (or Europe) regarding image-based sexual abuse. The answers were these:

- 41 respondents did not know any laws or regulations regarding this phenomenon.

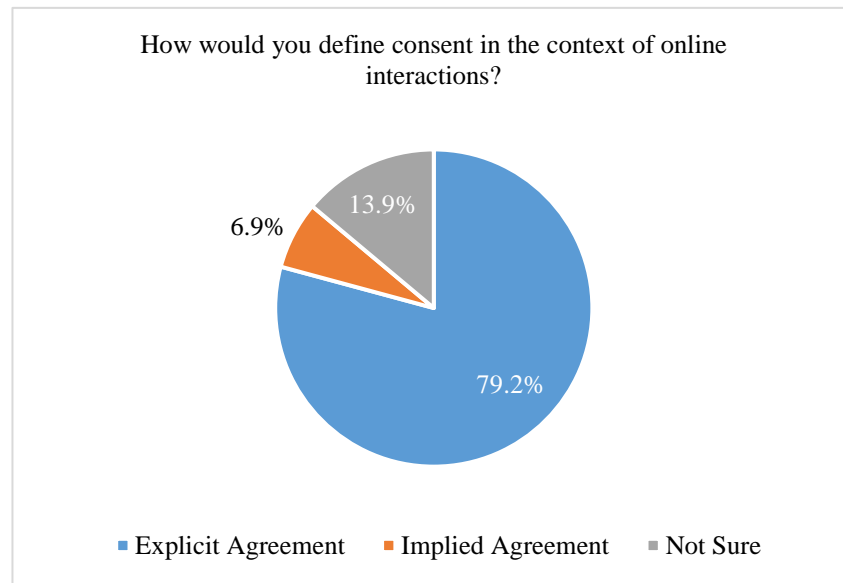
- Out of these 41 respondents: 2 thought that falsifying images and/or videos is not a crime; 1 did not think that if the private content is of a famous person, that it should be considered as a crime; and 1 respondent asked “Why?”.
- On a positive note, 31 respondents out of 72 mentioned GDPR’s *right to be forgotten*, as well as Lithuanian laws regarding violation of dignity, defamation (articles 2.22, 2.23 and 170).

Another open-ended question was raised “Do stereotypes or cultural features in Lithuania influence the spread of such content? What kind?”. The answers varied, yet validated subjects of gender, patriarchy, sexuality which were reviewed and analysed in previous chapters:

- 17 respondents, mostly the age of 25-34, see misogyny and patriarchy as the main factors “Ingrained, traditional stereotypes about a woman's weakness, inability to be alone, obligation to “belong” to someone”.
- 5 respondents mentioned the stigma surrounding naked bodies, yet 1 respondent mentioned a popular TV show “Nusirenk” (en. Undress) in which participants have to go on a date as naked as possible (or they feel confident). These positions and examples highlight that the stigma is prevalent when a person feels confident in their own body and maintains sexuality for their own pleasure rather than others’.
- 4 participants distinguished victim-blaming “I think so. According to the majority, if the sexual/pornographic content was shared voluntarily in the first place, the person is considered guilty and not responsible. In general, sexual crimes in Lithuania are often treated as the consequences of the victim's actions”.
- 2 participants think that people in Lithuania have herd mentality “[...] In the case of personal content distribution, I believe that people will be more willing to share content with others than to stop it because they are driven by herd sentiment, afraid to appear as “complainers” or to earn “points” in their friends' companies or on the Internet. And many simply do not care”. This notion can be explained by referencing, already mentioned, Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effect and Social Identity Theory, which suggests that people in masses tend to lose responsibility by transferring it to the whole group rather than feeling it individually.
- 2 respondents consider that the reasons for such actions are lack of sexual education and fear of sex “Yes. Propaganda is owned by all kinds of bigots who spread fear of sex. They ruin their lives. Trying to spoil someone else’s. Without even realizing the essence of their fears gives birth to the dissertation [...]”.
- Lack of maturity “[...] Maybe human maturity is still lacking, given that the entire technological revolution happened recently”.
- 2 respondents brought up LGBTQ propaganda as an issue in Lithuania, but 1 participant wrote that homophobia is still prevalent, therefore this could mean that lack of sexual education could lead to lack of tolerance, which could lead to victim-blaming.
- 2 respondents think that apathy is in Lithuanian culture “Lithuania's characteristic of “not interfering in other people's affairs” creates the conditions for the spread of such content, as a result, victims may not learn about such content, and people who publicize such content may not experience any negative consequences”.
- 2 respondents think that others view such content as a form of entertainment by sharing it with others and laughing about it;

- 16 did not agree that there are stereotypes and/or cultural features that could influence image-based sexual abuse in Lithuania, one stating “No. Lithuanian communication culture is stained by the principles of restraint and non-disclosure of redundant information”.
- 19 respondents were unsure.

Examining the concept of consent in online interactions, a majority (79.2%) defines it as explicit agreement. 6.9% of respondents think that consent is an implied agreement, while 13.9% of participants are not sure how to define it. This finding adds to Tom Dougherty’s (2015) idea, that consent should be communicated, and it is especially true in cyberspace. (Fig. 16)



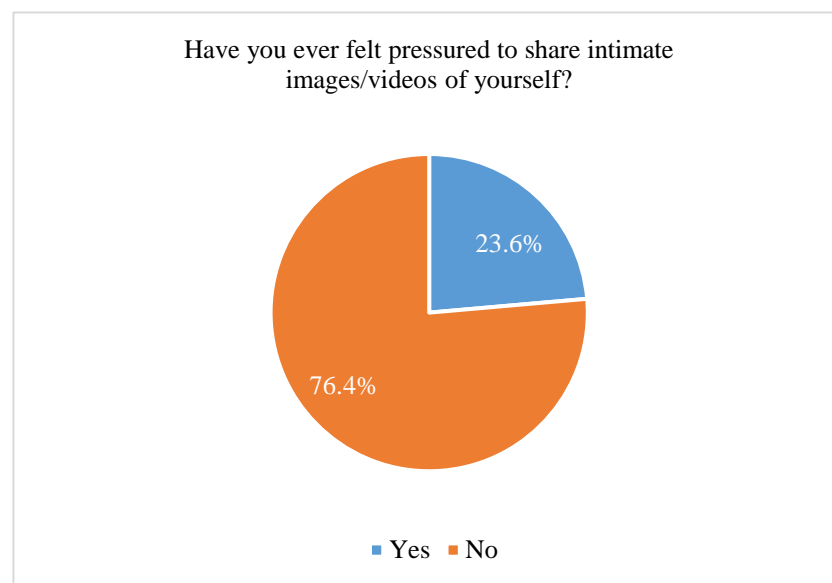
**Fig. 16.** Online survey respondents' definition of consent in the context of online interactions, percentage. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

Moreover, to analyse the answers, regarding definition of consent, an open-ended question was coined to understand what actions or communication traits indicate consent online:

- 31 respondents think that consent online is understood as a direct answer or question if intimate content could be shared “verbally directly saying 'yes', 'I agree', when a person is fully informed about what they are agreeing to”;
- 16 respondents wrote that consent only is given by written agreement “direct writing/saying: “I give permission to use this on the Internet”, “I give permission to publish”;
- 3 respondents answered that consent online is made through personal actions “If a person uploads the content themselves”;
- 5 respondents see it as context dependent “This aspect is difficult to formalize, because consent (non-objection) is revealed in the continuous totality of the content of communication and depends on the nature of communication and personality characteristics. In principle, the person must understand the intentions of the conversation and not express dissatisfaction or doubts, directly or indirectly, by changing the nature of communication, for example”.
- 3 respondents suggested that consent online is given through hints: lewdness, subtlety, and pleasant communication;

- 2 respondents thought that there is no need for consent online “I believe you don't need to ask for consent online. The survey is BROAD and UNOBJECTIVE. Consent is required when a physical direct action takes place. Or consent is needed for propaganda from foreign institutions when it is explained about “necessities of consent”. This is direct aggression and violation of privacy. An attempt to impose the control of the level of slavery on an irrelevant “threat” issue - by inflating it and artificially supporting it”;
- 1 respondent did not think that content online belongs to anyone, therefore no consent is needed;
- 1 respondent noted that not the consent is implied but rather the trust that others, with whom the content was voluntarily shared, will not break the implied promise. “In practice, all scenarios of this kind are personal and must not be made public. These are more reserved, isolated cases, if a person specifically says - the content I sent can be made public, forwarded, shared, etc, I think that in 98% of cases it is expected that it will remain among those people, because it is sent personally, and not publicly”;
- 10 respondents were not sure.

When asked if respondents have ever felt pressured to share intimate content of themselves, 17 (23,6%) answered yes, and the majority (76.4%) have never felt pressured to do so. This raises questions if they truly were not pressured, or rather they feel an obligation to share their intimate content e.g., with a partner? Still, this finding signals that there is a need for awareness not only about sexual education, but also asserting boundaries and seeing through manipulation. (Fig. 17)



**Fig. 17.** Respondents’ experiences regarding feeling pressured to share intimate images online, percentage. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

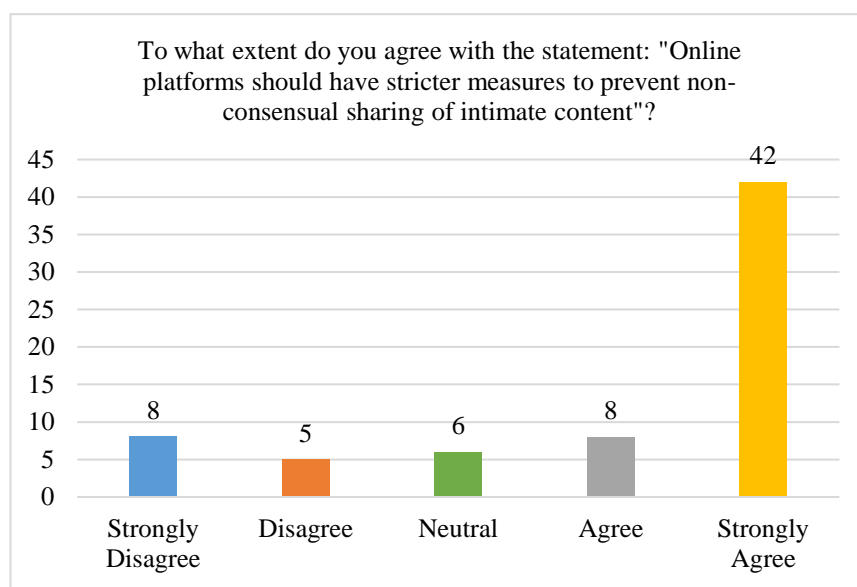
An open-ended question was asked, so the respondents could elaborate on the forms of pressure they have experienced:

- 10 respondents (out of 16) wrote that they felt manipulated “All kinds of “others do it”, making me feel abnormal that I don't want to send intimate photos of myself”;
- 1 was threatened by their ex-boyfriend “My ex-boyfriend threatened to beat me up if I didn't share, and will make the photos, he already had that he got through blackmail, etc., public”;



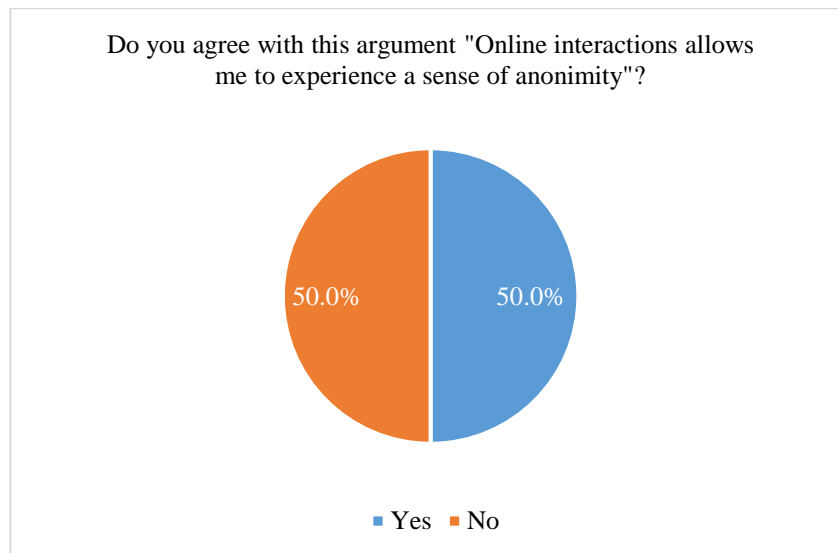
- 1 respondent mentioned that everyone in gay dating apps asks for such content;
- 1 respondent's answer could be considered a grooming experience "When I was little, I was on a Chatroulette platform and was invited to play a game of undressing";
- 6 respondents chose not to answer.

While asked about the need for online platforms to have stricter measures to prevent non-consensual image sharing, 42 out of 72 participants expressed strong support for this statement. The median range of agreement is 4.03 out of 5, this stance reflects a societal demand for enhanced digital security, as well as awareness as to what sexual consent is online. (Fig. 18)



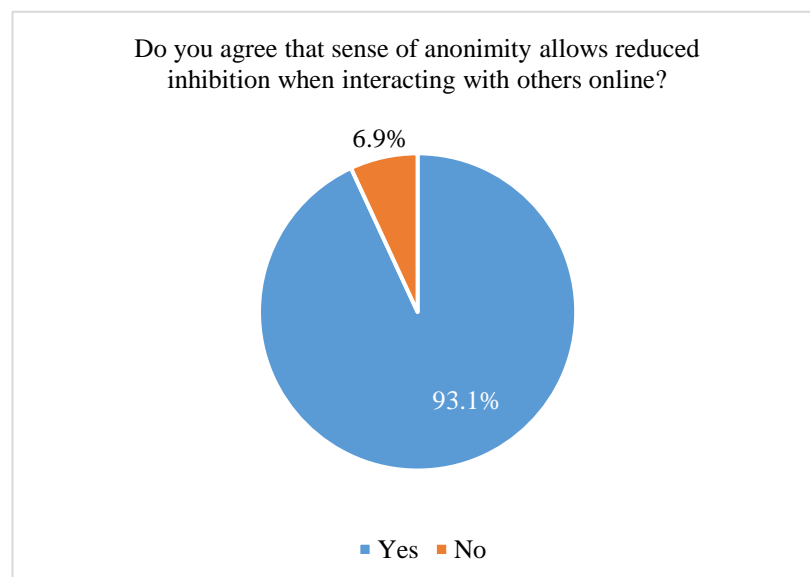
**Fig. 18.** Statistics of agreement with the statement that online platforms should have stricter measures to prevent non-consensual sharing of intimate content, numbers. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

Another main topic of the survey is feeling anonymous online. The respondents divided in half, with 36 agreeing that online interactions allow them to experience a sense of anonymity, while others did not agree with this statement. This perception is crucial in understanding the dynamics of online behaviour and the potential influence on consent and disinhibition. (Fig. 19)



**Fig. 19.** Online survey respondents' opinion on online interactions allowing one to experience a sense of anonymity, percentage.  
(compiled by the author based on survey results)

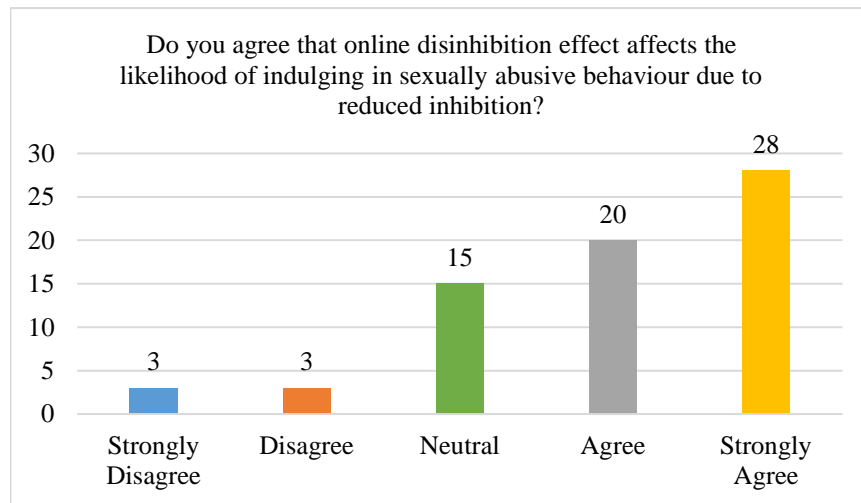
A substantial majority (93.1%) of respondents believe that the sense of anonymity does, indeed, lead to reduced inhibition in online interactions. This, almost unanimous, agreement aligns with the well-established concept of the online disinhibition effect. Even though, not all respondents feel that online interactions allow them to experience a sense of anonymity, they still recognize that the perceived anonymity in online interactions can create an environment where individuals may feel less constrained and more inclined to express themselves without the usual social norms and inhibitions associated with in-person communications (Fig. 20)



**Fig. 20.** Online survey respondents' opinion on anonymity allowing reduced inhibition when interacting with others online, percentage.  
(compiled by the author based on survey results)

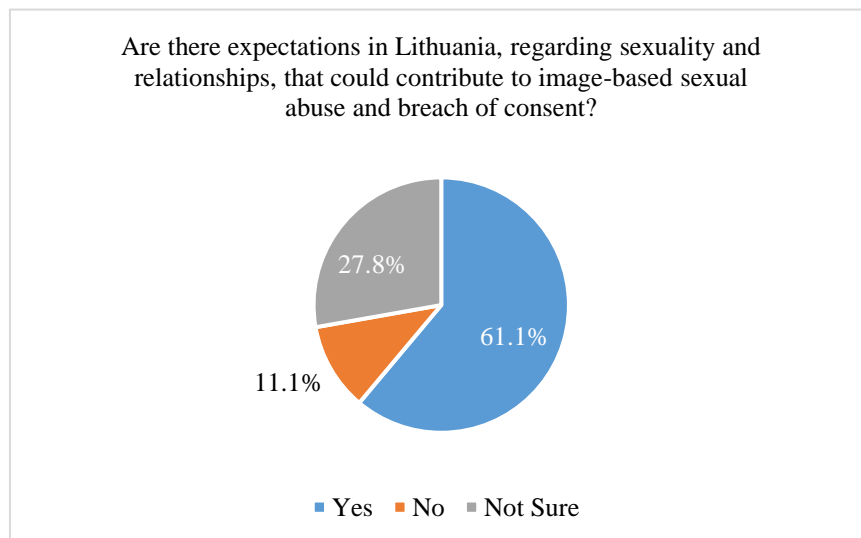
48 respondents (67%) agree or strongly agree that the online disinhibition effect contributes to the likelihood of engaging in sexually abusive behaviour in cyberspace. The median range is 3.97 out of 5, thus leaning toward agreement that feeling anonymous and viewing others as characters can lead

to sexually abusive behaviour online. Solipsism could also be the reason, if the victim of non-consensual image sharing is a famous person, as seeing a part of their lives in virtual space, could give an illusion that one knows them very well. (Fig. 21)



**Fig. 21.** Statistics of agreement with a statement that online disinhibition effect affects the likelihood of indulging in sexually abusive behaviour due to reduced inhibition, numbers. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

Adding to stereotypes and culture features in Lithuania, there is a need to dig deeper regarding image-based sexual abuse. 44 (61.1%) of respondents think there are expectations regarding sexuality and relationships which could contribute to non-consensual image sharing and breach of consent, 20 (27.8%) are not sure and 8 (11.1%) do not agree with this statement. (Fig. 22)



**Fig. 22.** Online survey respondents' opinion on expectations in Lithuania regarding sexuality and relationships, percentage. (compiled by the author based on survey results)

Then, respondents were asked to elaborate on those expectations and the answers were:

- 18 respondents determined that there are stereotypes regarding what is considered a beautiful body, as well as treating women as objects “women's bodies are still considered objects that can be commented on and discussed like commodities”;
- 16 respondents agreed but did not want to elaborate;
- 4 respondents wrote that the bigger issue is the possibility to feel anonymous online and/or such pressure is felt in various anonymous platforms “I don't know. I don't know if there is a lot of pressure in Lithuania to share your content, I think it is more common in more anonymous spaces, such as pages like Chatroulette and so on”;
- 2 respondents mentioned expectations to have sexual relations “Well, especially from the older generation of people (women), I hear about “the fact” that a woman's role is to obey her husband, to accept life as it is. Basically accepting “the fact” that you're going to be treated like garbage”;
- 1 responder distinguished lack of control in public spaces “Public space is under-controlled, individuals remain unpunished for hate speech, etc.”;
- 1 respondent argued that social media has created expectations on how women should behave;
- 1 respondent made argument that there is still gender inequality. “In Lithuania, as in many countries, there are certain social expectations for sexuality and relationships, which can impact the prevalence of image-based sexual abuse and breach of consent. One of these expectations is stereotypes and norms, which often promote gender inequality and can lead to misunderstandings about the importance of consent. For example, there is still a widespread misconception that a woman's sexual behaviour or appearance can be considered “consent” or provocation. Such provisions not only undermine a person's right to the autonomy of his body, but also create more favourable conditions for sexual violence[...]”. A plausible and knowledgeable argument, yet the respondent also mentioned the reasoning for participating in the survey “[...] your profile picture is very cute and pretty :DD otherwise I wouldn't have filled out the survey for you :)))”. This ambiguity in one answer only displays that a woman’s worth and what she deserves is based on her appearance, therefore, stereotypes that a woman’s worth is based on her appearance is still prevalent.
- 29 respondents wrote “-”, “.” or “no”.

Additionally, the respondents shared other thoughts, experiences, or suggestions that they had about image-based sexual abuse. 3 respondents were negative towards the theme and survey as they did not understand the importance of the research, 1 of the respondents was male, 1 did not want to disclose their gender and 1 was not sure. The age ranged from 35 and up, and all of them do not view *revenge pornography* as a crime.

On a positive note, 6 respondents suggested the importance of having non-profit organization in Lithuanian to educate people on image-based sexual abuse, distinguished artificial intelligence as another layer of analysis and expressed the right to freedom, as well as the importance of competent organization involvement.

### **5.2.2. Summary of Online Survey Research Results**

Most of the respondents were women aged 25-34. Majority of the respondents identify as heterosexuals and live in a city. 12,5% of respondents have never experienced image-based sexual abuse on the internet in a form of manipulation and content being shared by someone they know, and almost all the respondents kept it to themselves, therefore this issue was not resolved. 81.9% of

respondents have encountered non-consensual image sharing, only one of them contacted the police and the perpetrator was punished. Most of the image-based sexual abuse content was said to display women (93.1%). Only 8 respondents out of 72 think that there is enough awareness and sexual education regarding image-based sexual abuse, yet some think that education alone is not enough to combat it and there needs to be specific laws and regulations in Lithuania. 77.8% of respondents view image-based sexual abuse as a crime, thus, 79.2% understand consent only as an explicit agreement given through verbal or written communication. 17 out of 72 respondents have felt pressure to engage in explicit activities online against their will. While asked “To what extent do you agree with the statement: “Online platforms should have stricter measures to prevent non-consensual sharing of intimate content?” the median range of agreement was 4.03 out of 5 (1-strongly disagree and 5-strongly agree). Respondent opinions on feeling anonymous online divided equally, yet 93.1% of the respondents agree that sense of anonymity allows reduced inhibition while interacting with others online. While asked about online disinhibition effect affecting the likelihood of indulging in sexually abusive behaviour due to reduced inhibition, the median range was 3.97 out of 5 (1 - strongly disagree and 5 - strongly agree). 61.1% of respondents agreed that there are expectations towards sexuality and relationships, mostly contributing those expectations to misogyny and a woman’s obligation to belong to someone.

## Conclusions

1. Theory analysis reveals that there is still no unanimous definition of image-based sexual abuse agreed upon. Furthermore, distribution and creation of pornography in Lithuania is still illegal (article 309), thus defining image-based sexual abuse as revenge pornography or non-consensual pornography diminishes perpetrators behaviours and instead shifts the focus towards victim-blaming. Therefore, it causes damage to the victim's well-being not only online but also offline. Image-based sexual abuse is still a new phenomenon, and there are still no specific laws and regulations in Lithuania for combatting it. To get justice, the victims need to rely on articles such as 2.22 "Right to an Image" and 2.24 "Protection of Honour and Dignity".
2. There is still lack of sexual education and awareness regarding image-based sexual abuse in Lithuania, yet 64 respondents out of 72 think that education alone is not enough tool to fight this phenomenon. Additionally, 77,8% of respondents agree that image-based sexual abuse should be considered as a crime, only 62,5% think that the perpetrators should be punished. Furthermore, 41 respondents out of 72 do not know any laws that could be applied to fight image-based sexual abuse and 2 respondents do not agree that falsifying an explicit image is a criminal act. This only highlights the importance of necessary changes to be made to teach society of more critical thinking and evolving not only from victim-blaming but also from idealization of women and idolization of well-know people.
3. There are possible crucial elements for the prevalence of image-based sexual abuse – lack of self-regulation and responsibility online which is caused by the sense of anonymity as well as lack of regulations online. A significant majority (93.1%) believe that the sense of anonymity online leads to reduced inhibition, with 50% attributing this to an increased likelihood of engaging in sexually abusive behaviour. While online disinhibition is not always the reason for non-consensual image sharing, it is still an illusion of an online space without conditions. Additionally, solipsism is another important finding regarding non-consensual image sharing as one respondent wrote that explicit pictures of famous people should not be considered as revenge pornography.
4. Sexual consent online is still a rarely considered topic in research in general, and in Lithuanian legal system. Therefore, a paradox emerges in the respondents' views on violence, with one expressing the belief that not all people generally understand that abuse is not just physical, while another holds the perspective that abuse is solely physical. This disfunction of thought highlights complex comprehension within the respondents, emphasizing the need not only for awareness and laws regarding image-based sexual abuse but also education regarding sexual consent online. Positively, 31 out of 72 respondents do know laws in Lithuania about honour of dignity, as well as GDPR "right to be forgotten" in Europe.
5. Feminist philosophers, such as Simone de Beauvoir and Laura Mulvey, are important in analysing image-based sexual abuse as the victims are usually women (or identifying as women). Even though, literature review showed that gender is a performance rather than a binary and biological system, still women are viewed as objects for men's pleasure and demand. Quantitative research only confirms such notions as 17 respondents out of 72 highlights the ideology of women being obligated to belong to someone. Furthermore, 2 participants think that people in Lithuania have herd mentality which is explained by Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effect and lack of individual responsibility in a crowd, and in the context of cyberspace in Lithuania, sharing explicit content without consent is validated as others do it as well. Another issue regarding image-based sexual abuse may be attributed to the idea that it is a form of entertainment, especially if the content is of a famous person. Additionally, one respondent, that is a male, is the perfect example

of how patriarchal system is rooted into determining a woman's worth online – when asked about sexual and relationship expectations in Lithuanian society, he began with a forward thinking perspective, yet concluded it by stating he had agreed to fill out the survey solely because of the (online) appearance of the researcher.

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