Perspectives on Non-consensual Deepfake Pornography: A Content Analysis of Reddit Discussions Initiated by Perpetrators, Victims, and Bystanders

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Abstract

Non-consensual deepfake pornography is an emerging form of image-based sexual abuse (IBSA). It involves the non-consensual creation, distribution, or threat to distribute nude or sexual imagery generated using artificial intelligence (AI-IBSA). Although the legal, socio-cultural, and technological aspects of this phenomenon have received scholarly attention, the lived experiences of those involved remain underexamined. This study addresses this gap by analyzing Reddit discussions to examine the perspectives of perpetrators, victims, bystanders, and the community responses, drawing on routine activity theory (RAT). A deductive analysis of 134 Reddit initial posts identified who initiated the discussions (RQ1) and the relational, gender, and age dynamics between parties (RQ2). Seven typical discussion threads (269 comments) were inductively analyzed to explore the experiences of perpetrators (RQ3), victims (RQ4), and bystanders (RQ5), alongside community responses. Findings indicate that most threads were initiated by bystanders (45.5%; RQ1). Victims (85.8%) and bystanders (46.3%) were predominantly women, while perpetrators were mostly men (81.3%), often targeting individuals within their social networks (RQ2). Experiences ranged from perpetrators' guilt to victims' and bystanders' distress. Across groups, participants reported emotional, psychological, relational, and interpersonal harms (RQ3–5). Through the lens of RAT, the study highlights the convergence of perpetrators' motives and technical capabilities, victims' vulnerability factors, and bystanders' lack of capable guardianship. Community responses on Reddit offered support and moral reflection but also revealed patterns of harm minimization and technological fascination. These findings underscore the need for multi-level interventions, including mental health support, legal resources, digital literacy, and public education on consent and tech-facilitated abuse.

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Introduction

Non-consensual deepfake pornography (NDP) has become an increasing concern in the digital age. It is also referred to as AI-generated image-based sexual abuse (AI-IBSA; Döring et al., 2025b) or AI-generated non-consensual synthetic intimate imagery (AI-NSII; Umbach et al., 2024). Tools such as deepfake, face-swap, and nudify applications or websites enable the realistic manipulation of images and videos to create pornographic content without consent.

While the legal, socio-cultural, and technological dimensions of NDP have received scholarly attention, research into the lived experiences of those involved remains limited (Döring et al., 2025b). A content analysis by Döring et al. (2025a) found that nearly 30% of Reddit posts related to AI pornography described specific deepfake cases involving victims, perpetrators, or bystanders, suggesting a high number of real-life instances. Among these were accounts of women discovering that their male partners had produced NDP featuring individuals from their social circles. These cases raise particularly ethical, emotional, and relational concerns. Given these patterns, it is vital to explore more deeply the perspectives of those involved in or affected by NDP to understand their experiences, needs, and responses.

To address this gap, the present study examines the experiences of individuals involved in NDP cases as shared on Reddit. First, a deductive analysis of 134 initial Reddit posts was conducted to determine who initiates discussions on the topic—victims, perpetrators, or bystanders. Second, seven threads (two each from victims and perpetrators, and three from bystanders) were selected for inductive analysis to gain insights into different perspectives and community discussion dynamics.

Non-consensual Deepfake Pornography

Deepfake pornography refers to AI-manipulated sexual imagery, typically in the form of still images or videos, that creates hyper-realistic depictions of identifiable individuals (Brigham et al., 2024). This can involve superimposing a person's face onto explicit content or fully generating synthetic sexual imagery that falsely depicts a specific individual, as illustrated by the Taylor Swift deepfakes in 2024 (McGlynn & Toparlak, 2024). The term *deepfake*, a portmanteau of "deep learning" and "fake," reflects both its technical foundation and its fabricated nature. While early deepfake production required large image datasets and deep learning algorithms, recent generative AI tools allow users to create such content using simple text or image prompts via face-swap, nudify, or deepfake applications and websites (Brigham et al., 2024; McGlynn & Toparlak, 2024; Wang & Kim, 2022). These developments have greatly increased the accessibility of the technology, along with its potential for misuse.

Deepfake pornography can be categorized as either consensual or non-consensual. Although rare, *consensual deepfake pornography* requires informed consent

from both the individuals depicted and the original performers whose likenesses or material are used (Döring et al., 2025b). In contrast, the vast majority of deepfake pornography is created and disseminated without consent and therefore constitutes *non-consensual deepfake pornography* (Karasavva & Noorbhai, 2021). Accordingly, this study uses the term *non-consensual deepfake pornography*—rather than the broader and more commonly used *deepfake pornography*—to highlight the sexual violation and abusive nature of this practice.

Non-consensual deepfake pornography is a form of image-based sexual abuse (IBSA). It involves the non-consensual creation, distribution, or threat to distribute nude or sexual imagery generated using AI (Flynn et al., 2022b). Earlier forms of IBSA include practices colloquially termed upskirting and downblousing, sexual spycamming, sexualized photoshopping (the non-consensual creation of intimate images), revenge pornography (the non-consensual distribution of such material), or sextortion (threats to distribute it), among others (Hall et al., 2023; McGlynn & Rackley, 2017). With the rise of AI, more sophisticated forms of abuse have evolved, particularly through the use of deepfake technology. Accordingly, scholars have expanded the definition of IBSA to explicitly include non-consensual deepfake pornography with the concept AI-IBSA (Henry & Beard, 2024; Wei et al., 2024).

A final conceptual clarification is warranted. From a technical and normative perspective, the phenomenon addressed here is more accurately understood as a form of sexual violence rather than pornography, as pornography traditionally refers to content produced by consenting adults who are aware of the production process, participate voluntarily, and are remunerated for their involvement. None of these conditions apply to non-consensual sexualized deepfake practices, which therefore cannot be adequately conceptualized as pornography. At the same time, it is reasonable and analytically pragmatic to retain the term *non-consensual deepfake pornography*, as it is firmly established and widely used in both academic scholarship and popular discourse. Employing this term facilitates continuity with existing research, legal debates, and public understanding, while the explicit qualifier "non-consensual" foregrounds the violent, abusive, and rights-violating nature of the practice.

State of Research

Image-Based Sexual Abuse (IBSA): Victims, Perpetrators, and Bystanders

A growing body of research has explored the dynamics among victims, perpetrators, and bystanders of IBSA to understand their experiences. Research focusing on *IBSA perpetrators* has examined their prevalence, characteristics, and motivations. An online survey of 6109 participants from the UK, Australia, and New Zealand found that 17.5% self-reported engaging in at least one form of IBSA (Powell et al., 2022), while other studies have reported comparable rates ranging from 11.1 to 20.7% (Karasavva & Forth, 2022; Powell et al., 2019). Consistent patterns show that perpetrators are more often men (Henry et al., 2019; Powell et al., 2022), younger adults, and LGBTIQ+ (Henry & Beard, 2024; Powell et al., 2019). Perpetration often targets both men and women, typically involving (ex)partners, friends, or family members (Hall et al., 2023; Powell et al., 2019). Motivations for perpetration depend

on the type of IBSA but generally include seeking social validation (e.g., making a joke, gaining peer approval), power and control, sexual gratification, and retaliation (Gassó et al., 2022; Hall et al., 2023). These motivations are shaped by broader cultural norms surrounding masculinity that normalize male sexual entitlement and the objectification of women, enabling perpetrators to frame IBSA as harmless humor or fantasy and thereby minimize harm and disregard victims' autonomy and consent (Henry & Powell, 2015).

Research on *IBSA victims* has primarily focused on prevalence, victim characteristics, the impacts of victimization, and help-seeking behaviors. A cross-national survey found that 22.6% of respondents had experienced at least one form of IBSA (Umbach et al., 2025). Victimization tends to be more common among LGBTQ+ individuals and younger people (Umbach et al., 2025). Findings related to gender remain mixed. While several studies examining the full continuum of IBSA found no significant gender differences (Henry et al., 2019; Powell et al., 2024), research focused on specific forms of IBSA suggests that women may be at greater risk than men (Karasavva & Forth, 2022; Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2020). Moreover, women tend to suffer more severe and long-lasting impacts (Scott et al., 2022; Umbach et al., 2025). They commonly report a wide range of serious impacts, including impaired self-esteem, shame, depression, suicidal ideation, and significant disruptions to their personal, social, educational, and professional lives (Huber, 2023; Mandau, 2021; Nygård et al., 2025).

IBSA bystanders have received less research attention than victims or perpetrators. Scott et al. (2022) found that in a sample of 293 Australian youths involved in IBSA, about 50% had been bystanders. Bystanders often reported discomfort or embarrassment, with few intervening, likely due to uncertainty, peer pressure, or fear of social consequences (Kromann & Flynn, 2025). While gender differences were generally minor, women were more likely to feel embarrassed and men more likely to find the situation funny (Harder, 2020; Scott et al., 2022). Bystanders' intervention intention reflects four themes: perpetrator-centered, victim-centered, justice-centered, and informed intervention (Mainwaring et al., 2024). Bystanders' reactions may also be shaped by cultural myths that normalize male sexual entitlement and minimize the harms of sexual violence, leading some to justify perpetrator behavior or downplay victims' experiences (Burt, 1980).

Non-consensual Deepfake Pornography: Victims, Perpetrators, and Bystanders

Research on deepfake pornography has largely concentrated on non-consensual content (Döring et al., 2025b). Studies have addressed ethical concerns (Öhman, 2020; Story & Jenkins, 2023), the development of legal frameworks (Dunn, 2024; Karasavva & Noorbhai, 2021; Mania, 2024), public attitudes toward deepfake pornography (Brigham et al., 2024; Fido et al., 2022; Wang & Kim, 2022), alongside its technological dimensions (McCosker, 2024; Van der Nagel, 2020).

However, few studies have examined NDP through the lens of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. One cross-national survey reported that 2% of participants had been targeted by or created deepfake pornography (Umbach et al., 2024). Broader research on digitally altered IBSA—which includes but is not limited to deepfakes—

found higher rates of victimization (14.1%) and perpetration (7.6%; Flynn et al., 2022b). Women were more likely to experience severe and lasting harms, including emotional, psychological, and professional damage. Few studies exploring the motives of deepfake creators have highlighted factors such as entertainment, sexual gratification, technical experimentation, power, and masculinity validation, with women and gender-marginalized individuals most often targeted (Han et al., 2024; Timmerman et al., 2023).

Overall, although IBSA has received growing scholarly attention, NDP—particularly regarding victims, perpetrators, and bystanders—remains understudied. More research is needed to address these gaps and better understand their experiences surrounding this new type of AI-enabled abuse.

Current Study

The current study draws on Routine Activity Theory (RAT; Cohen & Felson, 1979; Cohen et al., 1981), which posits that victimization occurs when three conditions converge: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian. Although originally developed to explain physical crimes, this framework has been widely applied to sexual victimization research in offline and online contexts (Hayes et al., 2021; Snyder, 2015). It suggests that offenders can be anyone with both the motive and opportunity to commit a crime. Targets become more vulnerable when their routines (1) bring them into proximity with potential offenders, (2) expose them to risky or deviant settings, (3) make them appear attractive or exploitable, and (4) lack effective guardianship. These principles guide our analysis of the roles and experiences of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders in Reddit discussions about NDP (e.g., perpetrators' motivations, victims' vulnerability factors, and bystanders' potential for intervention).

To structure this investigation, we pose the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1   Who initiates Reddit threads about non-consensual deepfake pornography—perpetrators, victims, or bystanders?

RQ2   What dynamics (relationships, gender, age) between victims, perpetrators, and bystanders are visible in these Reddit posts?

RQ3   What aspects of perpetrators' experiences are highlighted, and how do Reddit users respond to them?

RQ4   What aspects of victims' experiences are highlighted, and how do Reddit users respond to them?

RQ5   What aspects of bystanders' experiences are highlighted, and how do Reddit users respond to them?

For this study, *perpetrators* are defined as individuals who create, distribute, and/or threaten to share NDP of another person; *victims* are individuals who have been depicted in, had their images shared, or have been threatened with the sharing of such material without consent; and *bystanders* are those who become aware of these behaviors—whether by witnessing, discovering, or being shown the material—without directly participating in the abuse (Mainwaring et al., 2024; Scott et al., 2022). These roles are not mutually exclusive; a person can be the perpetrator in one case

and the bystander or victim in another. But when sharing a specific case on Reddit, they usually present a single perspective.

Reddit was selected for this study because it offers a rich environment for examining how individuals discuss emerging forms of abuse, including NDP. Reddit is the largest English-language forum platform, with over 430 million active users (Rocha-Silva et al., 2024). Its structure—organized around topic-specific forums—encourages in-depth discussions and the sharing of personal experiences. Its anonymity facilitates open dialogue on sensitive issues (Stang et al., 2025). These make Reddit valuable for researchers studying attitudes, experiences, and discourse around sexuality, like sexual desire (Belcher et al., 2023), IBSA (Wei et al., 2024), and deepfake pornography (Han et al., 2024).

Methods

The study employed a manual content analysis of $N = 134$ Reddit threads discussing NDP available as of February 2025. First, all initial posts of these threads were deductively coded to determine who initiated discussions (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2016). Then, seven typical discussion threads, including 269 comments, initiated by perpetrators (2 threads), victims (2 threads), and bystanders (3 threads), were inductively coded to gain insights into different perspectives and community discussion dynamics (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023).

Research Ethics

Our study adheres to a user-centered ethical approach (for an explanation of two approaches to research ethics in Reddit research, see Döring et al., 2025a), with approval from the Ethical Committee of Technische Universität Ilmenau (Germany).

Given the sensitivity of the topic, we prioritized user privacy by omitting usernames and subreddit names and avoiding verbatim quotations in our reporting (Hintz & Betts, 2022; Proferes et al., 2021). All coding and analysis were conducted using the original, verbatim Reddit posts. Modified quotes were used only at the reporting stage to reduce re-identification risk while preserving meaning. These paraphrases were generated using ChatGPT-4 solely for surface-level rephrasing after analysis was complete; the AI tool played no role in data selection, coding, or interpretation. All paraphrases were subsequently reviewed and manually edited by the authors to ensure fidelity to the original meaning and further reduce traceability (e.g., by removing identical information and rephrasing distinctive keywords or phrases; see an illustrative example of ChatGPT rephrasing and manual edits in Supplementary Table S5 at https://osf.io/hcnja/). To assess re-identification risk, each modified quote was independently checked by both authors and an additional communication researcher before inclusion, using Google searches of the full paraphrase. Paraphrases that returned potential matches to original posts were further revised or excluded from reporting.

To further protect users, we analyzed threads from a diverse range of subreddits and will not publicly share our dataset or Reddit thread links, granting access only

under strict confidentiality. We only included threads from subreddits that do not restrict the analysis of threads for research purposes in our qualitative analysis.

To protect minors, no visual content involving minors or potential child sexual exploitation material (CSEM) was collected or analyzed. The study relied solely on textual self-reports from publicly available Reddit posts. Mentions of age were coded only at an aggregate level for prevalence estimates, and no identifying or potentially sensitive age-related information is reported or shared publicly.

Sample

A typical Reddit thread begins with an initial post introducing a topic, followed by comments from Reddit users. For this study, we collected both publicly accessible initial posts and their corresponding comments. To address RQ1 and RQ2, we focused solely on the initial posts, while we examined both initial posts and comments from a subset of threads to answer RQ3–5.

Sampling of Initial Posts

Reddit's initial posts were manually identified using the website's search function. We employed 13 pre-tested search terms, three filters, and four exclusion criteria (for the sampling plan, see Supplementary Table S1 at https://osf.io/hcnja/). The sampling occurred on December 2–3, 2024, and February 10, 2025. The final sample consisted of 134 Reddit initial posts describing experiences involving NDP with perspectives from perpetrators, bystanders, and victims. The content was published between 2017 and 2025 across 54 subreddits (see Table 1). The subreddits covered a wide range of topics, primarily focusing on gender relations, pornography, confessions, relationship advice, and legal advice. Due to research ethics, the names of subreddits are not mentioned here. On average, each initial post received about 100 comments.

Selection of Thread Subset

To address RQ3, RQ4, and RQ5, we purposively selected a subset of threads to yield information-rich discussions involving perpetrators, victims, bystanders, and

Table 1 Description of the sample of Reddit initial posts on non-consensual deepfake pornography

Formal categories	Total
Sample size	134 Reddit initial posts describing experiences with specific cases of NDP
Publication year	2017–2025[a]
Number of subreddits	54 subreddits
Number of comments	$N=13{,}393$ comments $M=99.9$ ($SD=192.0$) comments per individual Reddit post

Formal categories were coded on December 2–3, 2024, and February 10, 2025

[a]Number of posts by year: 2017 ($n=1$), 2018 ($n=0$), 2019 ($n=2$), 2020 ($n=4$), 2021 ($n=3$), 2022 ($n=5$), 2023 ($n=24$), 2024 ($n=85$), 2025 ($n=4$)
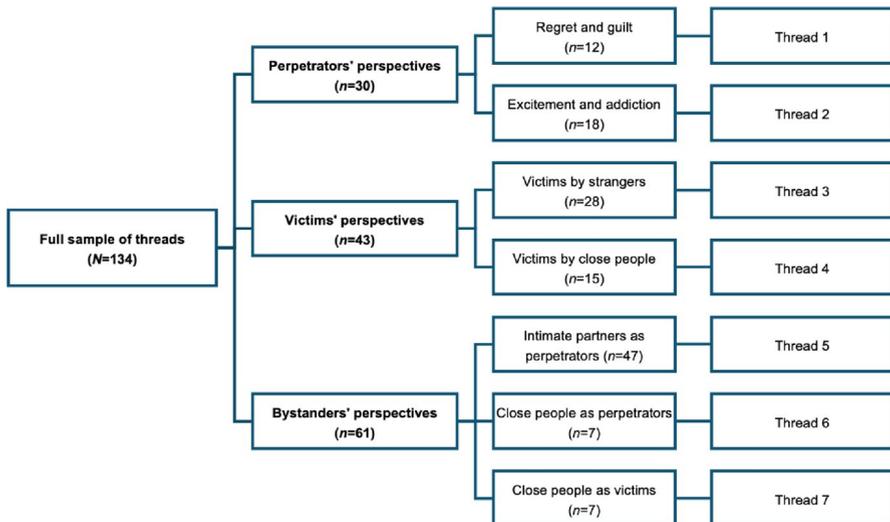
the Reddit community (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2002). Analyzing a subset of threads facilitates a deeper understanding of the flow and dynamics of discussions.

The thread selection process is illustrated in Fig. 1. First, all initial posts (N = 134) were screened and grouped into three overarching perspectives: perpetrators, victims, and bystanders. Second, through close reading, initial posts within each perspective were inductively clustered into sub-categories based on their main themes. These included two sub-categories for perpetrators (*Regret and guilt; Excitement and addiction*), two for victims (*Victims by strangers; Victims by close people*), and three for bystanders (*Intimate partners as perpetrators; Close people as perpetrators; Close people as victims*). Third, the defining aspects of each sub-category were identified through inductive coding of all initial posts within that sub-category. This process was conducted using MAXQDA24 (for the thread codebook, see Supplementary Table S2 at https://osf.io/hcnja/).

Within each sub-category, one thread was selected for in-depth qualitative analysis based on two criteria: (1) the initial post addressed all aspects of the sub-category, and (2) the thread demonstrated high engagement relative to others in the same sub-category, indicated by the highest number of comments (minimum threshold of 20 comments; exceptions were made when no threads in a sub-category met this threshold).

Analytic saturation was assessed during coding, and no new high-level themes emerged in the final threads beyond those identified within the established sub-categories.

By applying these criteria, we identified the seven most information-rich Reddit threads that capture all main aspects and diverse arguments related to perpetrators', victims', and bystanders' experiences. Comments from these seven threads were collected for content analysis of discussions using Python with PRAW (for the extraction script, see Supplementary S6 at https://osf.io/hcnja/). We excluded comments that (a) originated from original posters and from moderators, (b) were not in English, and

Fig. 1 Sampling of seven selected Reddit threads on non-consensual deepfake pornography

(c) had been deleted/removed such that only a removal note remained, resulting in $n = 269$ comments. A brief description of each thread is presented in Table 2.

Data Collection and Analysis

To answer RQ1 and RQ2, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of all initial posts using a deductive approach (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2016). A codebook was developed, comprising 33 codes organized into ten topical categories (for the initial post codebook, see Supplementary Table S3 at https://osf.io/hcnja/). These codes were derived from research questions, existing literature, and data (Powell et al., 2019; Statistics Canada, 2024; Wei et al., 2024). The codebook underwent a face validity check by the two authors, resulting in minor refinements. Intercoder reliability was then assessed using two trained coders (author T.D.L. and a communication researcher, who provided informed consent to participate in the coding). The coders independently coded a random subset of 40 initial posts drawn from the full sample. Reliability testing indicated that all codes achieved substantial to almost perfect agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977, p. 165), with Cohen's kappa coefficients ranging from 0.77 to 1.00 and a mean κ of 0.95. Following the reliability assessment, the codebook underwent several iterative refinements through comparison and discussion among the authors to further enhance reliability and validity. Author T.D.L. subsequently coded and analyzed all initial posts using Excel and RStudio.

To address RQ3, RQ4, and RQ5, we conducted a qualitative content analysis through inductive analysis of each selected thread (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023). First, initial posts were examined using the sub-category aspects identified in the previous step (see Selection of thread subset). For example, Thread 1 (Regret and guilt) was analyzed based on aspects of production, reasons for production, relationship problems, negative emotions, and actions to change. Author T.D.L. coded and analyzed seven threads using MAXQDA24.

Next, we conducted a qualitative content analysis of comments within each thread, employing both deductive and inductive approaches. Analyzing comments within each thread enabled us to observe how the flow of arguments varied depending on the nature of the initial post. For instance, threads related to perpetrators' excitement often stimulate public curiosity, while those involving victims tend to evoke sympathy. An initial coding scheme was developed based on prior research on violence disclosure on Reddit (Sivagurunathan et al., 2021) and iteratively refined as new codes emerged (for the comment codebook, see Supplementary Table S4 at https://osf.io/hcnja/). The comment codebook underwent a face validity check by the two authors, resulting in minor refinements. Author T.D.L. coded and analyzed all comments using MAXQDA24.

The analyses addressing RQ3, RQ4, and RQ5 were qualitative and interpretive in nature; therefore, intercoder reliability statistics were not calculated. Analytic rigor was ensured through iterative coding, constant comparison across threads, discussion of emerging interpretations among two the authors, and documentation of coding decisions in the evolving codebook.

Table 2 Description of seven selected Reddit threads on non-consensual deepfake pornography

Thread	Perspectives	Themes	Comments	Upvotes	Brief summary of threads and comments
1	Perpetrator	Regret and guilt	37	29	Account of a young man struggling with guilt and regret after creating deepfake pornography of a girl he liked *Comments:* encouragement for self-improvement, emotional reassurance, recognition of remorse as progress, etc
2	Perpetrator	Excitement and addiction	91	66	Account of a man who became excited about creating deepfake pornography of his female friends to the point of feeling addicted to it *Comments:* curiosity about the AI tools, etc
3	Victim	Victims by strangers	64	319	Account of a female student targeted by published deepfake nudes depicting her likeness, facing fear and embarrassment due to the exposure *Comments:* practical advice for digital protection, sympathy, speculations about the perpetrator, etc
4	Victim	Victims by close people	23	4	Account of a woman devastated after discovering that her intimate partner secretly used AI to create pornographic deepfakes of her, leaving her feeling violated, betrayed, and unsure whether to stay or leave *Comments:* breakup and legal advice, perpetrator justification, etc
5	Bystander	Intimate partners as perpetrators	87	320	Account of a woman who uncovered her intimate partner's long-term deception involving production of deepfake pornography of third parties but not her, struggling with betrayal, self-worth, and the dilemma of whether to salvage their relationship or walk away *Comments:* blaming the perpetrator, sympathy, advice to end the relationship, etc

Table 2 (continued)

Thread	Perspectives	Themes	Comments	Upvotes	Brief summary of threads and comments
6	Bystander	Close people as perpetrators	72	68	Account of a man who discovered deepfake pornography of many girls on his brother's computer *Comments:* reporting and confrontation advice, condemnation of perpetrator, empathy for bystander, etc
7	Bystander	Close people as victims	40	46	Account of a man seeking advice after learning that his cousin had become a victim of sextortion involving deepfake pornography created using his likeness *Comments:* advice on handling sextortion, doubt about authenticity of victim's story on AI involvement, etc

The rationale and inclusion criteria for selecting these Reddit threads are explained in the Sample section of the manuscript

Table 3 Perspectives of posters initiating Reddit threads about non-consensual deepfake pornography

Posters' perspectives	n	%
Perpetrators	30	22.4
Victims	43	32.1
Bystanders	61	45.5
Total	134	100.0

$N=134$ Reddit initial posts about personal experiences with NDP were analyzed

Results

Results are presented separately for each research question.

Individuals Initiating Discussions About NDP (RQ1)

Among 134 Reddit threads discussing experiences with NDP, the majority were initiated by bystanders ($n=61$, 45.5%; see Table 3). Victims followed, contributing 32.1% ($n=43$) of the threads, while perpetrators accounted for 22.4% ($n=30$). The thread initiators' or original posters' perspective can typically be inferred from the thread title or opening statements.

Bystanders often begin their initial posts by describing how they came across the deepfake content and seeking advice on how to process or respond to the situation:

> I recently found out my boyfriend was using AI to make fake nude pictures of some of our friends based on their social media photos to get off to. Should I dump him?

Table 4 Dynamics between perpetrators, victims, and bystanders involved in non-consensual deepfake pornography as described in Reddit initial posts

Categories	Dynamics between perpetrators, victims and bystanders					
Relationships	Victims-perpetrators		Bystanders-victims		Bystanders-perpetrators	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Intimate partners[a]	25	18.7	3	2.2	54	40.3
Family members	25	18.7	20	14.9	5	3.7
Friends and acquaintances[a]	67	50.0	37	27.6	4	3.0
Work colleagues[a]	9	6.7	2	1.5	0	0.0
Strangers	37	27.6	1	0.7	2	1.5
	Victims		Perpetrators		Bystanders	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Gender[bc]						
Male	2	1.5	109	81.3	10	7.5
Female	115	85.8	1	0.7	62	46.3
Age[c]						
Children (under 14)	4	3.0	3	2.2	1	0.7
Youth (15–24 years)	23	17.2	27	20.1	21	15.7
Adults (above 25 years)	9	6.7	31	23.1	19	14.2

N=134 Reddit initial posts were analyzed. All categories were coded separately as binary variables; therefore, the percentages do not sum to 100%

[a]The categories of "Intimate partners", "Friends and acquaintances," and "Work colleagues" cover both current and former relationships

[b]Non-binary genders did not appear in the analyzed sample of Reddit posts

[c]Gender and age were coded only when explicitly self-reported or clearly stated in the initial post; no demographic attributes were inferred from usernames, writing style, contextual cues, or comment information

Perpetrators tend to open with admissions of their actions, often identifying their targets explicitly. In contrast, victims typically frame their posts around the identity of the person who created the deepfakes and use the platform to seek emotional or practical support:

> About a year ago, I found out my boyfriend had edited my face onto porn videos. [...] It's starting to bother me. I don't know what to do about it—any advice?

Dynamics Between Perpetrators, Victims, and Bystanders (RQ2)

The most frequently reported relationship between victims and perpetrators is that of current or former friends and acquaintances (*n*=67, 50.0%; see Table 4). Additionally, a considerable proportion of perpetrators were described as strangers (*n*=37, 27.6%). Furthermore, perpetrators were also often identified as former or current intimate partners (e.g., boyfriend, spouse) or family members of victims (e.g., siblings), accounting for 18.7% (*n*=25) of cases. One thread, for instance, describes how a man used AI tools to generate NDP of individuals he knows:

> I discovered some AI tools and bots that could create fake explicit images, and in a moment of weakness, I used photos of people I knew, friends and acquaintances, to generate nudes for my satisfaction.

From the bystander's perspective, the most common relationship to the victim was also friends or acquaintances ($n=37$, 27.6%), while bystanders most often identified perpetrators as an intimate partner ($n=54$, 40.3%), such as a current or former boyfriend.

Gender dynamics mentioned in the Reddit posts indicate a clear pattern: victims of NDP were predominantly women ($n=115$, 85.8%), while perpetrators were primarily men ($n=109$, 81.3%). Victims were often identified as mothers, sisters, female friends, whereas those producing the deepfake content included sons, brothers, and male friends. Among bystanders, 46.3% ($n=62$) were women and 7.5% ($n=10$) were men.

Age dynamics show that youth (aged 15–24) are well-represented in all roles, particularly among victims ($n=23$, 17.2%) and perpetrators ($n=27$, 20.1%). Adults and older individuals (aged 25 and above) made up a large portion of perpetrators ($n=31$, 23.1%) and bystanders ($n=19$, 14.2%). Children who are under 14 years old were less frequently mentioned in Reddit discussions on NDP.

In many of the included threads, Redditors explicitly disclosed the gender and age of all parties, offering insight into the demographics involved:

> I'm 18 female and have been with my boyfriend (also 18) for almost a year. While checking his recently deleted photos, I found something really disturbing—dozens of pictures of our mutual friend (18 female), including regular selfies, full-body shots, and AI-generated nudes of her.

Perpetrators' Experiences and Reddit Community's Reactions (RQ3)

The following sections will examine one selected thread from two categories of NDP perpetrators' perspectives: *Regret and guilt* and *Excitement and addiction,* with both the initial posts and the comments.

Regret and Guilt

In this thread, the perpetrator describes creating NDP involving a woman he knew by using AI to superimpose her face onto adult performers' bodies. He frames his actions through references to low self-esteem, prior bullying, emotional distress following romantic rejection, and increased consumption of adult content, positioning these experiences as contextual explanations for the image manipulation.

> Lastly, I've been overwhelmed with guilt to the point where I've had serious thoughts of ending my life. I can't believe I did something like this to another person. It makes me feel like a terrible human being, and it hurts deeply to know I was capable of it.

While emphasizing that the material was neither shared nor retained, the post is marked by strong expressions of guilt, regret, and moral self-condemnation, including the use of dehumanizing self-descriptors and references to suicidal ideation. The perpetrator further raises questions about his moral worth and future relationships, articulating a desire for accountability and redemption while simultaneously expressing concern that disclosure or apology could cause additional harm to the victim.

Comments. A large portion of the comments fell under *Informational Support*, particularly within the *Suggestion and Advice*. Commenters provided practical recommendations to help the original poster process their feelings of guilt, such as reflecting on the experience as a learning opportunity to avoid repeating similar behavior and striving to *"be a better person"* by focusing on personal development and volunteer work.

Moreover, many responses offered *Nurturant Support.* Commenters expressed sympathy for the poster's distress, often validating the emotional burden of guilt. Others praised the poster's remorse as a positive sign of self-awareness: *"Feeling regret and doing everything you can to fix your mistakes is a clear sign that you're working to overcome those actions"*.

Excitement and Addiction

In this thread, the perpetrator describes using AI tools to generate sexualized images and videos by superimposing the faces of friends onto pornographic bodies. He frames both the production and consumption of this material as oriented toward personal sexual gratification and as increasingly central to his media practices. The post foregrounds excitement and compulsion, with the perpetrator characterizing his engagement as "addictive" and explicitly contrasting it with a disengagement from conventional pornography in favor of AI-generated content depicting individuals from his social circle:

> I'm addicted to it. I don't even watch regular porn anymore. I get off to pics and videos of my friends doing sexual stuff, like posing nude, being dirty, or hooking up.

Comments. One of the most prominent patterns observed in the comments was the ongoing *Discussion about the AI tools* used to generate deepfake nudes. Many commenters expressed curiosity about the technology, asking what specific tool was used, its functionality, and how it could be accessed. Some commenters went a step further, not only naming specific applications but also offering detailed instructions on how to achieve similar results.

> If you're trying this, there's an app on the App Store. It has a feature called 'Change Objects', you can highlight clothing and type in prompts like 'nude' or even add specific details like 'flat chest', 'big boobs', or 'giant penis', and it works.

Victims' Experiences and Reddit Community's Reactions (RQ4)

The following sections will examine one selected thread from two categories of victims' perspectives: *Victims by strangers* and *Victims by close people,* with both the initial posts and the comments.

Victims by Strangers

In this thread, the victim describes discovering that AI-generated nude images of her were circulating online after receiving anonymous messages referencing such material. She links the abuse to her public social media presence, which she used for professional purposes, and recounts how the situation escalated when the images were sent to people in her social network. The post foregrounds the realism of the manipulated images alongside feelings of fear, embarrassment, and anxiety associated with sudden exposure and loss of control.

> Those images look way more realistic […] They found my public photos and edited them. Some of the results are pretty convincing.

In response, the victim positions herself as both distressed and proactive, describing efforts to seek legal advice, contact law enforcement, publicly challenge the authenticity of the images, and encourage others to block the harassers. She also urges readers to recognize the emotional harm involved, challenges victim-blaming narratives, and asserts a right to participate online without fear.

Comments. Commenters offered a range of responses, with a strong focus on *Informational Support*. Many provided *Suggestions and Advice* to help the victim address the situation and prevent future AI misuse. Suggestions included reporting to the police, sharing the story publicly to prevent blackmail, reducing personal exposure to the abusive images, increasing privacy settings, and practicing digital caution.

Many also engaged in *Situational Appraisal*, speculating about the perpetrator's identity and motives. Some suspected someone close to the victim—such as a jealous peer, former intimate partner, or disapproving relative—while others suggested a random online follower seeking attention. Furthermore, some comments offered *Nurturant Support*, showing empathy, solidarity, and hope for healing and justice.

Victims by Close People

In this thread, the victim describes discovering that her intimate partner had used AI tools to generate sexualized images of her without consent. She situates the discovery within an ongoing relational context marked by prior tensions around his pornography use, noting that the revelation emerged after observing repeated visits to AI-based "nudify" websites on his computer. The post conveys shock, betrayal, and physical distress, particularly in light of an earlier mutual agreement that he would stop consuming pornography to protect the relationship.

> I always knew he was a porn addict, but I didn't realize it was this serious.

The partner's secrecy and repeated actions are framed as a breach of trust, intensifying feelings of violation. The victim positions herself as uncertain and conflicted, describing how the discovery destabilized shared future plans and prompted a dilemma between attempting to rebuild trust and prioritizing her own safety and well-being.

Comments. Much of the discussion focused on *Informational Support,* specifically through *Suggestions and Advice.* Many urged the victim to end the relationship or seek legal and professional help. In parallel, many engaged in *Situational Appraisal,* highlighting that the boyfriend's actions were not just inappropriate but potentially rooted in deeper psychological issues.

A smaller group offered *Perpetrator Justification*, arguing that using AI-generated images of someone he was already intimate with wasn't inherently wrong. Others further minimized the act, framing it as a technical curiosity rather than intentional harm.

Bystanders' Experiences and Reddit Community's Reactions (RQ5)

The following sections will examine one selected thread from three categories of bystanders' perspectives: *Intimate partners as perpetrators*, *Close people as perpetrators*, and *Close people as victims,* with both the initial posts and the comments.

Intimate Partners as Perpetrators

In this thread, a female poster describes discovering her intimate partner's involvement in deepfake pornography while using their shared laptop. She reports finding email records linked to porn subscriptions, OnlyFans activity, and AI-generated sexual content depicting women from his social circle, positioning herself as a bystander rather than a direct target. After initial denial, the partner admitted to generating deepfake pornography involving former partners, acquaintances, and a mutual friend, attributing his actions to a long-standing pornography addiction.

The post foregrounds strong emotional responses, including anger, hurt, disgust, and diminished self-worth, alongside moral distress about whether to inform the women who had been unknowingly sexualized. These reactions are framed in relation to repeated boundary violations and continued dishonesty. Although the relationship ended, the partner's expressions of remorse are met with ongoing uncertainty:

> One side of me wants to save what we've built, the relationship, the house, the life. But the other side sees clearly that he's deeply damaged and has been dishonest from the beginning, even after being confronted.

Comments. Many comments offered *Informational Support*, mainly through *Suggestions and Advice.* Most commenters urged the original poster to leave the relationship. The focus was on prioritizing personal well-being and not tolerating repeated deception, manipulation, or non-consensual behavior. Commenters warned that staying with someone who lies and minimizes harm could cause more serious emotional damage and encouraged her to seek healthier relationships.

Many comments reflected *Situational Appraisal,* helping the poster grasp the seriousness of her partner's actions. Several described the boyfriend as *"a disgusting person"*, pointing to a clear pattern of dishonesty, emotional neglect, and disregard for boundaries.

Close People as Perpetrators

In this thread, a male poster describes discovering a folder of AI-generated sexual images on his brother's computer, which he identifies as deepfakes depicting women from their shared social circle. He positions himself as a bystander to his brother's NDP production, expressing distress not at the presence of pornography per se, but at the non-consensual sexualization of people they knew, including the possibility that his own partner was among those depicted. The post foregrounds feelings of disgust and disappointment, framed in relation to prior concerns about his brother's behavior, and articulates uncertainty about whether and how to confront him.

> If it were just porn, I wouldn't care; every man has it. But these are people we know, maybe even my partner. I can't stop thinking about it.

Comments. Commenters frequently provided *Informational Support*, often offering *Suggestions and Advice.* Many commenters encouraged immediate action, such as reporting the behavior to the authorities, informing the family, or at least confronting the perpetrator.

The discussion also included *Situational Appraisal*, focusing on the psychological and moral severity of the brother's actions. Many agreed he showed signs of serious mental health issues and described his behavior as antisocial, dangerous, and criminal. A smaller group of comments reflected *Nurturant Support*, offering empathy and validation to the bystander.

Close People as Victims

In this thread, a male poster recounts learning that his cousin had been targeted in a sextortion scheme involving AI-generated pornographic videos created using his likeness. He positions himself as a bystander who became aware of the abuse through the victim's disclosure rather than direct discovery. The post describes how scammers harvested images from the victim's social media after initiating sexual chats and used them to produce highly realistic deepfake videos, which were then used for blackmail. The perceived realism of the videos and the threat of exposure are framed as producing intense fear, leading the victim to make repeated payments.

The bystander expresses frustration at not being informed earlier, believing intervention could have prevented financial loss, and describes offering reassurance and practical support once aware of the situation. He situates the harm within a cultural context in which public exposure would carry severe stigma:

Had I known sooner, I would have stopped him from sending anything. He knew it was a mistake, but the thought of family seeing those videos terrified him. In our culture, the humiliation would have been unbearable.

Comments. Most comments provided *Informational Support* through *Suggestions and Advice* for the cousin. Users urged him to cut contact with scammers, block them, and inform his family and friends that the videos are fake. Many emphasized the importance of moving on and not letting fear or shame control the situation.

Other users engaged in *Situational Appraisal*, focusing on two key themes. First, they criticized the decision to pay, warning that it could encourage continued extortion. Second, some questioned the cousin's story, suggesting that the videos might be real and that he could be using AI as a cover for self-recorded explicit material with which he was blackmailed *"Why panic over leaks if the videos are fake in the first place?"*.

Discussion

The discussion interprets the main results in response to the five research questions, acknowledges the study's limitations, and offers an outlook for future research.

Interpretation

This study analyzed 134 Reddit threads about experiences with NDP and found that bystanders initiated most posts (45.5%; RQ1). This is in line with survey findings by Flynn et al. (2022a), who reported that 64.1% of respondents had witnessed or become aware of IBSA, indicating that it is a widespread issue. The unexpected discovery of NDP often prompted moral, emotional, or legal concerns, leading bystanders to seek advice, validation, or support in online spaces like Reddit (Flynn et al., 2022a; Mainwaring et al., 2024).

Findings regarding RQ2–RQ5 align with Routine Activity Theory (RAT; Cohen & Felson, 1979; Cohen et al., 1981): In the case of perpetrators, the analysis revealed that they were typically individuals with both the motive and the technical capability to commit AI-enabled abuse. In five of the seven relevant threads, they engaged in NDP primarily for sexual gratification, often in connection with self-acknowledged problematic pornography use. This pattern is most clearly illustrated in Thread 2 (*Excitement and addiction*), where the perpetrator describes repeated engagement with NDP for masturbation. Most perpetrators were younger men with advanced digital skills, access to deepfake tools, and high exposure to misogynistic and exploitative content through their active participation in online spaces like gaming or other digital subcultures (Henry & Beard, 2024). These patterns are consistent with the IBSA literature, which identifies men and younger individuals as the most common perpetrators (Henry et al., 2019).

Regarding victims, one of the key findings of this study is the relational proximity between perpetrators and victims. Both the quantitative and qualitative analyses show that NDP frequently targets individuals from the perpetrator's close social

circle (e.g., intimate partner in Thread 4—*Victims by close people*), underscoring proximity as a central risk factor for victimization within RAT. This pattern mirrors prior IBSA research demonstrating that abuse is often perpetrated by known others rather than strangers (Henry et al., 2019), and highlights how familiarity, access, and trust can facilitate technology-facilitated sexual harm. Victims were also more likely to be targeted when their lifestyle involved exposure to risky situations (e.g., sexting in Thread 7—*Close people as victims*) or made them appear as attractive targets (e.g., high online visibility in Thread 3—*Victims by strangers*), again consistent with RAT. The majority of victims addressed in Reddit discussions were women, in line with previous findings that women are more often perceived as vulnerable and desirable sexual targets of victimization (Bones, 2013).

Bystanders frequently encountered NDP within close social contexts and often expressed uncertainty about whether and how to intervene, particularly when perpetrators were family members or romantic partners. These discussions align with prior research showing that, although bystanders may recognize IBSA as harmful, many hesitate to act due to social pressures or uncertainty about appropriate responses (Kromann & Flynn, 2025). In online communities, bystander responses—ranging from silence to humor—can contribute to the normalization of IBSA through homosocial dynamics that minimize perceived harm (Henry & Powell, 2015). From a RAT perspective, such hesitation reflects a lack of capable guardianship, enabling abuse to occur and persist. Conversely, posts describing earlier bystander intervention suggest that timely action may mitigate harms such as sextortion (Thread 7—*Close people as victims*), with visible intervention and victim support functioning as forms of informal guardianship (Banyard, 2011).

The pronounced gendered pattern observed in this study—where women constitute the majority of victims (85.8%) and men the majority of perpetrators (81.3%)—can be further illuminated through sexual script and affordance theory. Simon and Gagnon (1984) argue that cultural sexual scripts have historically privileged male pleasure while marginalizing female erotic agency, often positioning women as sexually available rather than desiring subjects. Building on this, Wiederman (2005) shows that dominant male sexual scripts emphasize sexual exploration and pleasure-oriented activity, whereas female sexual scripts stress relational meaning, restraint, and sexual gatekeeping. NDP can thus be understood as a technologically mediated extension of these gendered scripts. From an affordance perspective (Gibson, 1979), features of deepfake technologies and networked platforms—such as manipulation, personalization, anonymity, scalability, and replicability (Boyd, 2010; Celik et al., 2024; Liu & Mazibrada, 2020)—lower social and moral constraints and facilitate sexual access and control without consent, reproducing patterns of male entitlement and gendered power alongside the situational dynamics captured by RAT.

Importantly, this study contributes new insights to the literature by revealing the emotional, psychological, relational, and interpersonal harms not only affecting victims, but also perpetrators and bystanders—whereas current research tends to focus on victims. Harms were especially severe when NDP occurred within intimate relationships or close social networks, where violations of trust and emotional safety were particularly damaging.

Finally, our Reddit comment analysis reveals a complex landscape of community support, moral appraisal, and normalization surrounding NDP. Victims and bystanders generally received informational and nurturant support, while remorseful perpetrators were met with sympathy and advice. In contrast, those expressing excitement about NDP often sparked curiosity about the technology, reflecting a normalization of NDP creation for personal gratification. This duality suggests that while ethical and legal awareness around NDP is growing, a parallel minimization of harm persists.

Limitations

The current study has several limitations. First, the analysis is limited to publicly available, English-language Reddit threads, which restricts the cultural and geographic diversity of the findings. Second, a limitation of our sampling is that posts were identified manually using Reddit's search function and predefined search terms and filters. Together with Reddit's ranking and visibility mechanisms, this approach may have introduced selection bias by overrepresenting highly visible, popular, or explicitly articulated experiences while excluding deleted, removed, low-visibility, or less searchable perspectives. The purposeful selection of highly engaged, information-rich threads may also have biased findings toward more extreme or socially salient discussions, limiting generalizability to broader Reddit discourse on NDP. In addition, we did not systematically screen for trolling, role-play, automated, or fabricated posts, which may have inflated extreme accounts and biased both prevalence estimates and thematic interpretations. Third, self-reported experiences on Reddit may not fully reflect actual behaviors or events. Posts may be influenced by perceptual biases, memory distortions, interpretive framing, writing abilities, or strategic self-presentation. Fourth, although ChatGPT was used to paraphrase selected quotes for reporting purposes, this process may introduce a risk of subtle semantic distortion; however, all paraphrases were manually reviewed and edited by the authors to preserve the original meaning and contextual intent of the Reddit posts. Fifth, this study could not examine LGBTIQ+ dynamics due to the lack of explicit information on gender identity or sexual orientation, despite evidence of elevated IBSA risk (Henry & Beard, 2024; Umbach et al., 2025). Sixth, although research highlights the prevalence of child sexual exploitation material (CSEM), including deepfake CSEM (NCMEC, 2024), this form of abuse was largely absent from the dataset. Furthermore, although age is a known factor shaping both IBSA and NDP involvement, age-related dynamics could not be systematically examined in this study due to the inconsistent availability of age information across posts. Seventh, the study captures only temporal, self-reported experiences as expressed in single Reddit posts, without the ability to track users' longitudinal behaviors, evolving emotions, or the longer-term effects of NDP. This limits insights into how individuals' coping strategies, relational dynamics, or psychological states might develop over time following the incident.

Conclusion

The analysis of Reddit threads on NDP, through the lens of RAT, highlights the convergence of three key elements: perpetrators' motives and technical capabilities, victims' vulnerability factors, and bystanders' lack of capable guardianship. Together, these factors create the conditions that enable NDP abuse. The study also reveals gendered patterns: victims and bystanders were predominantly women, while perpetrators were primarily men, often targeting individuals within their close social networks. An important insight is the connection between self-described compulsory pornography consumption and NDP, highlighting the need for further research on the relationship between problematic pornography use, social factors, mental health, and the motivation to produce NDP (De Luca et al., 2025; Vieira & Griffiths, 2024).

Experiences across cases varied—from perpetrators' excitement or remorse to victims' and bystanders' emotional distress—but a consistent theme was the profound emotional, psychological, relational, and interpersonal harm experienced by all parties involved. Online communities played a dual role: while they offered informal spaces for support and moral reflection, they also sometimes fostered technological fascination and minimization of harm, which could overshadow ethical considerations.

These findings underscore the need for targeted, stakeholder-specific interventions. Online platforms should strengthen reporting and takedown mechanisms for non-consensual deepfake content. Mental health professionals and support providers should offer trauma-informed psychological support and referral pathways for perpetrators, victims, and bystanders of NDP, particularly in cases involving intimate partners. Educators can integrate digital ethics, consent, image-based abuse awareness, and bystander intervention into media literacy and sexuality education. Policymakers should clarify legal guidance addressing non-consensual deepfake pornography and related harms to support access to remedies and protection.

Overall, this study situates NDP within the broader framework of IBSA, highlighting the involvement of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders and the multifaceted harms involved. Future research should explore the underlying drivers of NDP, such as mental health issues, and investigate its long-term impacts, especially among marginalized populations who may face heightened vulnerabilities.

Declarations

Conflict of interest T.D.L. and N.D. have no conflict of interest to declare.

Ethical Approval This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Technische Universität Ilmenau (Germany) on 11 July 2024.

Informed Consent This study does not involve human participants, only Reddit threads. To protect the privacy of Redditors, we do not disclose usernames or include verbatim quotes from Reddit threads. Details about our approach are provided in the "Research Ethics" section.

Declaration of LLMs in Scientific Writing T.D.L. drafted the initial manuscript in consultation with N.D., with all ideas originating from the authors and informed by prior research on non-consensual deepfake pornography and Reddit. In addition to English language corrections (prompt: "proofread") and readability improvements ("improve readability"), ChatGPT-4 was used to rephrase Reddit quotes for privacy protection ("rephrase"). The manuscript was subsequently reviewed and revised by N.D. The final version was approved by both authors, with no further use of ChatGPT-4.

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