



IJMRRS

**International Journal for Multidisciplinary
Research, Review and Studies**

ISSN: 3049-124X (Online)

VOLUME 2 - ISSUE 1

2024

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**THE VOYEUR WITHIN THE WIRE:
A PSYCHO-PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY OF CYBER
VOYEURISM**

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Abstract

Along with the ubiquitous reach of the internet, cybercrime has also increased rapidly. Within it, cybercrimes against women present a particularly grave problem for society and lawmakers. A particular cybercrime against women that has been rising in recent times is cyber voyeurism.

Cyber voyeurism is voyeurism done using cyber-related technology, and can include circulation and distribution of voyeuristically recorded videos. This paper will look into the psychological and social aspects of cyber voyeurism at the levels of both the voyeur and the victim. At the level of the voyeur, we will explore the psychological background that engenders the perpetration of cyber voyeurism. This exploration will include discussion about the enhancement of the voyeur's sense of his self (supermorphia) made possible by cyberspace. At the level of the victim, we will discuss the psychological and social impact. The victims of cyber voyeurism undergo great mental trauma and all this has a negative impact on their personal, professional and social life.

Given the devastating impact on the victims, the need for empathetic counselling and psychotherapy cannot be overstated. We also argue that the society needs to be more supportive towards victims of voyeurism. Apart from that, we also emphasize the need for psychological therapy for the voyeur, along with criminal punishment, to remedy any underlying psychological pathology. Only by taking measures on all fronts – victim, voyeur and society – can the bane of cyber voyeurism, in particular, and cybercrimes against women, in general, be defeated.

Key words: Voyeurism, Cybercrime, Supermorphia, Privacy.

Introduction

Legal and social recognition of sexual offences against women has historically been gradual. For instance, when the Indian Penal Code (IPC) was enacted in 1860, only sexual assault with the intent to outrage the modesty of a woman (Section 354) and rape (Section 375) were recognized as crimes. It was only over a long period of time, and usually following social pressure, that other crimes like sexual harassment, disrobing, stalking etc. were criminalised. In many cases, even where an offence has been included in the law books, society has been slow to recognize it as an offence, as in the case of stalking. The delayed recognition of such crimes implies that there is lesser understanding about them. One such offence that has only recently been recognized as a crime, and is still very less understood is voyeurism.

Voyeurism is the act of secretly looking at anyone who is undressing or dressing, grooming (bathing), having sexual intercourse or in any other state or act that involves partial or full nudity, in order to get sexual gratification from such looking. As a sexual behaviour, whether benign or deviant, it is among the least understood and studied¹. Historically, voyeurism was not given the same status as a crime against women as other supposedly “graver” crimes like sexual assault and rape. However, the situation of neglect is slowly changing. For instance, the incidents of “upskirting”² or “downblousing”³ are causing increasing uproar among the public; and many countries have either enacted or are considering bringing laws to criminalise voyeurism, especially electronic or cyber voyeurism (voyeurism done by means of technological devices and the internet). In line with this trend, in India, electronic voyeurism was included as a crime in the Information Technology Act (Section 66E) in 2008, and voyeurism was added as a crime in the Indian Penal Code (Section 354C) through the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013.

These developments are very promising and long overdue. This is because voyeurism indicates serious psychological abnormality of the voyeur and leads to debilitating psychological and social impact on the victim. Understanding the psychological and sociological issues involved in voyeurism is, therefore, of prime importance in understanding the seriousness of the problem. In this paper, we will try to do precisely this, for a specific type of voyeurism – cyber voyeurism. We have focussed on cyber voyeurism because,

¹ Duff, *Voyeurism*, p. 1.

² The practice of clicking photographs or taking videos under a woman’s skirt without her knowledge.

³ The practice of clicking photographs or taking videos down the top of a woman’s dress or blouse in order to record an image of their breasts or cleavage.

increasingly, acts of voyeurism are done by perpetrators not in person, but by using hidden cameras and the internet; also, as we will show later in the paper, the psychological ramifications of cyberspace (the internet) compound the psychological repercussions of voyeurism to give rise to a different and more dangerous monster. Section I will contain a discussion of the meaning and psychological explanations of voyeurism. Section II will explore the psychological underpinnings of cyber voyeurism in particular. This will be done in two stages. In the first stage, we will look at the psychological impact of cyberspace on an individual's sense of self; in the second stage, this impact on the self will be shown to have a sinister consequence for the practice of cyber voyeurism. Moving on from the voyeur, Section III will deal with the psychological impact of voyeurism on the victim. It will be shown how the social nature of the cyberspace amplifies this psychological impact in the case of cyber voyeurism. Finally, the paper will conclude by laying out the necessary psychological and social interventions that target the victim, the voyeur and the society.

I

As mentioned above, cyber voyeurism is voyeurism done through technological devices (like cameras) that are wired to the internet. It can also involve storing and circulating the voyeuristic images or video clips using the internet. Since cyber voyeurism is an extension or even amplification of (physical) voyeurism, it is only natural that in order to understand cyber voyeurism, we must first understand voyeurism in its psychological aspects.

Definitions

In psychiatric terms, voyeurism is a paraphilia – a sexual behaviour that is different from typically observed sexual behaviour patterns. The DSM-V (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition), 2013 of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) defines voyeurism as: “[Over a period of at least 6 months] recurrent and intense sexual arousal from observing an unsuspecting person who is naked, in the process of disrobing, or engaging in sexual activity”. The definition adds the further condition that the individual should have acted on these sexual urges with a nonconsenting person; or the sexual urges or fantasies should have caused clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. The DSM definition is a medical definition intended to aid the diagnosis of a mental disorder. A different type of definition is

that of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which defines voyeurism as a *crime* in Section 354C thus: “any man...watch[ing], or captur[ing] the image of a woman engaging in a private act in circumstances where she would usually have the expectation of not being observed either by the perpetrator or by any other person at the behest of the perpetrator, or disseminat[ing] such image...”. The section explains “private act” as “an act of watching carried out in a place which...would reasonably be expected to provide privacy and where the victim’s genitals, posterior or breasts are exposed or covered only in underwear; or the victim is using a lavatory; or the victim is doing a sexual act that is not of a kind ordinarily done in public”. The section adds that even where the images have been taken with the consent of the person, disseminating them without their consent would also count as voyeurism.

While the definition in the IPC is more explicit in the context and content of the looking, it is silent on the intent (motive) of the looking, which is highlighted by the DSM-V definition, in that voyeurism is done for, and involves, “sexual arousal”. Moreover, the DSM definition is gender-neutral – the voyeur can be a man or a woman – while, according to the IPC definition, only a man can be a voyeur. We acknowledge that the DSM definition is more accurate in this regard, since both men and women can both be either voyeurs or victims of voyeurism. However, for the purposes of our discussion in this paper, we have mostly assumed that men are voyeurs and women are victims. This is for two reasons. Firstly, several researches have shown that more men than women are voyeurs. For instance, Langstrom and Seto (2006) report that out of their sample of 2,450 adults, 11.5% of the men were identified as voyeuristic compared to 3.9% of the women⁴. The comparative statistics in the study of Hopkins, Green, Carnes, and Campling (2016) on 3951 men and 541 women points to 15.4% of the men, as against 4.8% of the women, being voyeurs⁵. Secondly, given that most societies across the world are patriarchal and place a value on women’s “purity”, the woman victim undergoes more psychological and social trauma than her male counterpart. Therefore, the woman victim’s psychological turmoil and well-being demand urgent acknowledgement, which our paper tries to highlight.

In summary, from the two definitions above, the following essential elements of a voyeuristic act can be gleaned: (a) It involves observation of someone in a private state or act; (b) It involves *secret* observation; and (c) It is done for *sexual gratification*. Another important point to note about voyeurism is that it is not merely the object of the looking (the woman or

⁴ Langstrom and Seto, “Exhibitionistic and Voyeuristic Behavior in a Swedish National Population Survey”

⁵ Duff, *Voyeurism*, p. 9.

man looked at) that gives the sexual gratification; but also, in fact primarily, the process and surreptitious way of looking itself.

Psychological Explanations of Voyeurism

While there is no single unified psychological theory that explains voyeurism, there are several possible explanations for the deviant behaviour. Simon Duff, in his book *Voyeurism: A Case Study*⁶, lists four classes of explanations.

(i) Psychoanalytic Explanations: One such explanation is an extrapolation of Freud's original idea that one of the impulses of child sexuality is the impulse to look. Normally, as the child grows into an adult, the various impulses get integrated into normal adult sexuality. However, it can so happen that the impulse to look sticks out to dominate the other impulses, in which case voyeurism results. Another explanation, due to Friedman (1959)⁷, is that voyeurism is the result of the individual seeking to allay castration anxiety. This applies to women voyeurs as well, in that women experience castration anxiety when they realize that they do not have penises, and so look for them in the world.

(ii) Imprinting Explanations⁸: These explanations assume that there is an "instinctive sexuality" in every species, including humans. Instinctive sexuality refers to sexual desire for a member of the opposite sex, which involves the desire for normal intercourse. This instinctive sexuality is, of course, also conditioned by environmental factors like cultural norms, influences of caregivers and peers, exposure to media, etc. The effect of environmental factors is called "imprinting". Extrapolating suggestions made in other contexts, Duff suggests that voyeurism could be the result of the imprint of a child looking at an older relative in a naked or semi-naked state or a sexual act, while at the same time touching its genitals so as to make the association between the looking and the sexual pleasure⁹.

(iii) Learning Explanations: These explanations explain voyeurism as something learnt due to classical or instrumental conditioning. One possible explanation could be that if a man watches a woman secretly and experiences a spontaneous erection, the association between the visual stimulus and the sexual arousal is established. However, for the learning to take

⁶ Duff, Simon. *Voyeurism: A Case Study*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

⁷ Duff, *Voyeurism*, p. 32.

⁸ Duff calls this "instinctual explanations", p. 33.

⁹ Duff, *Voyeurism*, p. 35.

root and voyeurism to become part of the man's sexual repertoire, the man should then select the visual stimulus from his memory and use it for masturbation, thus reinforcing the association. An alternative explanation is that voyeurism could be acquired through social learning. Group influence combined with positive reinforcements like praise or a sense of achievement in having done an "adventurous" task could reinforce voyeuristic behaviour. As Duff writes, "for social learning to take place, there need not be immediate rewards, but there can certainly be rewards such as feelings of power, dominance, accomplishment, along with sexual rewards that can occur at a later time"¹⁰. As would be clear, learning explanations have much in common with imprinting explanations in that they take voyeurism to be a behaviour which is acquired due to the impact of environmental and individual factors.

(iv) Neuropsychological Explanations: These explanations take voyeurism to be the result of the loss of certain brain processes that inhibit sexual behaviour; the uninhibited sexual motivations now finding outlet in voyeurism. The loss of the inhibiting neurological process could be due to brain trauma. This explanation implies that voyeurism is something innate, but repressed in normal individuals, rather than acquired as the previous explanations hypothesised. This explanation assumes that the repression happens as a child grows up, and also that voyeuristic acts are common in children and reduce as they grow up. However, evidence of late-onset voyeurism in non-brain damaged individuals poses a challenge to these explanations.

Other Explanations: Apart from the above, which link voyeurism to some underlying pathology, there are some non-pathological explanations. One is that voyeurism could be the result of social anxiety and poor social skills of the voyeur, which makes it difficult for him to approach a woman in the normal way. Another is that some voyeurs could consider voyeurism to be a relatively risk-free and quick way of getting sexual satisfaction. The normal pathway of meeting a woman, talking and getting to know her, and then getting physically intimate could just seem to some to be time-taking and fraught with personal and social risks.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 40.

II

The previous section discussed the possible psychological explanations of voyeurism in general. This section and the next will deal directly with cyber voyeurism. We believe that cyber voyeurism is more sinister and noxious than physical voyeurism. What justifies our belief is the enmeshing of the psychological and social ramifications of cyberspace (internet) with the impact of voyeurism. In this section, we will look at how the cyberspace affects the voyeur's sense of experience and agency, and how that directly contributes to increased incidents of cyber voyeurism. We will do this in two stages: Firstly, we will explore how cyberspace affects an individual's sense of the self; that is, we will consider the nature of the virtual or cyber self and how it is different from the physical self. Secondly, we will look at how the nature of the virtual self directly contributes to the toxic character and impact of cyber voyeurism.

The Cyber Self – Disembodied or Embodied?

In the early days – the early 1990s – of the internet, it was almost entirely text-based and, thus, provided the scope for visual anonymity. As a result, it was seen as a realm where people could free themselves from the limitations of their physicality and interact as “disembodied selves”, without reference to their physicality. Thus, the cyberspace was pictured as the realm where Cartesian selves or pure minds could meet. Sherry Turkle¹¹ was among the first to envision and theorize about disembodiment in the cyberspace. She believed that cyberspace gave the opportunity to experiment with one's self or personality and create alternative versions of the self. The hope for disembodiment was also evinced by feminists like Donna Haraway who hoped that the cyberspace would pave the way for “cyborg feminism”, where by cyborg she meant a “cybernetic organism, a hybrid of a machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction”¹². While being rooted in social reality, Haraway hoped that the cyborg would be free from biological reality, especially bodily identity. Thus, the cyberspace could help women escape gender roles and limitations¹³. However, it was soon observed that although disembodied, the cyberspace was not disgendered. Several studies found that people gave out gendered linguistic cues in their communication with each other. For instance, Thomson and Murachver (2001) found that women make more emotional references and give more personal information compared to

¹¹ Turkle, *Life on the screen: Identity in the age of the Internet*.

¹² Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, p. 149.

¹³ Whitty and Young, *Cyberpsychology*, p. 32.

men; and that participants usually could identify the gender of the person they were communicating with based on textual interaction alone¹⁴. So, more accurately, the cyber self of the early 1990s was the disembodied-but-gendered cyber self. However, the same cannot be said of the cyber self of today. With bodily information being copiously uploaded, and even necessary, on social networking sites, the cyberspace has become thoroughly embodied. So the cyber self is essentially an embodied self.

Young and Whitty write that what makes the cyber-self different from the physical self is its characteristic of progressive embodiment or supermorphia¹⁵. Supermorphia refers to transcending the limits and limitations of the body without escaping the need for embodiment itself. The cyber self, consequently, is an enhanced self or a supermorphic self. The enhancement here is in terms of enhanced bodily characteristics, abilities or experiences. To fully understand the supermorphic cyber self, therefore, we have to analyse, firstly, the nature of embodiment (in physical and cyber space), and, secondly, the nature of the supermorphia or enhancement that the cyberspace allows for.

Embodiment

Young and Whitty use Shaun Gallagher's analysis of the embodied self¹⁶, which identifies two dimensions to the body: (a) Body image; and (b) Body schema. *Body image* refers to the "system of perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs pertaining to one's own body"¹⁷. Thus, it is the conscious dimension of the body. On the other hand, *body schema* refers to the sub-conscious dimension of the body and includes the "system of sensory-motor capacities that functions without awareness or the necessity for perceptual monitoring"¹⁸. In other words, body schema includes those operations of the body that, for example, maintain the normal posture of a person or determine the peculiar way in which a person's facial muscles move when smiling, etc. The result of the operations of the body schema is to give a sense of normalcy to our actions and experiences; this explains why any consciously forced way of walking or smiling in different ways often seems out-of-the-normal. Young and Whitty analyse the body image into two further aspects: (a) Body-as-object; and (b) Body-as-subject or the phenomenal self. Body-as-object refers to our perception of our bodies as having certain

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁵ Young and Whitty, "Progressive embodiment within cyberspace: Considering the psychological impact of the supermorphic persona", p. 540.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 542.

¹⁷ Gallagher, *How The Body Shapes The Mind*, p. 24.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

characteristics like height, skin colour, weight, etc. This aspect is most apparently seen in social networking sites and dating sites. However, in the context of our discussion about the cyber voyeur, it is the body-as-subject or the phenomenal self that is relevant. The phenomenal self refers to the embodied self as the subject of experience and the agent of actions. The phenomenal self's experiences and actions depend on the body schema; in fact, the phenomenal self might be said to incorporate the body schema for its normal functioning.

Supermorphia in the Cyberspace

Cyberspace-induced supermorphia is relevant to both the body-as-object and the phenomenal self. In the context of the phenomenal self, supermorphia is usually achieved in immersive virtual environments. The individual has the sense of having enhanced physical capacities, as in virtual karate, or having enhanced experiences due to the virtual environment being more vivid than the actual physical environment. This supermorphia has both positive and negative effects, according to whether it is authentic or inauthentic. Young and Whitty say that as long as the supermorphia is limited to attaining that extra extent of bodily enhancement which the individual has the potential to realize, but has not yet realized, in the physical world, it is *authentic or ideal supermorphia*. However, the supermorphia that is totally disconnected with an individual's actual or potential selfhood is *inauthentic or idealised supermorphia*¹⁹.

Cyber Voyeur as the Inauthentic Supermorphic Self

What characterizes the cyber voyeur's cyber self is that the supermorphia enabled by the cyberspace is mostly inauthentic. It should be clear that the nature of the cyber voyeur's supermorphia has to do with the enhanced nature of the voyeurism enabled by digital technological devices and the internet. While the physical voyeur can be at only one place at a time and is limited by his physical position with regard to the view that he has, the cyber voyeur does not face such limitations. Cyber voyeurism is usually done using digitally-connected hidden cameras that can live-stream the footages of a woman in her private states and can also store them for later use. This can allow the cyber voyeur to engage in simultaneous multi-place voyeurism, since he only has to install cameras at different places. Also, by planting the cameras in strategic angles, he can get a view from different angles and perspectives. Thus, his experience is significantly enhanced; in other words, he gets a supermorphic phenomenal self. However, we argue that this supermorphic self of the cyber

¹⁹Young and Whitty, "Progressive embodiment within cyberspace: Considering the psychological impact of the supermorphic persona", p. 539.

voyeur is inauthentic. This is because his experience of looking via the cyberspace is completely disconnected with and unrealizable in the actual physical world, due to the limitations mentioned above. A more important reason for the inauthenticity is that, while in the physical phenomenal self, the body schema is formed by the operations of the body itself, in the supermorphic cyber phenomenal self, the body schema is the entire virtual environment or cyberspace itself. This appropriation of the cyberspace as the body schema gives the experience of looking a more immersive character; but, at the same time, it makes it completely different, and consequently inauthentic, compared to actual experience. Due to the inauthentic experience being very immersive, there is a high probability that the cyber voyeur will become addicted to cyber voyeurism, which will further reinforce the immersion and inauthenticity, setting off a vicious spiral of cyber voyeurism. Another reason for the cyber voyeur to prefer voyeurism in the cyberspace as compared to physical voyeurism is the relatively lower risk of getting caught red-handed in the former case. This not only increases the incidents of cyber voyeurism, which is a legal and ethical travesty for the society and a psychological trauma for the victim, but also has unsavoury psychological impacts on the voyeur himself, who would prefer his supermorphic cyber self to his actual physical self without the hope for any parity between the two. In the end, nobody gains from cyber voyeurism.

III

Section I dealt with why voyeurs do what they do. Section II discussed the psychological background of cyber voyeurism, and why cyber voyeurs are so dangerous to society as well as the victims. This section (III) will look at the psychological impact on the victim, of voyeurism in general and cyber voyeurism in particular. It will also look at the possible physical dangers to the victim.

To understand the psychological impact on the victim, we must be clear as to what about voyeurism makes it so deviant. It cannot be the mere fact of sexualized looking. This is because, sexualized looking has been found to be a normal part of our normal sexual behaviour. Most romantic relations often begin with an exchange of looks that is infused with at least some amount of sexual longing. This is corroborated by evolutionary psychologists,

who are of the opinion that sexual looking is essential for mate selection²⁰. Rather, the problem is with the secretive way of looking, and that too because of two reasons: (a) It is seen to violate the privacy and agency of the victim; and (b) It objectifies the victim by taking away her agency. Another reason why voyeurism (physical or cyber) is a problem is because of the non-consenting circulation of the recorded clips or images on the internet; but this is because, again, it represents a violation of the victim's privacy and agency.

Violation of Privacy and Agency

The concepts of privacy and agency are interconnected. This can be seen in the definition by Altman (1975) of privacy as “the selective control of access to the self”²¹. Privacy further has three dimensions according to DeCew (1997)²²: *informational*, *accessibility*, and *expressive privacy*. Information privacy refers to the control that a person has over their personal information such as financial records, medical records, etc; accessibility or physical privacy refers to the control that a person has over others' physical access to them; and, expressive privacy refers to the extent to which a person can express their identity, through words or actions, without hindrance. Clearly, in voyeurism, the victim's accessibility privacy is violated. Along with that, however, her expressive privacy is also attacked, because the unauthorised looking by the voyeur can be considered as a hindrance to her expression of sexuality.

Privacy is a psychologically treasured requirement for, and an essential component of, a dignified life. Accordingly, the Supreme Court of India, in the Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd) vs Union of India case in 2017, ruled that the right to privacy is an “intrinsic part of Article 21” that protects the right to a dignified life and liberty. As part of its reasoning for its decision, the Supreme Court said that privacy assures dignity to the individual, and it is only when life can be enjoyed with dignity that liberty can be of true substance. It is because privacy is so intimately connected with human dignity, that its violation has such a debilitating impact on the individual. The results of privacy violation due to voyeurism can be constant paranoia about being watched in public; lack of trust in any stranger; a state of total reclusiveness - not venturing out into the public sphere; anxiety, depression or even suicidal tendencies. There can be a sense of fear even when one is within the confines of one's home. Thus, it can severely cripple the victim's psychological health as well as social

²⁰ Duff, *Voyeurism*, p. 5.

²¹ Schofield Paine and Adam N. Joinson., “Privacy, Trust, and Disclosure Online”, p. 14.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

life. Another impact could be that the victim could start to view herself entirely as an object, as a result of the objectification by the voyeur.

Objectification of the Body

The dual phenomena of the objectification of the victim's body by the voyeur and victim's perception of herself as only body-as-object are complexly related and can be explained by borrowing Jean-Paul Sartre's analysis of the body. Sartre, in his *Being and Nothingness*, writes that there are three modes of the body's existence²³. First is the mode of body-*for-itself*. This is similar to the phenomenal self or body-as-subject discussed in Section II. In this mode, the body experiences and acts upon the world. The second mode is body-*for-the-other*. Here, our bodies exist as objects of other people's knowledge and experience. At the same time that we realize that our bodies are made into objects by others, we also realize the existence of others as subjects in their own right. The third mode is that of the body existing for myself but as known by the other. Here, we start objectifying our own bodies as other subjects would objectify it. The perspective taken is mixed – one's own as well as others' perspective. It is in the second mode that the victim's body exists for the voyeur who objectifies her, and in the third mode that it exists for herself after the incident of voyeurism has taken place. Sartre further says that the second and third modes of the body are made possible by the "look" of the other. However, this look is not the voyeuristic look, because the subject (looker) and the object (looked) are face-to-face and aware of each other. The second mode involves the recognition of a subject at the same time when our bodies are made by them into objects, and the third mode is a construction based on this recognition. Thus, even in the process of objectification there is a kind of mutual equality. This is not so in the case of voyeurism. Here, the realization by the victim that she has been made into an object does not happen till long after the incident of looking. This deferred realization of objectification along with the sense of violation of privacy doubles the sense of objecthood that the victim feels. The ultimate result can be that the victim entirely perceives herself as an object with impaired agency and impaired privacy.

The Cyberspace as a Social Space

The above psychological repercussions of voyeurism are magnified in the case of cyber voyeurism. This is because the cyberspace is a social sphere in its own right. Mary Chayko,

²³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*.

for instance, refers to the cyberspace as a “techno-social” and “socio-mental” space²⁴. The sociality of the cyberspace is different from the sociality of physical society in that the former is highly connected. Though in practice, people interact on the cyberspace in small groups, theoretically the entire internet can be one large society - that is an estimated 3 billion-people-strong society. Apart from its size, another unique aspect of cyber society is the speed with which information can be communicated and the reach of the network. These three aspects – size, speed and reach – make the impact of cyber voyeurism extremely disturbing. While the cyber voyeur can take advantage of these features and circulate the recorded images and footages fast and far; for the victim, the realization that one’s footage can potentially reach anyone in the world can be psychologically paralyzing. Also, since cyber society and physical society are closely interconnected, the victim always lives under the fear of the possibility that the footages can reach relatives or acquaintances, exposing her to the possibility of social shame and ostracism.

Voyeurism and Other Risks

The discussion till now has been focussed on the psychological impact on the victim. While that is serious enough, the externalities of voyeurism can be even graver. There is always the risk of voyeurism escalating to physical harm to the victims or sexual assault, including rape. Recognizing this possibility, there is a hypothesis called Courtship Disorder Hypothesis about escalation of sexual crimes²⁵. The idea is that the pattern of progression in a courtship (locating a potential partner → interaction → physical contact → sexual intercourse) is mirrored by the escalation of sexual crimes: Voyeurism → Exhibitionism (flashing one’s genitals) → Frotteurism (rubbing one’s genitals against another person) → Rape²⁶. However, not all cases of voyeurism escalate, making escalation only a possibility. Also, in cases where there is an escalation, there is no consensus among psychologists as to whether there is a causal relation or only a mere association. Nevertheless, the likelihood of escalation indicates that voyeurism can be a physical danger to the victim as well.

²⁴ Chayko, Mary. *Superconnected: The Internet, Digital Media, and Techno-Social Life*.

²⁵ Duff, *Voyeurism*, p. 19.

²⁶ McNally, M. R., and WJ Fremouw. “Examining risk of escalation: A critical review of the exhibitionistic behavior literature”.

Conclusion

In this paper we have tried to highlight the psychological aspects of voyeurism, in general, and cyber voyeurism, in particular. On the side of the voyeur, we firstly laid out the psychological background that engenders voyeurism; and, secondly, described the psychological impact of cyberspace on the enhancement of the virtual self (supermorphia), which compounds the toxic nature of voyeurism. On the side of the victim, we discussed the reasons why voyeurism, especially cyber voyeurism, can be so psychologically debilitating to the victim. Not only are a loss of privacy, agency and subjecthood involved, but also the fear of social shame. We discussed, as well, the possibility of voyeurism escalating into physical sexual harm to the victim.

Clearly, therefore, cyber voyeurism is a pernicious phenomenon that should be nipped at the bud. In India, legal measures for this are already in place. Section 354C of the IPC and Section 66E of the Information Technology Act deal with voyeurism and cyber voyeurism respectively. However, given the psychological baggage of cyber voyeurism, legal measures alone will not suffice. There is an urgent need for the state to provide psychological counselling and psychiatric services for the victims of voyeurism. Also, there is a simultaneous need for spreading awareness in society regarding taking precautionary measures; this includes checking changing rooms and public lavatories for any hidden cameras, checking whether or not the mirrors in changing rooms are two-way²⁷, etc. Apart from this, the society has to become more supportive towards the victims in their psychological recuperation. Often, it is the fear of social shame that makes the victims hesitant to report the crime of voyeurism or in taking psychological support, thus pushing them into anxiety or depression. Therefore, close social groups (family, peer group, etc.) should be educated to encourage victims to report cases of voyeurism, and to stop victim-blaming and shaming. This involves change in social attitudes and will naturally take a long time to come to fruition. Nevertheless, citizen groups, victim support groups and the state have to persistently engage in an awareness campaign to destigmatize sexual victimisation in general.

However, psychological interventions in favour of the victim are only half the story. Since cyber voyeurism could indicate psychological pathology on the part of voyeur, only

²⁷ A reliable way of ascertaining whether the mirror is genuine or two-way is the fingertip test. We have to place our fingertip on the surface of the mirror. If there is a gap between the fingertip and the reflection of the fingertip, it is a genuine mirror; if there is no gap, it is a two-way observation mirror.

imprisonment and fines will not be sufficient to prevent recidivism. Justice will be comprehensively served only when the voyeur attains psychological normalcy. This requires psychological therapy for the voyeur while he serves his sentence. It is, therefore, only by catering to all the three vertices of the cyber voyeurism problem – voyeur, victim and society – that the menace of voyeurism in general and cyber voyeurism in particular can be definitively tackled.

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