

# Why a reality star's conviction sets such a powerful precedent for revenge porn victims everywhere

December 20 2022, by Jade Gilbourne

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Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Reality TV star Stephen Bear has been found [guilty](#) of two counts of disclosing private sexual photographs and films with intent to cause distress, and one of voyeurism after profiting from intimate images of his former girlfriend without her consent. Bear's conviction is a landmark moment in a climate where non-consensual sexual image sharing often goes unpunished.

Bear's victim, Georgia Harrison (also a reality TV star), has fought hard for this conviction. She discovered that footage of her and Bear was being shared with friends via WhatsApp, and was then posted to an account on the adult site Only Fans, where access to the video was being sold for profit. While the sex with Bear was consensual, the recording of it (via CCTV camera on his property) was not.

What followed for Harrison was two years of ["absolute hell"](#), including feeling "ashamed, hurt, violated, even broken at times." She has described the [personal, professional and financial impact](#) of having [sexual content](#) released, including the loss of career opportunities, feeling unsafe in her own home and even the fear of dating again.

While Harrison's fame has perhaps amplified this particular case, her experience [aligns](#) with countless others.

## **A landmark conviction**

The conviction of a reality TV star like Bear is a significant step in the battle to have non-consensual sexual image sharing—often referred to as "revenge porn"—taken seriously as a sexual offense. It serves as a public and formal demonstration to both perpetrators and victims that sharing intimate images is a genuine violation.

The Bear conviction comes at a crucial time when we consider the state of justice for victims of intimate image sharing. Although distributing

sexual images without consent was made illegal in 2015, and [threatening to do so](#) was also recently added to the legislation, a [Channel 4 investigation](#) found that just 4% of reported cases resulted in a charge or summons.

This figure is shockingly low even without considering the number of cases of having sexual imagery shared without consent that go unreported to the police. Victims might be unaware their content has ever been released. As in Harrison's case, footage could be taken without the victim even being aware of it happening.

[Poor police training](#) and [harmful and unhelpful responses from police](#) can also deter victims from reporting their experiences. For some, the idea of [further compromising their anonymity](#) by facing their perpetrator publicly in court is too much to bear.

What's more, incidents of intimate image sharing seem to be on the rise. Reports of "revenge porn" increased during the pandemic lockdowns, with a revenge porn helpline reporting a [40% rise in calls](#) compared to 2019.

## **Trivializing sexual harm**

Scholars argue that the failure to take non-consensual sexual image sharing seriously is a symptom of a culture which [trivializes sexual harm more broadly](#) and disregards the idea of sexual consent. Academics, campaigners and researchers are therefore working to reframe intimate image sharing as a serious sexual violation.

Using language such as ["image-based sexual abuse"](#) instead of ["revenge porn"](#)—a term which emphasizes the salacious nature of the content and undermines the potential for harm—is just one important step towards this. Publicly shaming and condemning men like Bear is another.

Described by the prosecution as a "[self-obsessed show-off](#)" who would do anything for fame, Bear used his [notoriety during the trial](#) to advertise his Only Fans, the very website he originally used to share the video. It is hard to imagine a more suitable poster boy for the kind of person who finds sharing non-consensual content acceptable, and his conviction is a cheering reminder that justice for victims is within reach.

The nature of the internet means that once information is posted, it's out there forever. While Bear's Only Fans account was suspended not long after he uploaded the video, Harrison has said that [she was sent evidence](#) of the video being hosted "on multiple platforms" online shortly after the video was posted.

While Bear might have been convicted, the video is almost certainly still out there—and what's more, people are looking for it. Searches for terms such as "[Bear and Georgia video](#)" have increased since the [guilty verdict](#), demonstrating a continuing voyeuristic appetite for this content.

This redistribution of imagery is common in incidents of sexual image sharing. Victims are harmed not just by people like Bear who disclose this material, but by others who download, share, and spread it afterwards. Websites such as [Reddit](#) and [Pornhub](#) have faced backlash for allowing unauthorized sexual content to be shared on their platform.

It's clear that for Georgia, while her perpetrator has been convicted, nothing can undo the original and continuing harms of having intimate footage shared online. Convicting men like Bear is simply the first step in creating a fair and just climate for victims of intimate image sharing.

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