

'anna': how a kid (me) was raped online

Lohse

2022-12-04

The first thing I thought was; “*I wonder who took the picture?*” I’m still so, so angry with myself for not asking her.

2002. I was 14. The days when dial up internet connections were still common and the Internet was slooowww. Images could take literally minutes to download, arriving block by block from the top left corner to bottom right.

The picture ‘anna’ sent me of herself revealed itself like that. The top of a blonde head and some of a blurry, indistinct background. Her hair got longer as the image loaded. Blue eyes and a slight smile. I could see her whole face now. The next line started to appear. I couldn’t make out what I was looking at. The white fabric of a t-shirt over ‘anna’s’ shoulders, but something skin coloured in front of them too. Ten seconds later, more of the image had downloaded. I realised the skin coloured things were her hands pulling up her top. D’uh. “*I wonder who took the picture? You need your hands to use a webcam.*“

Once fully downloaded I could see a high quality (by 2002 standards) picture of a young woman kneeling wide and low on a bed. She was wearing a short tartan skirt, white knee high stockings, and lifting her t-shirt, exposing her breasts and stomach to the camera. I’m pretty sure she was wearing a multicoloured bracelet on her right wrist. I can’t remember.

I was pretty sure there was no way it was taken with a webcam. And definitely not a webcam from 2002. Still, I knew ‘anna’ well enough. We’d been talking daily on AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) for well over a week at that point. Perhaps she had an ex-boyfriend she’d not told me about yet. Perhaps he’d taken the picture? Perhaps she did modelling and hadn’t told me about it? A week isn’t time enough to learn everything about a person, even a 16 year old, right? Perhaps perhaps perhaps.

A Saviour?

In 2002 ‘anna’ seemed like the first properly good thing that had happened to the 14 year old boy I used to be in what felt like a long, long time.

I’d been at a new school for about a year. I’d not made any friends. The boy who bullied me throughout primary school happened to be at my new school. He was popular and more than happy to pick up where we’d left off a few years ago with a bunch of reinforcements. To their delight, I was fat now. Perhaps the greatest of social sins? Very quickly it became socially toxic, and frankly dangerous for other kids to be around me. I had no friends at my new school.

I hadn't been popular at my previous school, but I'd had a tight friend group. Including some kids I'd known since my very first day of school a decade or so ago. However, shortly after I'd left they had a massive falling out, and by not wanting to pick sides, I tried to pick both. Consequently neither side wanted anything to do with me anymore. I had no friends.

Around this, the business my parents had started a few years back was failing. They were in all sorts of legal and financial trouble. My already abusive mother became drunk and more abusive. My dad was all but absent as he tried to hold things together.

I was scared to go to school. I was scared to come home. I was *almost* totally alone.

Refuges

Our family PC was hidden away in a little cold room at the back of our house. When I wasn't banned from the PC, I liked to go on a particular AOL chatroom that was bundled with the AOL software we used to get online. Consequently I discovered AIM. With AIM, anyone could message anyone. You didn't need to be friends. You just needed someone's username. It wasn't uncommon to get random messages and speak to complete strangers on it, though most conversations never went past "a/s/l?"¹ wot u doin? not much lol".

So when a kind stranger called 'anna', who turned out to be **super** interested in me messaged me out of the blue on AIM, I was primed for grooming. Little did 'anna' know, she couldn't have found an easier victim.

Oh, and one final thing that made this even easier for 'anna'? I had a crush on a girl at school I'd never spoken to called Anna. There's no way 'anna' could have known that. I'd never told anyone. But nevertheless, I secretly hoped it was Anna from school.

Reading back these past few paragraphs I worry I'm trying to make excuses for myself for being groomed. That if I'd been in a happier place, it wouldn't have happened. As if this was the only acceptable situation in which I could have fallen victim. Perhaps I'm trying to protect my past self? *He needed protecting*. But there's no acceptable situation. It wouldn't matter if I'd been the happiest kid in the world. If you're groomed, it wasn't your fault. *It wasn't my fault*. These fuckers set out to trick, manipulate, and abuse kids. It's all on them. Mainly though, I just want you to know how vulnerable I was, because all of the above details are important for what comes later.

¹a/s/l was early Internet lingo for "Age? Sex? Location?"

The Kindness of Strangers

‘anna’ told me she was 16, lived in America, and that she’d been looking for new people to talk to online. They’re the only solid details I remember about her. Again, this was all incredibly normal at the time. Hell, it’s normal today! She asked me about my friends and what I liked to do for fun. Normal questions that normal people ask each other normally. I told her what I’ve told you, and more; that I had no friends and I hated my parents. The city I lived near, and the school I went to. That I spent my free time reading, and playing videogames if the Playstation hadn’t been confiscated.

She told me it was okay I didn’t have any friends, because she was my friend now. If I just gave it some time, people from school would realise how great I was, just like she had. She thought I was fun to talk to. She could tell I was cute from the way I talked.

A few days later she asked me for a picture of myself. This was a big deal for an abused and bullied fat boy. If there’s one thing abusers, bullies, and random strangers on the street will not let you forget, it’s that you’re fat and that that’s not okay. I knew the way I looked was unacceptable.

“omg ur so cute!!!!”

Give or take an exclamation mark, that’s the message she sent once she’d worn me down with kind, reassuring words and I sent her a photo of me awkwardly smiling into a webcam. I still hate how good that made me feel at the time. I was so fucking easy to manipulate. *It wasn’t your fault. It wasn’t. That lonely 14 year old boy, he didn’t deserve this. I didn’t deserve that. Fuck, this is hard to write.*

‘anna’ did have a webcam, but it was broken, and she didn’t have any photos of just her face. But she did have some she thought were sexy. I wasn’t sure what she meant by “sexy”. She wasn’t sure she should send them to me. Could she trust me? I assured her she could.

You already know what’s coming, and it’s evil, right? ‘anna’ twisted things round so it seemed like I was the one trying to win her trust. She made it appear like I had the power. That hers was the trust to win. But she knew I had no one else.

‘anna’ wasn’t convinced. She said if I sent her another photo of me she’d send one of hers. Except in this second picture she wanted me to do something. It’s not what you’re thinking, at least, not yet. She asked me to take a photo of my face with some shaving foam on it. Not as if I was getting ready to shave, just with some random blobs and lines of it across my face. At 14 I hadn’t visibly hit puberty yet, so upstairs I went to the bathroom and took a can my dad sometimes used.

Sex Education Is Good

Now, you have to remember that on shitty 2002 internet connections, porn was much harder to get. And while I'd seen pictures of naked women before, I'd no idea that people took pictures and video of each other having sex for entertainment. In fact, it simply could not have occurred to me, because I didn't really know what sex was. My only knowledge of it came from a biology class a few years earlier.

In my mind sex was for reproduction between a husband and wife. Penis goes in vagina. Out pops some sperm and fertilises an egg. Nine months later a baby is born. That's literally all I knew. I had no idea that sex could feel good. What an orgasm was. That masturbation was even a thing. And I sure as shit had no idea about consent. Having a baby was of no interest to me. So sex wasn't on my radar! This is all to say that, well, I had no idea what a cumshot was.

Perhaps I'm wrong about what 'anna' was having me simulate with shaving foam. Fuck, I've spent many years thinking about it. This is the best explanation I've come up with. Why didn't she tell me (and teach me) to masturbate and get me to cum on myself? Maybe it wouldn't have shown up on a cheap 2000s era webcam? Fuck. I dunno. Does it even matter? Regardless, 'anna' really liked photos of me with random squirts of shaving foam on my face and body.

After I sent her the first shaving foam picture, she sent me the photo of "her" I described at the start of this essay. From then on, I belonged to 'anna'. Someone was being nice to me for the first time in a year, and she'd shown me her boobies! That was something girls only did if you were very special to them. Maybe things were gonna be okay. *He wouldn't have let me, but I wish I could give him a hug.*

The next thing she asked me for was a naked photo of me. She'd shown me hers, so it was only fair I show her mine. As a fat kid filled with self loathing about my fatness, I'd never looked in the mirror at my fat naked body before. I'd certainly never taken a picture of it and sent it to someone online. But I didn't want to lose 'anna'. And she *had* shown me hers. So I sent one. She helped me find the timer on the webcam app so I could stand far enough back from the PC to get most of my body in the frame. *"Maybe she had a really good webcam and that's how she'd taken her picture"*, I wondered.

In accounts of kids being groomed and sexually abused online, often their abuser will directly threaten them with sending the photos of them to their friends and family. They blackmail them with those pictures to get more pictures to get more pictures and so on. 'anna' was never openly hostile to me, our chats remained friendly and she was still being outwardly kind and supportive. She casually reminded me a few times that she knew where I went to school, and even though looking back it definitely was a threat, it never felt like one. Not at the time. We traded more photos over the next few days, until...

“put smth up ur butt! itll be funny”

Pens didn't count, because they wouldn't show up very well on the camera, and she already had some pictures of my butt splattered with shaving foam. It needed to be something bigger. The first thing I tried was a wooden broom handle. It didn't seem splintery, though I was a bit worried about germs. We'd had it for as long as I could remember and it was kinda grimy. I was nervous. But this is what 'anna' asked for, and I knew if I didn't, she might leave me. *This is really upsetting.*

I had no idea about lube, and it was never mentioned. Still, the handle went in alright, but its length and the weight of the still attached brush made it impossible to angle well in a photo. It wasn't visibly penetrating me in any I took. 'anna' really wanted to see it going into me. It didn't count if she couldn't see it. So it wouldn't do. I was running out of shaving foam.

'anna' suggested I try some kind of vegetable. So I waited until everyone was asleep, snuck downstairs and found a cucumber. 'anna' had told me to make a video of it going in and out of me. It was much thicker than the broom handle. It was harder to get in, and it hurt once it did. My hole felt really weird and loose for several days afterwards. I was constantly anxious I'd shit myself. The rough seal of the plastic wrap on the cucumber must have cut or grazed my insides, because they were painful for several days afterwards too. I was scared of infection, but I had no one to tell and no words to explain.

Soon these problems would be all but forgotten.

Buddies (0/4)

Family (0/0)

Offline (4/4)

'anna' hadn't been online for two days. And then three. And then four. And then a week. The whole time I was panicking. Had I done something wrong? Where was she? Had something happened to her? Had this been a trick by Anna from school? Had my bully or one of his cronies been tricking me? Had they somehow figured out I had a crush on Anna from school and pretended to be her while pretending to be a different 'anna'? Eventually I'd convinced myself they'd tricked me. I didn't know there could be other possible explanations.

I don't have to defend the thought process of a panicking 14 year old.

I don't have to defend the thought process of a panicking 14 year old.

I don't have to defend the thought process of a panicking 14 year old.

What were they gonna do with the photos? It was one thing to share funny pictures with someone who cared about me and I thought was my friend, that I'd

never thought anyone else would see. It was another to send them to people who took every opportunity to make my life miserable. I was convinced this was what had happened, and that they were going to show them to everyone at school. What if teachers saw and told my parents? I'd be in so much trouble.

The Very Worst Part

You have to remember that at the time I had no clear idea that what I'd done in those pictures was sexual. I didn't really associate being naked with sex, because I never thought about sex. I sure as shit had no idea butts could be used for sex stuff. I was totally unaware that I'd been sexually abused. My focus was entirely on the fact that people at school would see me naked, they'd see my private parts and me doing weird stuff to my bum. Perhaps worst of all they'd see how disgusting my fat body was. My parents would kill me. In my mind, I was the one who'd done something bad.

I was terrified and I didn't know what to do. I knew I couldn't go to school. But I had few ideas how to make that happen.

At first I tried not getting out of bed in the hope I'd be left at home when my mum drove me and my siblings to school in the morning. This didn't work. My dad threw cold water on me and eventually pulled me out of bed. Crying, I was made to get dressed and forced into the car. My parents already knew I hated everything to do with school, and it was definitely absolutely because I was so fat and lazy. Not because I was bullied and alone. In some fairness they didn't know I was being bullied. But also, I didn't trust them enough to ask for help, so make of that what you will. I guess they assumed I was having some kind of lazy induced tantrum or hadn't done my homework. I hid in the school toilets as much as I could.

After a few days of this, I realised it was futile. I switched tacts. The only times I'd been allowed to miss school before was when I had a stomach bug. So I figured if I could make myself vomit, I'd be able to miss school. I had no idea how to make myself vomit.

Sure, now as an adult in my 30s I'm able to point at any number of household items that might make me sick if I swallowed them. But in my sheltered and terrified mind, I settled on dog food. That was for dogs, and I was a human. I'm not really sure how I ended up there. *You were too scared to think straight. It's okay. I don't have to defend the the thought process of a terrified 14 year old.* But dog food is where I went. It was gross, and it made me retch. But it didn't make me puke. When a few spoonfuls didn't work the first day. I tried more the next. Eventually, to no avail, I ate almost an entire can of dog food before school.

Looking back now, I almost find it funny, because it's so obviously absurd. But then I remember how scared I was. I spent several days sitting in class with the

taste of dog food still in my mouth, terrified that today was gonna be the day that everyone would see me naked with stuff shoved up my bum.

It never came. And I never found a way to skip school. While the intense, all consuming fear I was filled with those first few weeks after 'anna' went offline eventually subsided, it never left my mind for the years I remained at that school. Every time I had a run in with a bully, I was grateful I only came away insulted or beaten up.

I can't save you, but I won't abandon your pain and terror. No one was there to acknowledge it for you at the time. So I will now. It was real. Fuck, I'm crying. I wish I could have been there for you. No one was else was. So I am now. I will grieve for you. I'm sorry I said I was angry with you at the start of this. Writing all this out, seeing everything you went through, I'm not anymore. You didn't do anything wrong. You were scared and alone, and someone evil tricked you.

As the years passed, and I moved school again I thought about 'anna' less and less. Eventually it was only once or twice a year. Maybe less than. I'm not sure when it clicked that what happened to me was sexual abuse.

I've spent the past couple of years researching, learning and writing about sexual violence. I've seen stories from survivors of grooming, and of children and adults who were or were made to penetrate themselves with objects. And whether they see it this way or not, I can't not see them as rapes. How are they not? And my story does not differ significantly from theirs.

In my country, the UK, the law says that it's only a rape when a penis is forced into a vagina. This colours people's idea of what a rape is. For many years it coloured my own understanding of rape and in turn it diminished my understanding of the severity of what was done to me.

The law fuels the false idea that there's only one way to rape people who have vaginas. It fuels the false idea that people with penises can't be raped. So I say this for me as much as I do for you, or for anyone else who's had their understanding of rape limited by patriarchy to hide its evils: What happened to me was rape. Similar things that happened to other people were rape. Do not let cops tell you otherwise.

Some Lasting Effects

It's been five weeks since I wrote the first draft of this essay, and since then I've had the worst episode of mental ill health I've experienced in several years. It's taken so much out of me not to kill myself. I'm so angry and upset that this was done to me. That it's still being done to me. I'm distraught there wasn't anyone there to protect 14 year old me. They won't ever know it, but this essay has damaged my relationship with my parents, something I've worked for years to improve.

I'm still so scared that 'anna' will find me and I'll be made to see those pictures

again. With that in mind, I've changed what was already undoubtedly a pseudonym to 'anna' just to protect myself further. It feels insane to be so scared of someone I knew online for a few weeks twenty years ago. But apparently some of that fear isn't going away any time soon.

It made me incredibly paranoid of my online friends and siblings within Judith's Dagger. For most of a week my paranoid mind convinced me that one of them might be 'anna' and our friendships had all been a years long ruse to further humiliate and hurt me. So I cut off contact for a while. They were scared I'd killed myself. I feel so ashamed and guilty for thinking that they, some of the most committed anti-rape people on the face of the planet, could be responsible for what was done to me. I feel awful for scaring them.

Fuck you for doing this to me... to us, 'anna'. I hope so many terrible things have happened to and continue to happen to you. I hope it so much. I wish I could cut your fucking head off and use your skull as a toilet. I am sad I will not get to witness and rejoice in every moment of suffering life brings your way. I hope you are miserable.

Do you believe me? Is this enough?

These probably seem like strange questions. Frankly if you're reading this site, I assume you do believe me. So why would I spend three thousand words recounting how I was sexually abused as a child, to then cast even the slightest doubt on it? Well, these are questions I've been wondering about a lot lately.

If you keep up with anarchist spaces on Twitter or Mastodon, you're likely aware that recently there's been a lot of um... "debate" around the slogan "Kill Your Local Rapist". If you're sensible and not on Twitter, or aren't aware of what KYLR means, you can read our Thirty-One Theses: A Manifesto to learn some of what it entails. We'll have more writing coming on it in the future, but in short, KYLR endorses supporting a survivor's autonomy and safety in every way possible. Up to and including killing their rapist. That we hold this bleedin' obvious anarchist principle makes some people and some "anarchists" very angry. Can't help but wonder why, hmmm.

Anyway, within the context of that "debate", a member of Judith's Dagger tweeted that the baseline for believing survivors of sexual violence is that you should trust them to name who hurt them. Unsurprisingly, I agree with that.

What I do wonder though is what that baseline looks like for someone like me, who was groomed and raped over the Internet. I don't know who my rapist was, it's pretty obvious it wasn't a 16 year old American girl called Anna, right? I can make

some educated guesses about them based on who usually does this kinda thing; pederastic cis men. But it doesn't meaningfully narrow it down. I cannot point at someone and say it was them. I cannot kill my rapist, because I will never know who raped me.

There Are More of Us Every Day

The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), a UK based charity and hotline that finds and removes child sexual abuse material from the Internet took action against 252,194 webpages in 2021. 72% of them, or 182,281 contained "self-generated imagery". In 2020 this number was 68,000. So that's a 168% increase in just a year. While these numbers don't tell us the number of victims of this kind of abuse, they clearly indicate this is happening to more and more kids every year.

"Self-generated imagery" is the term the IWF use. It covers a range of material, including sexually explicit material of teenage children that has been taken willingly and sent to a partner. Assuming their partner is of a similar age, there's nothing inherently wrong with that. But if the IWF have found it, it means it's been shared outside of that relationship and something very bad has happened. This is only a fraction of what they find though, and so the term distorts the reality of what's happening. In 2021, 147,188 reports included an 11-13 year old girl. This is 81% of self-generated child sexual abuse reports.

So "self-generated imagery" is a term that makes sense as a catchall. I don't like it when applied to me and others like me though. Firstly, it glosses over what's actually going on. Secondly, in my mind it removes the agency of the person demanding the images, and the coercive nature under which they were made. That being said, I'm yet to think of something better. Though I was encouraged to hear a recent interview with their CEO who agreed it's a problematic term, and they're looking to use something else.

For many victims of online sexual abuse (children and adults), the most damaging part isn't the sex acts we're made to perform, but what happens to the images and videos afterwards. The chances are they're shared across the Internet for any piece of shit to get their greasy hands on.

In some ways I was protected from the reality of my situation because I didn't know it was something that could happen. However, I convinced myself my abuser was one of my bullies and the material was in their hands, something that also definitely does happen. Both scenarios are terrifying in their own ways, and I don't think it's possible or helpful to try and declare one better or worse.

Years later when I realised I'd been manipulated by a pederast and that the photos and video I'd been made to take were likely somewhere online, I was well past the most devastating psychological effects. I consoled myself that no one would ever recognise me since I was now an adult, and that cameras were so much higher quality now no one would want my shitty webcam pictures anymore. Perhaps I'm wrong. I don't know. I don't know how pederasts like to collect or keep their child sexual abuse material. I don't know what counts as "good quality" child sexual abuse material. I hate having to wonder about it. I go back and forth on being glad 14 year old me was protected from that, and disgusted for him that they might still be out there. But I digress.

Patriarchy Will Never Be Sated

People have been raped in person for millenia. The majority of victims have been, and still are, women and girls. This is absolutely reflected in the statistics for detected "self-generated imagery". But society at large is still not even close to the point of believing anyone when they say they were raped, or trusting them when they name their rapists. Let alone allowing them to do something about their rapists. It must be left to The Authority to decide.

If "*I was raped by X at location Y on date Z*" isn't currently enough to make other people believe you were raped, let alone to believe you when you tell them who X is. What chance do I and others like me have when all we can say is "*I was raped by 'anna' on AIM*".

Sure, nowadays it's a bit easier for law enforcement to get chat logs and bits of data from social media companies. But every rapist is a cop without a badge and every cop is a rapist with a badge. Cops have no interest in preventing or investigating sexual violence. They frequently use their power to rape. Why should we trust them to handle it? We cannot and should not. Cops are our enemies. And they are our very worst enemies when it comes to dealing with sexual violence.

Even if you did go to the cops and they got some chat logs, it does little to solve anonymity. Most social media allows you to be anonymous. The services that aren't, you can lie when you make an account! I have anonymous Facebook and LinkedIn accounts for research purposes. They're really easy to get! They tell you not to lie, but um... okay, I promise I won't!

That being said, removal of online anonymity won't solve this. Even if it would, governments and tech companies having yet more control over what we're able to do online is not the Internet I want. We should not have to sacrifice anonymity to keep kids safe. Anonymity is not what causes children to be sexually abused. It is patriarchy. It is cis male entitlement to bodies they deem lesser.

There's much more to say about this. But for now I will end with stating that

writing about this experience only cements my desire for anarchy. For feminism. For youth liberation. For school abolition. And yes, the fear that fills the hearts of rapists when we start talking about killing them.

Anarchist Archive

anarchist-archive.org · anarchist-archive@riseup.net