

Comments provided by Dominic Crossley, Dispute Resolution Partner and privacy and media law specialist at Payne Hicks Beach first published in The Times and The Times online on 2 September 2014.



Dominic Crossley
Partner, Privacy & Media Law Team,
Dispute Resolution

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Stars' naked pictures hacked for cash

Jennifer Lawrence is among the actresses whose private accounts have been targeted, James Dean reports

Intimate photographs and explicit videos were hacked from the private online accounts of British and American actresses before being hawked on the internet for £70 each.

Private photographs of a number of actresses including Jennifer Lawrence, the Oscar-winning star of the *Hunger Games* films, and Mary Winstead, who appeared in the horror film *Final Destination 3*, were posted on 4chan, a photo-sharing website. Images and video of Jessica Brown Findlay, the actress who played Lady Sybil in *Downton Abbey*, were also leaked.

The photographs are believed to have been obtained by hackers who used a variety of techniques to remotely access photographs and videos taken on smartphones. Some showed actresses posing topless and without make-up while others appeared to be "selfies" taken in bathrooms or bedrooms.

One 4chan user who initially claimed to be the source of the images posted a



list containing the names of 101 actresses who have allegedly fallen victim to the hackers. Lawrence and Winstead confirmed that the leaked photographs were authentic and condemned the invasion of their privacy.

Winstead tweeted: "To those of you looking at photos I took with my husband years ago in the privacy of our home, hope you feel great about yourselves. Knowing those photos were deleted long ago, I can only imagine the creepy effort that went into this."

Lawrence wrote on Twitter: "It's so weird and hard how people take your privacy away from you." A spokesman for the actress said later that the authorities had been contacted "and will prosecute anyone who posts the stolen photos of Jennifer Lawrence".

Discussions about the images surfaced on a website called AnonIB last Wednesday. One anonymous user also requested explicit photographs and video of Ariel Winter, a 16-year-old American actress who stars in the *Modern Family* television series. "You know that slut has them," the website user said. Another replied: "She's a f***ing child. You really need some help."

An anonymous user of NNTP-Chan, a forum on the "dark web" that is accessible via a special web browser and is notorious for selling drugs and weapons, claimed to be one of the hackers behind the image theft. The user said: "You guys will get what you want, worry not. A lot of work was put into this whole operation."

Some anonymous web users asked for payments in bitcoins, the digital currency, to give others access to the photos. Access to the stolen images was advertised for as little as a quarter of a bitcoin, or £72.

The 4chan user who posted the list of 101 actresses was unmasked by members of the Reddit social network yesterday as Bryan Hamade, 27, a computer programmer from Lawrenceville, Georgia. Mr Hamade told BuzzFeed, the online news site: "I am not behind this. I am just an idiot who tried to pull one over on 4chan and lost big time. I saw a lot of people posting the actual

leaks and bitcoin addresses and . . . I thought, 'oh cool I'll get free bitcoins.'"

Most names on the list were American actresses. However, British celebrities including Kelly Brook, the actress and model, and Cat Deeley, who works as a television presenter in the US, also featured, as did Michelle Keegan, the *Coronation Street* actress, and the model Cara Delevingne. The pop stars Avril Lavigne and Rihanna, the reality TV star Kim Kardashian and the actresses Winona Ryder, Kirsten Dunst and Hilary Duff were also named.

A lawyer for Kate Upton, the American model and actress who was affected by the leak, condemned an "outrageous violation" of her privacy. Other actresses affected by the leaks said that the images were fakes.

Dominic Crossley, a privacy lawyer at Payne Hicks Beach, said that the leak was a "shocking" violation of privacy given its scale and content. "Once these images are disseminated on the internet, there is no getting them back."

Twitter began to block accounts that were posting the images yesterday.

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Cracking the iCloud

Apart from the hackers who stole them, nobody knows how the private photographs of Jennifer Lawrence, Mary Winstead and other actresses were obtained. However, the hackers are believed to have used a variety of techniques to steal the images over a period that could stretch back many months (James Dean writes).

When a 27-year-old computer programmer leaked the first images on Sunday, he claimed that they had been obtained from the actresses' iCloud accounts. iCloud, Apple's cloud storage service, automatically uploads pictures from account-holders' iPhones, iPads and Macbooks if they have the "photo stream" function enabled.

If a hacker wanted to access an iCloud account to steal uploaded photos, they would need the user name and password. They could try to guess a password or the security questions that protect the password should it be forgotten by its owner.

Another theory is that hackers exploited a temporary security fault in Apple's Find My iPhone software, which helps owners to trace lost smartphones through iCloud. The bug was reported a day before the stolen images were leaked online but was quickly fixed.

Intimate photographs of Scarlett Johansson and Mila Kunis appeared online in 2011 after the actresses had their email accounts hacked. The hacker, Christopher Chaney, was later sentenced to ten years in jail.



Jennifer Lawrence, top, and the model Kate Upton condemned the invasion of privacy; Cat Deeley, right, was on the list