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The Use of Technology in Sexual Exploration Among a Rape Culture Youth

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The present investigation sought to address the gap of research surrounding rape myth acceptance attitudes and cyber-sexual assault (CBSA). Researchers examined data collected from a college sample of 94 undergraduate psychology students. The purpose of this investigation was to explore whether this sample of college students reported any potential stereotypes pertaining to cyber-sexual assault victims and whether the college students utilized technology for sexual exploration (e.g., creation, distribution, and receiving of sexually explicit material). In addition to identifying cyber-sexual victims, this study explored the correlation of gender with those responses. Results are reported, and suggestions for counselors are offered. The researchers hypothesize that rape culture acceptance attitudes have shifted to victims of online abuse, though more research is warranted to draw specific conclusions.

Keywords: cyber-sexual assault, revenge-porn, sexual violence, rape culture, college students

Introduction

The United States is the lead consumer of technology, and recent advancements have shifted the way we communicate (Marganski & Fauth, 2013). This evolution of technology-facilitated conversations has transformed how individuals engage, which currently occurs most often through the avenues of cell phones, text messaging, and social media. Today, almost 85% of Americans own cell phones (Marganski & Fauth, 2013), and nearly two thirds to three-quarters of cell phone users regularly send and receive text messages (Kohut et al., 2011; Smith, 2011). As anticipated, text messaging is now the preferred means of communication among young adults (Marganski & Fauth, 2013; Smith, 2011). Moreover, social media is a widely used platform among young adults, where some youth have reported being online "constantly" (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). In fact, students spend nearly an hour on Facebook daily, as nearly 50% of students had logged onto their social media accounts multiple times throughout the day (Anderson & Jiang, 2018; Sponcil & Gitimu, 2013). With the rise and expansion of technology, cell phones (e.g., text messaging), internet use, and social media sites have become the socially favored route of communication among peer groups. In light of this surge in technology usage among youth, communication researchers (Armstrong & Mahone, 2017) pointed out that such avenues have extended how material is distributed, which includes sexually explicit material.

Cyber-sexual assault (CBSA), also known as "nonconsensual pornography" or "revenge porn," is the nonconsensual sharing of sexually explicit images online, through social media avenues like Facebook and Instagram (Holladay,

2016). Specifically, CBSA refers to the dissemination of sexually explicit images where one of the pictured individuals did not consent to the distribution of the material (Bartow, 2012; Bloom, 2016)). For example, the material can be posted by an ex-lover upon the ending of a relationship in efforts to taunt or humiliate the victim (Laird & Toups, 2013). The definition of CBSA can also encompass other nonconsensual distribution of intimate photographs, whether by a classmate or roommate, in efforts to bully or harass the victim (Bartow, 2012). Victims of CBSA can be shamed into silence when these private photos are made accessible for viewing by family members, friends, employers, schools, social media networks, and more. Further, the sexually explicit images can be posted on hundreds of websites, almost instantly, resulting in one Google search of the pictured individual's name being overrun with the images (Citron & Franks, 2014; Bloom, 2016).

The mental health consequences associated with cyber-sexual assault are largely unknown. Recent quantitative (Holladay, 2016) and qualitative (Bates, 2016) literature

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identified constructs (e.g., depression, suicidal thoughts, emotional dysregulation, post-traumatic stress) common among sexual assault survivors for two smaller samples of CBSA survivors. Despite this, as of now, CBSA is not classified as a form of sexual assault due to the lack of research, leaving victims with limited options for mental health care, while also leaving clinicians with no efficacious treatment approaches. Furthermore, prevalence rates have been difficult to measure, because a victim's speaking out can exacerbate the assault (Citron & Franks, 2014). An invaluable research contribution, however, has recently identified that one in 25 Americans have been harassed with their sexually intimate photos or become victims of CBSA (Data & Society Research Institute & the Center for Innovative Public Health Research, 2016). Meanwhile, researchers (Drouin, Vogel, Surbey, & Stills, 2013) reported that 55% - 78% of individuals have engaged in sexting, or the sharing of sexually intimate material through technology. With such high prevalence rates for engaging in the creation and distribution of personal, sexually intimate material, we wondered what the prevalence rates were for those that blame victims who are harassed with their sexually explicit material. In a recent study that examined biases towards blaming rape victims (Felson & Palmore, 2018), the researchers found that college students were more likely to engage in indirect blame; however, the researchers' also noted that college students were willing to use the word blame if they perceived a person's own recklessness as having led to their misfortune (e.g., assault). Because cyber-sexual assault survivors participated in the creation of their material (in some cases), we wondered if survivors of cyber-sexual assault would experience increased levels of blame surrounding their assault?

This investigation was specifically tested for behaviors of college students' in the creation, dissemination, and reception of sexually explicit images. Additionally, we explored the participants' responses concerning those individuals who become victimized with their private, sexually explicit images. Lastly, we explored the relationship of gender based on the participants' responses. Overall, this study served to initiate the conversation surrounding current rape culture attitudes, and how these may manifest through the proliferation of CBSA. With this in mind, we first present current research on the use of technology with sexual exploration among young adults (e.g., creation and sharing of sexual material). This section includes literature on deviant behaviors and the nonconsensual sharing of another person's private, sexual material. We conclude with how CBSA perpetuates rape culture acceptance attitudes.

Young Adults and Technology: When Sharing Intimate Images Digitally Goes Awry

An online cultural revolution has changed the way we interact both socially, and sexually. Sexting refers to the self-

creation (e.g., selfie) and the digital sending of a sexually explicit image, which is next transmitted through email, social media, or cellphone (e.g., text message). Typically, the individual shares their private image digitally, with a romantic interest or partner (Humbach, 2014; Henry & Powell, 2014b). Due to the nearly immediate transmission of information online, images can be disseminated via technology quickly and broadly. Researchers (Henry & Powell, 2014a, 2015) have noted that the taking of sexual photos may be a sexually healthy form of sexual exploration in the new age of technology. One of the unintended consequences, however, can be a rapid and nonconsensual distribution of sexual photos; in these cases, the consequences for victims may be highly traumatic. Bloom (2016) noted that victims could spend their lives scrubbing their images from the web, across hundreds of websites, and due to the nature of the internet, those images may never be erased. The scope and frequency of CBSA, as highlighted above, encourages a social norm that sexual assault endured through technology is normal and the victims are to blame (i.e., rape myth acceptance; Holladay, 2016).

In a recent meta-analysis that reviewed 39 studies on sexting behaviors among youth (Madigan, Ly, Rash, Ouytsel, & Temple, 2018), some of the literature pointed to a rise of sexting behaviors for this population (60%). The researchers also pointed out that multiple youth (8.4% - 12.0%) had either forwarded or received a sexual image without the pictured individual's consent. This behavior could be due to rape myth acceptance attitudes (e.g., "they took the photo so they should expect it to be shared"). Conversely, it may stem from the anonymity of technology, which enables individuals to continue to forward nonconsensual intimate material, while emotionally separating themselves from the crime. Either way, the sharing of sexually explicit material with a partner (Bloom, 2016), and as a form of sexual exploration (Henry & Powell, 2015), is no longer atypical. Consequently, approximately 10% of individuals have been threatened with their sexually intimate photos, where among these threats 60% of individuals reported that their intimate material was eventually shared without their consent (McAfee, 2013). In fact, one in 25 Americans have been threatened with or have become victims of CBSA (Data & Society Research Institute & the Center for Innovative Public Health Research, 2016). This equates to nearly 10 million Americans, or 4%. Despite prevalence numbers indicating CBSA was on the rise, ninety-four percent of Americans believe that their intimate photographs are safe in the hands of their current partners (Bloom, 2016). In a national study (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen & Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008) exploring the sexting behaviors of teens and young adults, males and females reported the sharing of sexually intimate photos at nearly equal rates (young adult women, 36%; young adult men, 31%). However, this same study highlighted that the

young women were much more likely to experience pressure from their partner to send the sexually explicit photos in the first place, and that the young women were more likely to become victims of revenge porn (Bloom, 2016, Willard, 2010). Moreover, though victims of revenge porn are predominately female (Laird & Toups, 2013), it has been largely young males that run revenge porn websites (Laird & Toups, 2013; Morris, 2012). For instance, Hunter Moore, founder of an infamous revenge porn website, made national headlines after pleading guilty to charges for hosting a website

that contained women's stolen, naked photos online, where the victims were then charged a fee to remove the sexual material. In an interview titled "The Most Hated Man on the Internet" for the Rolling Stones, Moore was quoted saying, "I'm sorry that your daughter was 'cyber-raped,' but, I mean, now she's educated on technology" (Morris, 2012). In the case of CBSA victimization, Audrie Potts sadly made national headlines when she died by suicide after becoming the victim of revenge porn (Burleigh, 2013). Three boys took her clothes off while she laid in bed unconscious after partying, drew on her with sharpies, then took and disseminated sexually explicit pictures of her. Not long after being harassed with these images, Audrie Potts was found "dangling from a belt" by her mother (Burleigh, 2013). Previous studies have pointed to increased vulnerability to suicide (Holladay, 2016), where one study by the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative (2013) found 47% of survivors had contemplated suicide (Bloom, 2016).

Recently, more focus has been given to understanding the problematic depths of why young adults distribute another person's material (Boyd, 2007; Holladay, 2016) without regard for both copyrights and consequences (e.g., emotional or physical). Yet, little research has explored the healthy use of technology in a sexually consenting relationship, nor have researchers explored the implications of cyber-sexual assault in a rape prone culture. The goal of this preliminary study was to explore whether students utilize technology in sexual exploration, as well potential stereotypes pertaining to cyber-sexual assault. Audrie Potts completed her suicide not immediately after her nonconsensual photos were taken, but after being harassed by other classmates upon their release. As evidenced by suicidality post victimization, the rape myth culture that both tolerates and perpetuates CBSA as a cultural norm may have devastating consequences for victims. It is critical that researched claims guide mental health service providers towards an area of intervention when working with their clients, in this case victims of CBSA.

Cyber-Sexual Assault and the Proliferation of a Rape Myth Acceptance Culture

Researchers have highlighted that technologically facilitated deviant sexual dating behaviors were among the rise for adults, nonetheless these continue to be minimized and disre-

garded (Marganski & Fauth, 2013; Huff, Johnson, & Miller, 2003). According to Huff et al.(2003) a physical component is necessary for a sexually based trauma to have occurred. CBSA refers to the dissemination of sexually explicit images where one of the pictured individuals did not consent to the distribution of the material (Bartow, 2012; Bloom, 2016), and may lack the physical component referenced by Huff et al. (2003). This perpetuates the rape myth acceptance attitudes that it is morally okay to humiliate someone online with their private photo since the abuse is not in a physical form.

Campbell, Dworkin, and Cabral (2009) asserted that we live in a rape prone culture that perpetuates a message that victims are to blame for their assault, and that such rape myth attitudes exist across cultural and social barriers. As noted by Reling et al. (2017), a vast amount of literature exists on how culturally normative sexual violence has become, proliferated by these rape culture attitudes. It is widely known among sexual violence researchers, that the likelihood a woman will experience sexual violence increases during college; approximately 1 in 5 (23.1%) college women have reported sexual assault (Cantor et al., 2015). Among a large-scale survey of 27 universities, 11.7% reported the experience of nonconsensual sexual contact while enrolled as a student (Cantor et al., 2015). Yet, what exactly is rape culture? In an article, "Rape Culture is Real" (Maxwell, 2014), the author reveals a few statements that we believed eloquently depicted the term.

Rape culture is when cyberbullies take pictures of sexual assaults and harass their victims online after the fact, which in the cases of Audrie Pott and Rehtaeh Parsons tragically ended in their suicides. Rape culture is when, in 31 states, rapists can legally sue for child custody if the rape results in pregnancy. Rape culture is when college campus advisers tasked with supporting the student body, shame survivors who report their rapes. (Annie Clark, a campus activist, says an administrator at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill told her when she reported her rape, "Well... Rape is like football, if you look back on the game, and you're the quarterback, Annie... is there anything you would have done differently?"). Rape culture is when women who come forward are questioned about what they were wearing. Rape culture is when survivors who come forward are asked, "Were you drinking?" Rape culture is when people say, "she was asking for it." Rape culture is when we teach women how to not get raped, instead of teaching men not to rape. (pp. 1-2)

The recent phenomena of CBSA can have a devastating

impact on victims' psychological well-being. This study serves to engage counselor educators and mental health clinicians on the topic, and explore trends surrounding college students and CBSA. We hypothesize that the lack of laws, research, and prevention programs constructs a social norm that sexual violence through technology is normal, and the victims are to blame. More specifically, the goal of this study was to explore the frequency with which college students are sexting, while also looking into the frequency of potential stereotypes pertaining to victims that are assaulted through technology, cyberspace, and social media.

Methods

The current study explored behaviors of college students' and their creation, dissemination, and receiving of sexually explicit material. Additionally, we explored the participants' responses concerning those individuals who become victimized with their private, sexually explicit images. Lastly, we explored the relationships between genders and this sample of student's responses. We surveyed students at a midsize, public, southern university in the United States. For the present investigation, we used a panel of experts (i.e., doctors of counselor education; expert in survey design) to generate the instrument and we surveyed an undergraduate psychology course. This study was approved by the IRB at the University of Central Florida and all participants provided informed consent.

Instrumentation Development

The instrument utilized in this investigation was constructed by a panel of experts, including an expert in survey design, and counselor education faculty members. The 19 items on the measurement (available upon request) were generated by the researchers following a rigorous literature review. The questionnaire, upon completion, was reviewed by these experts (counselor education faculty members and a statistician) for face validity. Following this, the instrument was administered to counselor education peers for clarity and legibility. This questionnaire was administered in-person to an undergraduate psychology course consisting of adult (age 18 and older) college students. The goal was to explore whether students utilize technology in sexual exploration, if they have ever been the victim of revenge-porn, as well as potential stereotypes held pertaining to cyber-sexual assault.

To increase the reliability of the survey answers, participants were provided with an explicit definition of revenge porn and sexually explicit prior to entering the survey. Revenge porn was defined as, "sexually explicit media that is publicly shared online without the consent of the pictured individual. Revenge porn is typically uploaded by ex-partners or hackers. The images are often accompanied by personally identifying information, like an individual's full name, social

media links, and addresses." Further, sexually explicit was defined as, "sexual content, usually depicting partial or full nudity of one or all individuals. Further, the material can be sexual in nature, used for purposes of arousal, with no nudity (e.g., lingerie)."

While previous instruments have identified prevalence numbers (2016), and methods for how nonconsensual material was shared (Eaton, Jacobs, & Ruvalcaba, 2017), there was a gap in the literature surrounding use of technology for sexual exploration and the correlation with rape myth acceptance attitudes towards cyber-sexual assault. Thus, we initially asked participants five questions that utilized a Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." These questions were aimed at exploring CBSA related rape myth acceptance attitudes. Questions included statements such as, "if I took an intimate photo of my partner, I can do with it whatever I please;" and "victims of revenge porn should never have taken the photos in the first place." Following this, to explore the frequency of technology usage with sexual exploration, the scale utilized a dichotomous response type to learn whether the students had ever taken a sexually explicit photo themselves or allowed someone else to take their photo, had ever shared a sexually explicit photo with someone else, had ever unintentionally received a sexually explicit photo, or had ever been the victim of "revenge porn" or known someone who has, here described as cyber-sexual assault. We intentionally collected minimal demographics information (i.e., age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, current relationship status, and college level) to preserve anonymity. At the end of the survey, participants were directed to campus resources that included a 24-hour source crisis hotline resource, as well as licensed therapist available on campus.

Data Collection and Survey Administration

We collected the anonymous results from an undergraduate psychology course, on a southern college campus. To recruit participants, we attended an undergraduate psychology course in order to provide the survey in-person. All of the students were provided an informed consent and then the survey. Students that elected to participate in the study were instructed to complete the survey and return the hard copy in the envelope provided.

Approximately 169 individuals were invited to participate. This invitation yielded 56% response rate (N = 95) for participants who had completed over 90% of the items on the instrument. We removed one individual who identified as transgender due to the research question surrounding gender differences, yielding a final useable sample of n = 94.

Utilizing the Cohen's d effect size of .64, the researchers calculated sample size post hoc. Thus, the researchers utilized a sample size calculator through www.danielsoper.com, as recommended by Schumaker and Lomax (2010). An ob-

served Cohen's d of .63, with a probability level of .05, and a sample size of 94, resulted in the observed power (one-tailed hypothesis) of $\beta = .917$, and observed power for a two-tailed hypothesis was $\beta = .855$.

Data Analysis

The data analysis utilized SPSS v.23. Participants were divided into two groups, based on self-reported gender. The researchers then explored the frequency of participants' responses to learn the influence of these in relation to CBSA rape myth acceptance attitudes, and their use of technology in the creation, dissemination, and receiving of sexually explicit material. Lastly, a Chi square was conducted to examine the relationship of gender and how the participants responded. Because only one individual identified as transgender, we could not include that participant in this particular study. A larger sample would need to be drawn, specifically targeting this population, in order to draw any representative conclusions.

Results

Participant Demographics

Descriptive data and measures of central tendency are presented for all participants (see Table 1) in the study ($N = 95$). The following descriptive analyses reported include the entire sample ($N = 95$; see Table 1). A large majority of participants were female ($n = 65$, 68.4%), compared to individuals who identified as male ($n = 29$, 30.5%) and other ($n = 1$, 1.1%). The majority of participants ranged in ages of 18-22 years ($n = 80$, 86.0%), followed by ranges 23-27 ($n = 9$, 9.7%), 28-32 years ($n = 3$, 3.2%), 33-37 years ($n = 1$, 1.1%). Regarding the ethnicity of participants ($N = 95$) the sample was 52 (54.7%), mostly Caucasian/White, followed by 27 (28.4%) Hispanic/Latino, 6 (6.3%) biracial, 4 (4.2%) African/African American/Black, 4 (4.2%) Asian, and 2 (2.1%) Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Sexual orientation of participants ($N = 95$) was 80 (84.2%) mostly heterosexual; 11 (11.6%) bisexual; 1 (1.1%) gay/lesbian; and 3 (3.2%) other. Lastly, the majority of participants ($N = 95$) were college senior's ($n = 42$, 44.2%), then junior ($n = 36$, 37.9%), sophomore ($n = 14$, 14.7%) and freshman ($n = 3$, 3.2%).

Rape Myth Acceptance and Cyber Sexual Assault

When the students were asked, "if a couple is in a relationship it is normal to take sexually explicit pictures," the majority of women strongly agreed/agreed (53.8%), whereas a much lower amount disagreed and/or strongly disagreed (15.4%). Men also strongly agreed/agreed (48.2%) at nearly the same rate as the women. However, men disagreed/strongly disagreed (27.5%) at a much higher rate than the women. For both females (30.8%) and males (24.1%), a

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Participants ($n = 95$)

Variable	n	%
Age		
18-22	80	84.2
23-27	9	9.4
28-32	3	3.1
33-37	1	1.0
Did Not Report	2	2.1
Gender		
Male	29	30.5
Female	65	68.4
Other	1	1.1
Ethnicity		
African American/Black	4	4.2
Asian	4	4.2
White (non-Hispanic)	52	54.7
Hispanic or Latino	27	28.4
Native Hawaiian or PI	2	2.1
Two or more races	6	6.3
Sexual Orientation		
Bisexual	11	11.6
Heterosexual	80	84.2
Gay/Lesbian	1	1.1
Other	3	3.2
Relationship Status		
Single	39	41.1
Dating	11	11.6
In a relationship	36	37.9
Cohabiting	6	6.3
Married	2	2.1
College Level		
Freshman	3	3.2
Sophomore	14	14.7
Junior	36	37.9
Senior	42	44.2

Note. AN = Alaskan Native, PI = Pacific Islander. Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding

large portion reported they were undecided on this question. The relationship for gender with these responses was not significant, $\chi^2(8, 94) = .630$, $p > .05$.

When the students were asked, "if I took an intimate photo of my partner, I can do with it whatever I please," the majority if women strongly disagreed/disagreed (86.2%); and for men, a substantial portion strongly disagreed/disagreed (62.0%). While a small portion of the women agreed/strongly agreed (4.6%), what was noteworthy was that a large portion of men strongly agreed/agreed (34.4%) with this statement. This equates to nearly one of three of the men in the study agreeing that they can do whatever they please with a sexually explicit image. Further, three times the number of females were undecided (9.2%)

when compared to males (3.4%) for this question. These frequencies were significant by gender, $\chi^2(8, 94) = .051, p < .05$, indicating that gender did influence whether participants agreed or disagreed with this question.

When the students were asked, "if a woman's naked photo ends up online, she deserves what she gets for taking the photo," the majority of women strongly disagreed/disagreed (83.1%) compared to women who strongly agree/agreed (10.8%). For men, the majority also strongly disagreed/disagree (65.5%); however, men strongly agree/agreed (24.1%) with the statement at more than double the rate of the women (10.8%). Even smaller number of females remained undecided (6.2%) than males (10.3%). The relationship for gender with these responses was not significant, $\chi^2(8, 94) = .508, p > .05$.

When the students were asked to respond to the statement that, "the social consequences of a woman's naked photos ending up online are more severe than those for a male's naked photos ending up online," the majority of women strongly agree/agree (72.4%), compared to those that strongly disagree/disagree (15.4%). For men, the majority strongly agree/agreed (48.3%), which was closely followed by the males that strongly disagree/disagree (37.9%). Both females (12.3%) and males (13.8%) remained undecided at nearly equal rates. These frequencies were significant by gender, $\chi^2(8, 94) = .012, p < .05$, indicating that gender did influence whether participants agreed or disagreed with this question.

When the students were asked to rate the statement, "victims of revenge porn should never have taken the photos in the first place," the majority of women strongly disagreed/disagreed (63.1%) compared to the women that strongly agreed/agreed (16.9%). The majority of men also strongly disagreed/disagreed (51.7%), while a large portion of males strongly agreed/agreed (27.6%). Thus, more than one out of four males reported that the victims should not have taken the intimate photo, compared to the one of six females that agreed with this statement. Again, both females (20.0%) and males (20.7%) remained undecided at nearly equal rates. The relationship for gender with these responses was not significant, $\chi^2(8, 94) = .829, p > .05$.

Technology and the Creation, Dissemination, or Receiving of Sexually Explicit Material

When we asked if participants had ever taken a sexually explicit photo of themselves (i.e., "selfie"), most of the women reported "yes" (72.3%) compared to men (44.8%). Nearly half of the males reported "no" (55.2%) in comparison to females (27.7%). These frequencies were significant by gender, $\chi^2(2, 94) = .026, p < .05$.

When we asked if participants had ever taken a sexually explicit photo of themselves and given it to someone else (i.e., "sexting"), a larger number of females reported "yes"

(61.5%) when compared to males (41.4%). More males reported "no" (58.6%) compared to females who reported "no" (36.9%). The relationship for gender with these responses was not significant, $\chi^2(4, 94) = .238, p > .05$.

When we asked if participants had ever allowed someone to take a sexually explicit photo/video of them, the majority of females (75.4%) and males (69.0%) reported "no." Females (24.6%) and males (24.1%) reported "yes" at similar rates. The relationship for gender with these responses was not significant, $\chi^2(4, 94) = .107, p > .05$.

When we asked if participants have ever known anyone who has taken a sexually explicit photo (of themselves or had someone else take it), the majority of both females (86.2%) and males (82.8%) said "yes", while a few reported "no" (females, 10.8%; males, 3.4%). The relationship for gender with these responses was not significant, $\chi^2(4, 94) = .279, p > .05$.

When the participants were asked if they had ever known anyone who has shared sexually explicit photos of an individual without that person's consent (e.g., with friends, to brag), over half of both females (55.4%) and males (55.2%) said "yes." Concerning this question, about one-third of both the females and males reported "no" (females, 35.4%; males, 37.9%). The relationship for gender with these responses was not significant, $\chi^2(4, 94) = .854, p > .05$.

When we asked if participants have ever unintentionally received an explicit photo from someone else (without asking), nearly half of the females reported "yes" (47.7%) compared to males who reported "yes" (31.0%). More males (62.1%) than females (49.2%) reported "no." Again, the relationship for gender with these responses was not significant, $\chi^2(4, 94) = .364, p > .05$.

When asked if participants have known anyone who was the victim of revenge-porn (i.e., "cyber-sexual assault"), more males (27.6%) than females (24.6%) reported "yes." The relationship for gender with these responses was not significant, $\chi^2(4, 94) = .441, p > .05$. However, among this sample of college students, 3.1% reported they had been the victim of revenge-porn, and 100% of those were female.

Discussion

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

We surveyed college students at a midsize, public, southern university in the United States regarding behaviors surrounding the creation, dissemination, and receiving of sexually explicit images. Additionally, we explored the participants' responses concerning those individuals who become victimized with their private, sexually explicit images. Lastly, we explored the relationship with gender, and how the participants' responded. Specifically, the present investigation sought to address the gap of research surrounding rape culture and technology induced assault (e.g., CBSA).

We inquired about the participants technology use with their sexual exploration, and nearly half of the males, and nearly three-quarters of the females had taken a sexual image of themselves. Nearly half of the males, and over half of the females had shared a sexually explicit image with another individual through technology. At almost identical rates, both males and females had allowed someone else to take a sexually explicit video or image of themselves. Over 80% of both males and females knew someone who had also created sexually explicit material through technology. At nearly identical rates, over half of both males and females knew someone that shared a sexually explicit image with others, without the pictured individual's consent. Almost half of the females received an unsolicited sexually explicit image, while just over one-third of the males had received such an image without asking. About one-fourth of both males and females had known someone who was the victim of CBSA (e.g., "revenge-porn"). Among the sample, three percent had been the victim of CBSA themselves, and these were all women. These findings point to the fact that technology is most certainly being used as a form of sexual exploration among college students.

After looking into technology usage for sexual exploration among this sample of college psychology undergraduates, we explored responses specifically regarding victims of CBSA. Males strongly agreed with the statement, "if I took an intimate photo of my partner, I can do with it whatever I please," at 8 times the rate in which females did. Keep in mind that males and females both participated in the creation and sharing of sexually explicit images. This finding suggests that, even if unconsciously, these participants believe they can share a private, sexually explicit image anywhere they please, without the pictured individual's consent. This is suggestive of a double-standard, as well as the perpetuation of rape myth acceptance attitudes. Although previous research has pointed to females being pressured to take intimate photographs within their relationship (Bloom, 2016, National Campaign to Prevent Teen & Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008) more than males, our findings showed that both males and females agreed at nearly equal rates that it was normal to take sexually explicit photos within the parameters of a relationship. This finding suggests that, without pressure, the creation of sexual material may be a sexually healthy form of exploration in the new age of technology, as noted by some researchers (Henry & Powell, 2014a, 2015). However, upon exploring the relationship of gender with this question, we found gender was, in fact, a significant contributor to how participants responded. Thus, the reasoning behind why each gender creates sexual material may vary (e.g., feeling pressured, to feel feminine, to feel masculine), and future research would benefit from investigating this variation.

Due to the increased rate for which females are victimized online (Eaton et al., 2017; Henry & Powell, 2015; Franks,

2013), specifically when compared to males, we asked participants about the social consequences of women's naked photos ending up online. The majority of women agreed that women's social consequences are more severe than for males, while the majority of males disagreed with this statement. This discrepancy warrants further investigation. It is noteworthy that the relationship of gender with how participants responded was significant. Thus, it is possible that the findings pointed to a biased question on the instrument. However, the results may also point to the interplay of gender with the perpetuation of rape myth acceptance attitudes. For instance, sexual assault researchers (England & Bearak, 2014) highlighted that double standards among males still exist for sexual behavior and rape culture attitudes, indicating males are more likely to underestimate the consequences (e.g., social, emotional, physical, financial) of sexual assault, and show higher rates of victim blaming when compared to females. This may also be true for victims of CBSA, though more research is needed to explore these findings, and future research would benefit from asking about the social consequence of all genders.

Specifically, regarding victims of CBSA, nearly one out of four males and one of six females reported that the victims should not have created the sexual material in the first place. Essentially, even though sexually explicit photos are being taken, there appears to be a stigma towards those who have their materials without the consent shared online. Moreover, males agreed with the statement that if a woman's naked photo ends up online, she deserves what she gets for having taken the photos/videos at nearly twice the rate of females. Keep in mind, however, that nearly half of the men had taken a sexually explicit (i.e., selfie) photo of themselves and given it to someone else, and both males and females had allowed someone to take a sexually explicit (i.e., selfie) photo/video of them at almost equal rates. Thus, it appears that a double standard exists where males and females are taking sexually explicit photos but are more critical of others when the outcomes of those decisions results in cyber-sexual assault. Conversely, when participants responded to the statement that they could do whatever they please with a sexually explicit image, only five percent of females agreed with the statement, while a substantially larger portion of men, nearly thirty-five percent, agreed that they can do whatever they please with a sexually explicit image of another person. Moreover, the relationship of gender with how individuals responded to this question was significant, indicating that gender influences, at the very least, attitudes pertaining to the ethics of having sexually explicit images of another person. Due to the significance found for gender with this question, future research would benefit from exploring the perpetrators of CBSA, and specifically how gender influences the perpetuation of CBSA, as this is pivotal for the creation of prevention programs.

The above attitudes persisted, even though nearly one-third of both males and females had known someone who was the victim of revenge-porn (e.g., identification with the victim). In essence, some (not all) individuals are creating sexually intimate material, sharing it, receiving it, becoming victimized, or have even known a victim, but are also responding in a manner that places the blame of being victimized on the victim of CBSA (e.g., rape myth acceptance). This suggests to the researchers, also licensed mental health counselors, that efforts should be geared towards sexual education, technology and morality, and also on the prevention of CBSA. For instance, in the future we may benefit from teaching all genders about healthy sexual exploration with technology, as well as the unhealthy sharing of other's images, and finally how placing blame on CBSA victims perpetuates rape culture attitudes. In sum, let's teach the prevention of both CBSA in addition to the reduction of rape culture attitudes.

Direction for Future Research

The goal of this study was to explore whether students utilize technology in the creation, dissemination, and receiving of sexually explicit material, if they had ever been the victim of revenge-porn, as well as potential stereotypes held pertaining to cyber-sexual assault.

We believe that rape culture attitudes influence the psychological consequences of CBSA; thus, if the creation of private photos does not inversely influence susceptibility to rape myth acceptance towards victims of CBSA, what does? Future research would benefit from exploring two specific areas regarding morality and sexting. First, research would benefit from focusing on prevention efforts of CBSA. Secondly, research would benefit from reducing the rape myth acceptance attitudes that give leverage to CBSA, making the crime much more psychologically damaging for victims. In essence, if we can't prevent private photos from being shared without one's consent, how can we shift the culture norm so that victims are not further taunted and scrutinized by their peers, colleagues, and society? This may be the key in reducing some of the detrimental mental health outcomes for CBSA victims, though future research is needed to support this claim

Limitations

It is important to note that while this topic has only recently gained attention of mental health professionals, this study has its limitations. First, a small sample from a single undergraduate psychology course at a conservative southern university certainly limits generalizability and cross-cultural comparisons. This convenience sample also limits the conclusions of the research; in the future researchers may want to utilize random sampling on a college campus to help with generalizability as well as replication (Cohen, 1992). Please

also note the lack of diversity within the sample. The majority of the sample identified as white, heterosexual females and males. The results of this study may have been different had the sample been more culturally diverse.

Regarding instrumentation, while the survey was created and reviewed by a panel of mental health experts, it was also not validated. Thus, content validity, or the ability to know we are measuring a specific construct of interest may be lacking (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). It is important to utilize validated instruments in research design, though new areas of study often lack these (Marganski & Fauth, 2013). This measurement was used due to inadequate existing measurements. With this in mind, future researchers would benefit from validating this instrument, or something similar, and also offering it alongside another rape myth attitudes questionnaire to learn if the results are comparable. Also, while explicit definitions of both revenge porn and sexually explicit were offered at the beginning of this survey to increase reliability, a thorough definition of sexting was not offered, which could have resulted in an underreporting of sexting among this sample. This study does serve to initiate the conversation surrounding how college students are exploring their sexuality, as well as the continuation of rape culture attitudes on college campuses, specifically in regard to online cyber-sexual assault.

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