

# An examination of nonconsensual pornography websites

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## Abstract

Nonconsensual pornography, sometimes referred to as “revenge porn,” refers to the distribution of sexually explicit photographs or videos without the consent of the individual in the image. These images, along with accompanying personal information, are often disseminated by a former romantic or sexual partner with the intent to harm. Websites exist that have a reputation for hosting and promoting revenge porn. However, it is unclear to what extent these websites function for the purpose of explicitly harming victims by providing a victim’s personal information. To address this question, a content analysis was performed on 134 photographs from seven different websites that originated within the United States. Descriptions of photos posted, content of victims’ personal information included within the post, victim and distributor demographics, and viewers’ comments were coded and analyzed. Website layouts and policies were also documented. Key findings were that nearly 92% of victims featured on included websites were women. Moreover, when a reason was given for posting the photo, it was correlated with having a greater number of views, being more likely to allow commenting on photos, and being more likely to include a victim’s name. Implications are discussed.

## Keywords

revenge porn, sexual objectification, nonconsensual pornography, victimization, content analysis

## Introduction

In recent decades, dramatic advances in technology have allowed for new ways in which people can be victimized. One example is the nonconsensual sharing of nude photographs. Nonconsensual pornography, sometimes referred to as “revenge porn,” refers to the nonconsensual distribution of sexually explicit photographs

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or videos (Citron & Franks, 2014; Franks, 2011, 2015). In recent years, the popularity of distributing photographs of former romantic partners through online platforms has been repeatedly brought to light. For example, according to a recent national survey of 1182 Americans aged 18–54, 36% of adults reported that they planned to send explicit photos to their romantic partners on Valentine’s Day (McAfee, 2013). Additionally, one in 10 participants were threatened to have intimate images disseminated online by an ex-partner and, furthermore, 60% of the time the ex-partner carried out the threat and distributed the photo.

As a result of this increased popularity of nonconsensual pornography, there have been entire websites created that are dedicated to posting pictures of ex-intimates. In 2010, the revenge porn phenomenon was brought to public attention with the website *IsAnyoneUp.com*, which was created and operated by Hunter Moore (Morris, 2012). Moore admitted that the website was created after he and some of his friends had their “hearts broken by a couple of girls” (Mungin, 2014). During the 16 months the website was operational, the website attracted between 150,000 and 240,000 unique visitors daily (Dodero, 2012) and earned between \$8000 (Hill, 2012) and \$20,000 (Lee, 2012) per month from advertising. When asked in an interview with Anderson Cooper if he had any misgivings about profiting from revenge porn, Moore expressed a complete lack of remorse when he responded with, “Why would I? I get to look at naked girls all day” (Goode, 2013).

Although many of these images are distributed by a victim’s former romantic or sexual partner with the intent to seek revenge by humiliating or harming the person in the photo (Burris, 2014; Stroud, 2014), not all perpetrators are driven to retaliate against an ex-partner (Franks, 2015). For example, while some revenge porn images may have originated in a manner that was consensual (e.g. in the instance of sending an explicit photograph to a romantic partner), some of these images may have been created without the knowledge of the victim by a person who was not in any sort of romantic relationship with the victim. Examples include “upskirting,” “downblousing” (Bell, Hemmen, & Steiner, 2006), or images created using Photoshop. Alternatively, the images may have been surreptitiously retrieved from a victim’s digital device or cloud drive via hacking (Clare, 2015; Franks, 2015). Hacking was the case when 90,000 photographs and 10,000 videos containing sexual content were stolen from *SnapSaved*, a program designed to allow users of the popular Snapchat app to save photographs and videos that have been deleted (Clare, 2015). Additionally, perpetrators may be motivated to develop these websites because large sums of money can be made from advertising revenue (e.g. Hill, 2012; Lee, 2012). These websites often do not differentiate or specify how photos were obtained, making it difficult – if not impossible – to identify perpetrator motivation.

The fact that these images are widely distributed without the consent of the victim, and is often times “justified” as an act of revenge, may serve to contribute to the portrayal of women as an object whose consent is both unnecessary and unwarranted given the presumed betrayal that initiated the distribution of the image. Recognizing the diverse ways intimate images may be distributed online, the terminology of “nonconsensual pornography” is preferred over the term

“revenge porn” as it is more inclusive (Franks, 2015). As such, the term nonconsensual pornography will be used throughout the paper.

## **Consequences of nonconsensual pornography**

Various organizations work to help victims and eliminate nonconsensual pornography websites (e.g. Cyber Civil Rights Initiative, Heartmob, Without My Consent). For example, on their website, the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative (2016) includes steps for individuals to follow to help create laws against nonconsensual pornography in their state, and have published a “Guide for Legislators,” which includes model laws. Their website also includes information to help support and empower victims, such as an online removal guide, attorney contact information, and a crisis helpline.

Despite the work of these organizations, even when nonconsensual pornography sites are shut down, images can often be found under new web addresses (Stroud, 2014). Once images are uploaded to cyberspace, it is almost impossible to remove them since they are often saved, redistributed, and posted on other websites (Judge, 2012; Korenis & Billick, 2014). For example, in 2014, numerous celebrities had their explicit photographs stolen and subsequently shared on 4chan, which is a forum that allows users to post anonymously and share images (McCoy, 2014). Following the release of these photographs on 4chan, many of the images were redistributed on Reddit, which became known as “the Fappening” (McCoy, 2014). In accordance with current photo ownership and copyright regulations within the United States, even when victims are able to locate their photos, it may not be within their legal rights to have an image removed (Kopf, 2013).

Nonconsensual pornography images often include victims’ personal information, such as first names, last names, city of residence, and links to social media profiles (Cyber Civil Rights Initiative, 2016; National Conference of State Legislature, 2014; Stroud, 2014). When personal information is included alongside pictures, a situation is created wherein victims can be more easily identified and located. It then in turn becomes easier for potential harassers and stalkers to find victims. Additionally, this personal information may cause these photos to pop up in simple searches of the victims for all potential employers, acquaintances, colleagues, etc. to find. The possible widespread dissemination of such personal identifying information can result in devastating consequences.

Victims of nonconsensual pornography have been blackmailed, lost educational opportunities, been fired from their jobs, changed schools, and have been stalked and harassed following the distribution of their photos (Citron & Franks, 2014; Cyber Civil Rights Initiative, 2014). Psychological damage from victimization may include the development of depression, anxiety, and/or eating disorders (Citron & Franks, 2014). Some victims have changed their names or altered their appearance following the distribution of their photos (Cyber Civil Rights Initiative, 2014; Goode, 2013; Kopf, 2013). The nonconsensual sharing of nude photographs has been considered by some to be on the continuum of sexual violence (Powell, 2010),

and some have even gone so far as to call it “digital sexual assault” (Wilson, 2015) or “cyber-rape” (endrevengeporn.org, 2016).

## **Current legal issues**

Despite potential consequences, only 38 states in the United States and the District of Columbia have currently passed laws concerning the nonconsensual sharing of nude photographs (State Revenge Porn Laws– C. A. Goldberg, 2017). There are many states that do not have laws to protect nonconsensual pornography victims. Victims in states without legal protection(s) have very limited options in seeking retribution. In light of the pervasiveness of nonconsensual pornography, and the negative consequences associated with victimization, research on this phenomenon may be helpful in terms of informing policy.

Evaluating nonconsensual pornography websites and the images that exist on these sites may be useful information when policymakers craft laws, as well as when evaluating how effective existing laws are for helping victims seek justice. As some of the laws are currently written, they may leave some victims unable to seek justice. For instance, some laws in the United States (e.g. Utah [Distribution of Intimate Images Act of 2014], North Dakota [N.D.C.C. § 12.1-17-07.2]) specify that specific body parts (i.e. genitals, pubic area, female breast) be exposed with “less than an opaque” covering. However, an image that was nonconsensually disseminated but does not have one of these specific body parts visible may still cause harm to the victim. For instance, a victim may still suffer humiliation or other negative consequences as a result of this shared image. In addition, Arkansas law specifies that in order to be charged with distributing an image of a sexual nature, it must be done in order to “harass, frighten, intimidate, threaten, or abuse a family or household member or a person in a current or former dating relationship” (Arkansas Code § 5-26-302). This law leaves victims who are unable to prove the existence of a previous dating relationship, or those in a casual relationship, unable to pursue charges against someone who has unwillingly shared an image.

Even in states where nonconsensual pornography laws exist, victims may be more successful and have more immediate results when using federal copyright law (Levendowski, 2014). Since it is estimated that 80% of nonconsensual pornography images are “selfies” – images taken by victims of themselves – victims can report copyright infringement when their images have been distributed without their approval (Levendowski, 2014). Additionally, filing takedown requests does not require that victims register their images for copyright or hire lawyers. If a victim is willing to register a copyright for his or her image(s), he or she can file lawsuits for monetary damages (Levendowski, 2014).

## **Gender differences in victimization**

Although some have argued that men are more likely to have their intimate images shared (see McAfee, 2013), most research suggests that victims of nonconsensual pornography are overwhelmingly women (Citron & Franks, 2014; Franks, 2011;

Powell, 2010). This gender disparity in victimization is not altogether surprising when taking into account society's differing expectations for men and women. Women have long been expected to be gatekeepers of sexuality (Wiederman, 2005) and protect their sexuality while holding off the advances of men. Conversely, men are expected to be the initiators of sexual activity and to be sexually more aggressive (Kim et al., 2007). For example, if a woman were to be the initiator of sexual activity, she would be perceived more negatively than if a man were to be the initiator. When considered within the context of nonconsensual pornography, it may be the case that women are viewed as acting in a sexually assertive way when sending nude photographs or allowing nude photographs to be taken. Moreover, women may be perceived as deserving of any punishment they receive if they act in a sexual manner.

In addition to being punished for acting in a sexual way, women may be more likely to be objectified than men. By posting images to nonconsensual pornography websites, distributors encourage viewers to digitally consume and critically dissect and judge the bodies of victims. Sexual objectification occurs when a woman is treated as if her body, body parts, or sexual functions represent her worth, meaning women are viewed simply as objects available for the pleasure of others (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). Much interdisciplinary research has explored sexual objectification of women in mainstream Western media, as well as the effects these pervasive images have on women and girls (Author et al., 2004; Bordo, 1993; Ferris, Smith, Greenberg, & Smith, 2007; Frederickson & Roberts, 1997; Kim et al., 2007; Krassas, Blauwkamp, & Wesselink, 2003; Ward, 2002; Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2006). The critical evaluation of female bodies contributes to anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and other mental illnesses among victims (Citron & Franks, 2014; Fredickson & Roberts, 1997). Disseminating explicit photos and allowing for commenting and rating of these photos may promote the sexual objectification of women.

It is common for nonconsensual pornography websites to allow photos to be ranked or to allow commenting and/or discussion boards where users can comment on and rate victims' images. Such ranking systems typically do not provide explicit directions for ranking the photos, but by the nature of the comments (and the body centric content), it can be assumed rankings are based on how pleasing viewers find the victims' bodies. Commenting on and critiquing explicit photographs allows for the continued objectification of victims – especially women. This participation in the evaluation of female bodies reinforces sexual gender stereotypes and patriarchal ideology by supporting the sexual objectification of victims (Citron & Franks, 2014; Stroud, 2014; Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011). The anonymity of the Internet helps to perpetuate this behavior, while making it easier to amplify levels of criticism and violence contained within comments directed toward the photographed individuals. As noted by Franks (2011, p. 260), nonconsensual pornography and other malicious online behavior targeting women compromises their “ability to share cyberspace on equal terms with men, and amplifies the sexual stereotyping and discrimination women experience in the offline world.”

Because consent can be ambiguous, many women in situations where consent is not explicit are seen to be at fault for “leading on” their partners (Muehlenhard, 1988). Distributors argue that in consenting to take or pose for a picture, victims are permitting the distributors to do whatever they please with the image (Citron & Franks, 2014). Despite this, although a victim may grant “consent” by posing for a photo or taking and sending a photo, this is often done under the implied understanding that the photo will remain private. Many of these victims may have assumed that the disseminator would never share the photo with anyone else. Additionally, even in instances where the victim explicitly tells the disseminator not to share the photos, it may be very difficult for the victim to prove that this sentiment was in fact expressed. In the instance of nonconsensual pornography, the mildest criticisms of victims frame them as naïve while harshest criticisms frame them as sluts who get what they deserve for playing an active role in their own victimization (Citron & Franks, 2014; Stroud, 2014). These criticisms again focus on the idea that it is justified to punish women who act in a sexual manner.

## **Purpose**

Some websites are dedicated to hosting and promoting nonconsensual pornography. It is unknown to what extent these websites function for the purpose of explicitly harming victims as opposed to serving some other function. In an attempt to better understand the nature of this victimization, we sought to correct this oversight and expand the general knowledge concerning these sites. One way to assess this is to consider the nature of personal information about the victim included within a post, as well as with what frequency this information is being provided. A survey conducted by the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative (2014) found that 59% of victims reported that their full name was included with their images, which means that a victim’s photo is likely to appear when his or her name is entered into a search engine (e.g. Google, Yahoo!). Conversely, some victims may have little to no personal information being shared. The current study examined the prevalence of personal information sharing across these websites.

Though some states have passed laws that restrict nonconsensual pornography, no research to date has examined the nature and content of these websites. To this end, the current study examined the content of websites that supported the distribution of images and were advertised as nonconsensual pornography websites. We used 134 photographs from seven nonconsensual pornography websites to gain insight into the content of nonconsensual pornography and nonconsensual pornography websites. Collected data included descriptions of photos posted (e.g. “face visible,” “waist up”), types of victims’ personal information included (e.g. first name, last name, social media links), demographics of the people victimized, and viewers’ comments. Website layouts and policies were also documented. Despite this research being primarily exploratory in nature, it was anticipated that these websites would have more images of women than men because women are more often victims of crimes of a sexual nature.



## Method

Websites were located by reading victim's stories, which were identified through various magazine articles and the *endvengexporn.org* website. In these cases, victims would often list the original site their photo had been posted on at the start of their victimization. To increase the number of websites included in the study, websites were also located by utilizing relevant search words on various search engines (e.g. Google, Yahoo!, Bing). Revenge-porn-related keywords were used (e.g. "revenge porn," "nude ex," "nude photos of my ex," "places to share nude photos of my ex") in order to locate websites that were advertised as revenge porn websites. Thus, all websites used in the analysis were either advertised as or identified by victims as revenge porn websites. Only websites based in the United States were used in the analysis.

In order for a website to be considered for analysis, it needed to either include a warning about not posting child pornography or make a statement about people in the images being at least 18 years of age. This ensured the research team was not engaging in illegal activity or documenting information including minors. Only one website lacked a specific warning against posting pictures of underage individuals, and so the researchers did not continue on to the analysis stage for this website.

The research team successfully located and coded content for seven websites that met inclusion criteria. Each site's rules, regulations, and layout were then further explored. Upon preliminary examination, many nonconsensual pornography websites featured advertisements for pornography, a search engine for viewer's preferences, and a list of categories to visit. Information collected included websites' rules and regulations, the types of photos allowed to be posted, whether a reason for posting was provided, whether or not a site included some type of ranking or voting system, ability to comment on photos, external links provided within a site, photo removal policies, as well as information regarding the photo submission process (i.e. what information was required of the submitter and the person in the photo). Once the analysis of the photos had begun, the researchers would analyze the 25 most recently posted photos on each website.

A team of two researchers conducted the website analysis simultaneously. Each rater would evaluate the content on the page individually, expressing her (all raters were female) opinion about how to complete each aspect of the coding sheet. In the case of disagreements, each coder explained her reasoning and the two raters reached an agreement. In order to evaluate interrater reliability, these instances of disagreement were noted on the coding sheet to symbolize an initial disagreement between coders on the content being analyzed. Interrater reliability was calculated to be 99.9%.

Concurrent analysis was performed for a number of reasons. First, because nonconsensual pornography websites are frequently shut down, analysis was a time-sensitive task; if time had been taken between each researcher's coding of site content, this would have risked changes to the website's content or even the complete removal of a website before the other researcher could review the same webpage. Second, this allowed the researchers to decipher the suitability of the content (i.e. ensure these websites were not self-submissions for amateur

pornography websites). Lastly, this ensured that disagreements between raters were resolved immediately, since it was known that a third rater may not have been able to access the websites in the future.

A total of 134 photos were coded between 28 April and 2 December 2014. Out of the seven websites, raters coded a total of 25 photos each for four websites, 24 photos were coded on one website, and five photos each were coded on the remaining two websites. For the current study, raters gathered both general and specific information about the website and posts. Demographic information for both the individual posting and the individual in the photo were collected, along with a detailed description of the explicit photo. Raters also gathered comments made about the photos, as well as anything else the raters considered notable. More specifically, raters noted whether the images (a) had comments that were threatening in nature (explicit or implicit); (b) had some “compliment” toward the victim (e.g. “nice little package,” “like them tities [sic] a lot”); (c) featured some negative critique of the victim and/or the victim’s body (e.g. “that’s one beat 33 old”); (d) called the victim slut, bitch, or a whore; (e) mentioned the person who posted the photo; or (f) were negative or derogatory in nature.

While the majority of statements clearly fit into one or more previously identified categories, this was not the case for the derogatory category. At times, raters found it difficult to discern whether or not a statement was derogatory. Specifically, since raters personally judged the majority of comments to be of a derogatory nature, it was especially challenging to distinguish between comments meant to “compliment” the victim (e.g. “damn hot lil slut,” “defo worth a cumdump,” “worth a rape”) and those which were strictly insulting or hostile (e.g. “do some grooming bitch,” “uglier than sh\*\*”). For the purposes of this study, “derogatory” was defined as something clearly intending to be insulting or hostile, which often included aggressive language used toward the individual(s) in the picture. As was the case for the website coding, when disagreements occurred, each rater discussed her viewpoint, and the raters came to a conclusion based on the established operational definition.

## Results

Results indicated that 48 (35.8%) of the photo posts included the reason the photo had been submitted online. Of these 48 photos, 21.6% ( $n=29$ ) were submitted simply because the person in the photo was an “ex,” 21.6% ( $n=29$ ) for reasons such as the person was “hot” or “sexy,” 6% ( $n=8$ ) because the individual was unfaithful, and 14.9% ( $n=20$ ) because the person in the photo was a “slut.” Table 1 provides a summary of content analysis results for the seven different websites. Table 2 provides a summary of content analysis results for the 134 photos that were analyzed.

### *Demographic information*

Results indicate that even though most nonconsensual pornography websites allowed for submissions of both men and women (six out of seven websites in



**Table 1.** Website content analysis information.

Content evaluated	Categories used	Sum
"Before" screen	Present	1
	Absent	6
Allowable submissions	Women only	1
	Women and men	6
Ranking system	Present	2
	Absent	5
Redirect links	Present	2
	Absent	5
Removal services offered	Yes	2
	No	5
Commenting allowed	Yes	5
	No	2
Search option	Present	5
	Absent	2
Links to related sites	Present	4
	Absent	3
Perpetrator name required	Yes	1
	No	6
Submission requires post title	Yes	3
	No	4
Warning against child porn	Present	3
	Absent	4
Limitations for posting	Yes	5
	No	2
Advertising present	Yes	5
	No	2
Ability of reporting photos	Yes	3
	No	4

the current analysis), a majority of victims were women (91.8%,  $n = 123$ ; men,  $n = 10$ ; man and woman,  $n = 1$ ). In many cases, it was clear the photo had been self-taken (48.5%,  $n = 65$ ).

While none of the websites required the photo submitter to provide any identifying information, one website required a submitter email address. The majority of photos posted on these websites did not list identifying information about the person who submitted the photo. In fact, the only information for the person submitting the photo provided was the submitter's first name, which was only provided in 18.7% ( $n = 25$ ) of photos. Alternatively, for the individual

**Table 2.** Photo data content analysis information.

Content evaluated	Categories used	Sum	%
Reason for posting photo provided	Yes	48	35.8
	No	85	63.4
Victim gender	Male	10	7.5
	Female	123	91.8
	Both male and female	1	0.7
Submitter known	Yes	50	37.3
	No	84	62.7
Poster's name (first) provided	Yes	25	18.7
	No	109	81.3
Victim's name (first) provided	Yes	25	18.7
	No	109	81.3
Victim's last name provided	Yes	24	17.9
	No	110	82.1
Victim's age provided	Yes	24	17.9
	No	110	82.1
Victim's city provided	Yes	24	17.9
	No	110	82.1
Victim's occupation provided	Yes	2	1.5
	No	132	98.5
Photographer	Victim (self-taken)	65	48.5
	Other	61	45.5
	Can't tell	3	5.2
Ratings on photo	Yes	33	24.6
	No	101	75.4
Number of views provided	Yes	74	55.2
	No	60	44.8

photographed, 18.7% ( $n=25$ ) of photos included the person's first name and 17.9% ( $n=24$ ) of photos included the person's last name, age, and city. A Pearson Chi square analysis was conducted to evaluate whether or not the reason for posting was related to the presence of a victim's name. A significant difference was revealed,  $\chi^2(1) = 42.19, p < .001$ , such that a photo was more likely to include the victim's name when the reason for posting the image was provided ( $n=48$ ) than when the reason for posting the image was not provided ( $n=86$ ).

Of the 134 photos included in analyses, 108 had some sort of title or label for the photo. The most common information provided in a title included some type of insult (e.g. "cheating, man-eating bitch," 26.9%,  $n=36$ ), followed by some type of language identifying the person in the photo as an ex (e.g. "former ex-girlfriend," 25.4%,  $n=34$ ), and/or mentioned the body of the individual in the photo (21.6%,

$n = 29$ ). Eighteen (13.4%) of the 108 photos with titles or labels were some type of “compliment” (e.g. “sexy Italian blonde on vacation”); 4.5% ( $n = 6$ ) included the victim’s name in the title, and 3.0% ( $n = 4$ ) included the words “me” or “my,” suggesting these may have been self-submitted images.

### *Financial gain*

Five of the seven websites included in analyses had advertising. Advertising included but was not limited to ads for Viagra, penis enhancement, other pornography websites, and other nonconsensual pornography websites (e.g. “GF revenge 100% real footage”). None of the websites examined appeared to charge a fee to remove a photo from the website.

### *Commenting, ranking, and number of views*

All websites either allowed photos to be ranked in some fashion (two of seven, i.e. “1 (worst)–10 (best)” or via “liking” or “disliking” an image) or allowed commenting on photos (six of seven). Photograph comments were also collected and analyzed. The majority (62.7%,  $n = 84$ ) of photos allowed users to comment on them. The most common commenting themes included referencing the victim’s body (39.3%,  $n = 33$ ) and/or some type of threat (e.g. describing what the person would do to the victim, 36.9%,  $n = 31$ ); of these, 0.07% ( $n = 6$ ) included an explicit threat (e.g. “I would love the [*sic*] punch that look of [*sic*] her face while I’m sodomizing her dry”). It is interesting to note that victims were only threatened when the reason for posting was provided.

Roughly an equal number of comments included a “compliment” (e.g. “good looking bitch,” 32.1%,  $n = 27$ ) and/or a negative critique of the victim’s body (e.g. “disgusting, fat sloppy bitch,” 29.8%,  $n = 25$ ). Fifteen comments (17.9%) included derogatory language regarding the sexual behaviors of the person in the photo (e.g. “bitch,” “slut,” “whore”); however, no comments mention the individual who posted/distributed the photo. Comments on photos including male victims include either words or descriptions that suggest the victims are homosexual (e.g. “gayest tatto [*sic*] ever,” “self post fag,” “i [*sic*] would buttfuck this beaner then have him swallow my speacial [*sic*] sauce”). However, from what raters could decipher from the posters’ descriptions, two of the three victims were in relationships with women (e.g. “...the need to steal women and cheat on his wife”).

There was a strong correlation between the reason for posting being provided and the number of times an image was viewed such that if no reason for posting the image was provided, the image was viewed less, Pearson  $r = .717$ ,  $p < .001$ . A Pearson Chi square analysis was conducted to evaluate whether the likelihood of providing a reason for posting the image(s) was related to whether a site allowed commenting on individual photos. A significant difference was revealed,  $\chi^2(1) = 44.52$ ,  $p < .001$ , such that a photo was more likely to include the reason for posting the image when commenting on the image was allowed ( $n = 84$ ) than when commenting on the image was not allowed ( $n = 50$ ).

The majority of photos (55.2%,  $n = 74$ ) listed the number of times a specific photo had been viewed; number of views ranged from one up to 40,693 ( $M = 5,077.86$ ) views. An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare number of views when the reason for posting the image was provided and when the reason for posting was absent. There was a significant difference in the number of views when the reason for posting was provided, such that images had a higher number of views ( $M = 15,195.39$ ,  $SD = 11,975.37$ ) than when the reason for posting was not provided ( $M = 575.06$ ,  $SD = 1252.72$ ),  $t(22.22) = 5.86$ ,  $p < .001$  (equal variances not assumed).

## Discussion

Despite claims by a McAfee (2013) report that men are more likely to have their nude images disseminated, results from the current study support previous research that suggests women make up the majority of nonconsensual pornography victims (Citron & Franks, 2014; Powell, 2010). Using 1182 online interviews with 18–54-year-old adults in the United States, McAfee (2013) reported that not only were men more likely to report sending imitate photos to their partners, but they were also more likely to report being threatened to have their photos shared online, as well as more likely to have those threats actually carried out.

Although six of the seven websites allowed photos of both men and women to be submitted to the site, images were overwhelmingly of women. Furthermore, one site specifically targeted submissions of women and did not allow for submissions of male images. As such, it appears that women are being disproportionately victimized on these websites. The results from this study offer support for the idea put forth by Franks (2011), which suggests cyberspace amplifies gender inequalities.

Tolman (2002) suggests that girls and women receive mixed messages regarding their sexuality from society. Girls and women are encouraged to gain popularity, particularly through being sexy; however, if they engage in sexual activity (especially with multiple partners), a loss of status may result. Therefore, girls and women are told they must be sexy while not being sexual, further perpetuating the notion of a sexual double standard for women.

While it would be worthwhile to compare number of views, comments, and other aspects of the images for male and female victims in order to evaluate this notion, due to the small number of photos including male victims, statistical analyses comparing male and female photos are inappropriate. It is interesting to note that comments related to photos with male victims included either words or descriptions that suggest the victims are homosexual men, despite the fact that two of the three male victims appeared to be in relationships with women. Future research considering male victims of nonconsensual pornography would be beneficial.

Our examination found 35.8% of the submitters specified a reason for posting the photo (such as the person in the photo cheated). Additionally, when a reason was given, it was correlated with having a greater number of views and being more likely to allow commenting on photos. This may represent a successful attempt

to shift blame toward the victims. If blame can be easily shifted to victims through these websites, it may be the case that, when attempting to achieve justice, the victims have more difficulty receiving support and having the perpetrator punished.

By providing a rationale for posting the photo, the perpetrators are assigning some culpability to their victims. If perpetrators are successful in assigning culpability to their (usually female) victims, it may reduce the extent to which these women are seen as victims and make it seem as though the victims are the ones responsible for the situation. This also may amplify the notion of women serving as gatekeepers of sexuality, where women are already being punished for acting in the sexual way of taking the photo in the first place. Additionally, in this study, victims were only threatened via comments on photos when the reason for posting was provided. This may mean that among those who frequent these types of websites, blame has been successfully shifted toward the victims of these cases due to the “justification” offered by the submitter. Future research assessing the assignment of victim blame and responsibility in these cases would be informative in terms of assessing legal culpability. More specifically, future research may benefit from examining nonconsensual pornography through the lens of just world beliefs, which suggests some individuals may be more deserving of their victimization than other victims (Lerner, 1980). For example, those who readily endorse just world beliefs may be more likely to place a greater level of blame on a victim due to their assumption that the victim must have done something deserving of his or her victimization (e.g. taking and sending the photograph in the first place, being unfaithful within the relationship).

### *Nonconsensual pornography and financial gain*

Although none of the websites examined appeared to have a photo removal fee, many of the websites did not make the removal process easy. For many of the websites, in order to request the removal of a photo, the removal link or person to contact for removal was buried within the website. It may be the case that the difficulty in finding the removal services greatly increases victim distress. It may go so far as to encourage the victim to give up on removing the photo before ever finding the removal directions. Furthermore, although none of the websites included in the current study were charging money to have photos removed, the websites still had advertising alongside the photos. Such advertising exploits the web traffic of people looking at the photos and generates money for the website owners.

Overall, the website owners have the potential to make large sums of money from the victimization of others. For example, according to a BBC news article, Hunter Moore was earning up to \$20,000 monthly simply from the advertising revenue on his website, IsAnyoneUp.com (Lee, 2012). When large sums of money can be made from these types of websites, it may increase the level of motivation for individuals to become involved with these types of websites, and therefore increase the numbers of these sites that are available to the public. If website administrators were unable to profit from nonconsensual pornography sites, they might be less motivated to operate these websites.

### *Commenting, ranking, and viewing of photos*

Many websites included a section where visitors could comment or leave a ranking of each photo. The comments and rankings of victims highlight the objectification of women that is taking place within these cases by encouraging anonymous viewers to express their opinions of the victims with whom they likely have never interacted. Many of the comments were derogatory or threatening in nature, or referred to women by specific body parts instead of as individuals. For instance, the commenters often analyzed the physical qualities of the victims while completely ignoring the pain and suffering that these comments and pictures may be causing the women. Even when offering a “compliment” about the victim’s body, this behavior still highlights the objectification of women. For example, commenters would occasionally post sexual acts they would perform on the individual in the photo, even though the women did not consent for these acts to occur.

Even when these photos are on the websites for a short period of time, they have the potential to accrue a large number of views. The average number of views was 5077.86; this large number shows the high impact and widespread humiliation that may be caused by these photos. This number is exacerbated when considering that these photos can be copied or downloaded by each viewer, and saved or shared on a different website. This creates a situation in which these photos have the potential to spread rapidly through different mediums (Goode, 2013). Furthermore, when taking into account the fact that the researchers only analyzed the most recent posts on the websites, the amount of actual image views, and subsequent ‘real-world’ reach, may actually be significantly greater.

Some of the websites allowed for personal information about the victims, such as names, city of residence, social media accounts, and/or career information, to be listed on the websites. The results of this study found that when a reason for posting the image was given, the victim’s name was more likely to be present. Although not surprising that a victim’s name is more likely to be included when someone provides an explanation for posting the photo, including this information may result in more extreme consequences for the victim. When a reason for posting the photo is given, it may give viewers a stronger reason to attempt to stalk or contact the victims. For example, if a website viewer feels as though it is his/her duty to harass anyone who has cheated on their ex, including personal information may make it easier for this harassment to occur. The reason for posting may also cause the website viewers to feel a personal connection to the poster of the photo, which may lead to less empathy for victims. Future research should examine this possibility.

The inclusion of personal identifying information with nonconsensual pornography may put victims at an increased risk for stalking and harassment by allowing site visitors to more easily track down victims. Furthermore, if these victims can be more easily identified, it may put them at an increased risk to suffer consequences such as losing jobs or job opportunities because employers have found these photos. One example of this occurred in Ohio when a fifth-grade school teacher lost her job following the distribution of nude photographs that were stolen from



her iPhone (Sherman, 2013). More recently, a teacher from South Carolina was forced to resign following an incident in which a student disseminated explicit photographs stolen from her cell phone (Adcox, 2016). Taken together, it is clear that nonconsensual pornography creates a situation in which victims can be repeatedly victimized through every viewing and download of their photos, while the perpetrators can remain anonymous and hide behind a screenname.

Of the websites analyzed, five of the websites had a search option for photos. This option allows for easier victimization of victims who are posted on the site; instead of searching through hundreds or thousands of photos, individuals can go to the photo they want almost immediately. When websites allow for an easy access pass to these photos, the victimization may increase because acquaintances who hear about the existence of a nude photo on a site now have an easy way to find these photos.

### *Issues related to photograph ownership*

Of the photos where it was clear who the photographer was, 48.5% of the photos were self-taken while 45.5% were taken by someone not in the photo. This finding highlights the difficulty of determining ownership of these photos. It is common for women to have photos of their bodies shared when they did not take the photo. In fact, it is likely that some of the photos were taken without the knowledge or consent of the victims. When these women try to get the photos removed, if they are in a state that does not have laws regulating nonconsensual pornography, they may have difficulty removing the photos because the photos may be considered the photographer's property, despite being the subject of the photograph. Further, this finding helps highlight the complexity of some situations, and shows why it is difficult to design laws that successfully protect victims, whether they took the photo or not.

### *Limitations*

Although the current study is the first known to evaluate nonconsensual pornography websites, it is not without limitations. First, not all victims may have their photos posted on nonconsensual pornography websites. Instead, some victims may have photos posted on other social media websites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram) or sent through other forms of communication (e.g. text messages, email). These individuals may or may not suffer the same consequences (e.g. embarrassment, harassment, loss of employment) as victims on nonconsensual pornography websites. The current study only examines victims on nonconsensual pornography websites. Second, some of the photos on these websites may have been self-posted, and therefore, these individuals' photos are online of their own volition. Based upon the titles and comments with the photos, the researchers conclude that this is likely a minority of the photos analyzed.

Due to the vulgar nature of nonconsensual pornography, these websites are often removed from service. Thus, the decision was made to have two coders

working side by side to analyze the same images and website. While this has its benefits (e.g. assurance that the images being analyzed were the same and the website would not have been removed before the second coder's analysis), it may have also worked to increase conformity, especially in situations in which the content being considered was ambiguous. Additionally, due to the sudden removal of nonconsensual pornography websites, many websites used in the analysis may no longer be available, making it impossible to reexamine the same websites and images. Despite this, nonconsensual pornography websites can be continuously created under new URLs, resulting in repeated revictimization for these individuals. Finally, although data regarding the submitter's reason for posting the images were collected, it is impossible to determine the true motivation of those who disseminate explicit images without consent. It could be, as suggested by some of the comments, to get back at an ex, to boast about a conquest, or possibly even to make money as a result of advertising. Future research should consider perpetrator motivation for disseminating these images. Further, it is not known how these images originated. As such, we cannot establish if the person submitting the photo was sent the image, took the image him/herself, or whether the image was legally or illegally obtained. It may be that perpetrators who illegally obtain these images do so to generate increased web traffic, which may result in increased revenue on the basis of advertising.

## Conclusion

Limitations notwithstanding, the current analysis adds to the literature by providing a clearer description of content of nonconsensual pornography websites. The analysis of the content of these websites provides a better understanding of the information that is disseminated on these websites. Additionally, it helps to highlight the large number of photos on these sites. Many of the sites had photos uploaded so often that the coders could not come back later to finish the analysis, and instead had to perform their analysis in one sitting. Most nonconsensual pornography research focuses on specific cases instead of the bigger picture of the experience of these victims (e.g. Burris, 2014; Franks, 2015; Goode, 2013). Focusing on the general information put onto these websites helps increase public awareness of victims' experiences instead of focusing on single case studies. This study helps to highlight the extreme and malicious nature of these websites. In order to be able to help victims of nonconsensual pornography, we must first have a thorough understanding of the problem.

Understanding the nature of the information shared about victims on these sites may in turn help to shape policy intended to help victims and highlight some of the specific issues victims may face. For example, knowing that many of the comments can be threatening in nature will highlight the need for a victim's protection. Additionally, many of the laws require the victim to prove malicious intent; the current analysis shows that not all perpetrators post images maliciously. In light of the potential consequences for the victims, and the apparent lack of consent, future legal policy should be modified to incorporate online victimization.

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