

Rape as Spectator Sport and Creepshot Entertainment: Social Media and the Valorization of Lack of Consent

by Kelly Oliver

Lack of consent is valorized within popular culture to the point that sexual assault has become a spectator sport and creepshot entertainment on social media. Indeed, the valorization of nonconsensual sex has reached the extreme where sex with unconscious girls, especially accompanied by photographs as trophies, has become a goal of some boys and men.

In an official trailer for the film *Pitch Perfect 2* (2015), Rebel Wilson's character "Fat Amy" is shown dancing at a campus party when the boy she is dancing with asks if she wants to have sex later. She says "no," but then gives him a suggestive wink. He looks confused and asks whether that means no or yes since she said "no," but then winked. She responds "absolutely not," and then winks again, suggesting that she doesn't mean what she said. What message does this send? When girls say "no," they really mean "yes"? Certainly, Amy's "no" is open for interpretation. In 2010 at Yale, fraternity brothers marched around the freshman dorms chanting, "No means yes, yes means anal" (Thomson-DeVeaux). Their interpretation of "no" and "yes" is clear.

The Yale case is not an isolated incident. Consider a chant used at St. Mary's University in Halifax to welcome new students: "SMU boys, we like them young. Y is for your sister, O is for oh so tight, U is for underage, N is for no consent, G is for grab that ass" (Williams 2013). A fraternity at Texas Tech was suspended for flying a banner that read "No Means Yes" (Schwarz). In 2013, another frat was suspended at Georgia Tech for distributing an email with the subject line "Luring your rapebait," which ended, "I want to see everyone succeed at the next couple parties" (Schwarz). And, in 2014 at Williams and Mary College, fraternity members sent around an email message, "never mind the extremities that surround it, the 99% of horrendously illogical bullshit that makes up the modern woman, consider only the 1%, the snatch" (McCarthy). The list goes on.

These examples suggest an aggressive campaign on the part of some fraternities to insist "No" means "Yes," meaning consent is not only irrelevant, but also undesired. In the St. Mary's chant, the lack of consent is openly valued, "N is for no consent." Actively seeking sex without consent, sometimes even admitting it is rape, turns them on. Whatever their actual desires, these college men are *saying* that they want nonconsensual sex. In fraternity culture, it seems their manhood and masculinity is dependent upon at least *saying*—or chanting—that they want forced sex, or sex with unconscious girls, if not also acting on it.¹ As we will see, sex with unconscious girls has become valorized in fraternity culture. Indeed, the valorization of nonconsensual sex has reached the extreme where sex with unconscious girls, especially accompanied by photographs as trophies, has become a goal of some college men.

In this essay, I argue that lack of consent is valorized within popular culture to the point that sexual assault has become a spectator sport and creepshot entertainment on social media. I trace this valorization of lack of consent back to the 14th Century Sleeping Beauty myth, on the one hand, and link it to pornographic fantasies of necrophilia and rape, on the other. I discuss the specific harms of "party rape" to sexual assault victims who are unconscious at the time and discover the violation of their bodies through photographs on social media. Finally, I consider how recording rather than reporting may become a new standard for prosecuting rape cases. Although rape and the valorization of it are not new, as we will see, the valorization of lack of consent is more public than ever. What used to be chanted in fraternity basements has taken to college quads. Furthermore, social media has simultaneously made rape and assault more visible and made it a form of social entertainment.

Pornography, Rape, and the Debasement of Women

Several studies have shown that many sexual predators buy into the pornographic fantasy that women enjoy being raped, what Nancy Bauer calls the "pornutopia" where everyone gets sexual satisfaction, even in rape

(Bauer). One study concludes, “rapists, or men identified as unusually likely to rape, are characterized by the belief that rape is not aversive to women—that, in fact, women desire and enjoy it” (Hamilton and Yee 112). Interviews with convicted rapists, and clinical reports indicate that many rapists “perceive their victims as deriving pleasure from the assault” (Hamilton and Yee 112).² Young men’s attitudes towards consent are formed by exposure to pornography, especially easily accessed Internet porn, in which rape victims are depicted as enjoying sexual assault (see Cuthbertson 2015). In the world of pornography, the desires of the aggressor turns out to be the secret desires of the victim, whether or not she originally says “no.” Of course, within the pornutopia, the agents are men who force their desires on women; and the fantasy is that women enjoy it, that “no” really does mean “yes, yes, yes.”

This is the generous interpretation of the “No Means Yes” campaign on college campuses, namely, that these college men really believe that girls and women want to be raped. Perhaps fraternity brothers or college athletes who are prone to sexual assault have bought into the pornutopia, and at some level really believe that “No” mean “Yes.” They have watched enough pornography to be convinced by the fantasy that whatever a woman says, and whether or not she is conscious, she enjoys it. The progression from aggressively trying to pressure girls and women to have sex, to using drugs and alcohol to weaken their defenses, has become the extreme of rendering them unconscious in order to sexually assault them, not only without their consent, but also at times, without their knowledge. For, within the pornutopia, the fantasy is that women enjoy violent sex, even abuse, conscious or not. If it turns him on, then within the logic of the pornutopia it turns her on too. This pornutopic fantasy of mutual satisfaction becomes a justification for acting on their violent desires.

The less generous interpretation is that they get off on debasing women, especially through rape. Slogans such as “no means yes,” and “N is for no consent,” suggest that rape and forced sex are desirable because they are debasing. Some studies show that men who rape women are more likely to have hostile attitudes towards women. The same is true for men who have nonconsensual sex with women. Researchers have found a strong correlation between negative attitudes and disrespect towards women and the proclivity for sexual assault (Lisak & Miller, Edwards et.al.). One study concludes, in terms of attitudes towards women, college men who say they would rape a woman if they could get away with it, and those who say they would force a woman to have intercourse, but don’t call it rape, were distinguished only by levels of hostility and disrespect (Edwards et.al. 188). Whether college men who force nonconsensual sex buy into by the pornutopic fantasy that women enjoy sexual assault whether they are conscious or unconscious, or they enjoy abusing women, it is clear that these college men valorize nonconsensual sex.

Recent cases of “creepshots” (photographs of girls and women taken and distributed without their consent or knowledge) found on fraternity websites, for example at Penn State, confirm the conclusion that men who prey on women sexually also enjoying debasing them. For, along with photographs of women in extremely compromising sexual positions, these websites include derogatory comments about the women by fraternity members. Or, consider media reports of videos taken by perpetrators in the high profile Vanderbilt rape case, which suggest that the college athletes who sexually assaulted an unconscious woman in a dorm room made derogatory remarks and jokes while engaging in the abuse. The same is true of the Steubenville, Ohio case where high school football players assaulted an unconscious girl while bystanders joked and made disparaging remarks about her. In this case, and others, perpetrators and/or by-standers have reportedly also peed on the unconscious victims, which suggests further denigration of these girls’ and women’s bodies.

The Fantasy of the Dead Girl and Sleeping Beauty

What are we to make of this desire to rape an unconscious “dead” girl? The fantasy of sex with an unconscious girl is centuries old, mythical even, with its first recorded roots in an anonymous 14th-century Catalan poem entitled *Frayre de Joy e Sor de Plaser* (Léglu 102). In this version of the Sleeping Beauty fairytale, after the beautiful virgin daughter of the emperor dies suddenly, her parents place her in a tower accessible by a bridge of glass. When Prince Frayre de Joy sees the sleeping beauty’s smiling face, he “has sex repeatedly with the corpse and gets her pregnant. The young prince attributes consent to the princess by kissing her a hundred times until her lips move in response (Léglu 106–7). As the legend of Sleeping Beauty shows, consent can become a male projection into his victim, whom he imagines as a properly active sexual partner, whereby he hallucinates consent,

even pleasure. Sleeping Beauty may be a fairytale, but fairytales tell us something important about our cultural imaginary. The 14th-century tale of the rape of Sleeping Beauty, construed as mutually consenting sexual pleasure, is all too relevant to contemporary scenes of party rape of unconscious girls and women, and rape pornography. In terms of attitudes toward rape, in some ways, we are still in the Middle Ages.

Newsweek magazine reports, “nearly one-third of college men admit they might rape a woman if they could get away with it” (qtd. in. Bekiempis). The results of the study, which found that approximately 32 percent of college men said they would force a woman to have sex, but only 13 percent of those said they would rape a woman (Edwards et. al.). This demonstrates the power of the word “rape.” It also shows that the majority of men who would force a woman to have sex don’t consider it rape. Indeed, if recent revelations brought to light via social media photos and videos are any indication, groups of young people happily watch, and even record, unconscious women being sexually assaulted without intervening or calling police. In another study, half of college men admit to using aggressive tactics to have sex (Wolitzky-Taylor et.al. 582).

As one study concludes, “college campuses foster date rape cultures, which are environments that support beliefs conducive to rape and increase risk factors related to sexual violence” (Burnett et.al.; see also Sanday). The existence of rape myths such as “victims are responsible for their own rapes,” “victims are sluts and are asking for it,” or “no” really means “yes,” are prevalent on college campuses and part of the culture of fraternities and sports cultures. Although colleges and universities are institutions of higher learning, producing the most educated people in the country, they also breed rape myths at a higher rate than other cultural institutions. “Although rape myths are a social and cultural phenomenon that exists beyond the college campus, research suggests that athletics and fraternal organizations, replete on college campuses, are related to stronger rape-supportive attitudes” (Burnett et.al.; see also Bleecker & Murnen; Sanday). College athletics and fraternity culture perpetuate a classic double standard whereby men who have sex, even force sex, are “studs,” whereas women who have sex are sluts (Burnett, Adams-Curtis & Forbes). In addition, several studies indicate that aggressive sports are correlated with aggressive sex: “College men who play aggressive sports in high school are more likely to accept rape myths, are more accepting of violence, and engage in more sexual coercion toward dating partners compared to other college men” (Forbes et. al., Burnett). The combination of a party atmosphere with alcohol flowing, and the acceptance of rape myths that include victim blaming or fantasies that victims enjoy rape makes colleges and universities especially fertile hunting grounds for serial rapists and men who are willing to force sex.

When highly educated men at Yale University can chant, “My name is Jack, I’m a necrophiliac. I fuck dead girls,” and do so in public, we have to wonder if feminists have made any progress in addressing sexism (Thomson-DeVeaux). If in the past young men harbored such fantasies, they usually hid them. Now, claiming to sexually assault and rape, and imagining unconscious girls as “dead girls,” are not only acceptable behaviors among young men, but also perhaps prerequisites to establish certain types of macho masculinity (see Buchwald). Obviously, these college men do not value consent. Indeed, sexual predators, including those involved in fraternity rape conspiracies value lack of consent. They aim for “nonconsensual sex,” particularly through the use of drugs and alcohol to incapacitate their prey.

Specific Harms of Rape While Unconscious

Recent cases make vivid the corpse-like nature of unconscious “dead” girls who are sexually assaulted and raped. Girls who are unconscious when raped and then learn about their rape later through photographs, are literally forced to see their rape through the eyes of their rapists and the by-standers who saw it as a “Facebook” moment. They are forced to see their bodies as *living corpses* through the eyes of witnesses who claim they look “dead” and “lifeless.”³ Louise Du Toit’s discussion of the rape victim’s experience of her own body as a “living corpse” takes on a new and powerful meaning in light of creepshots and videos recordings of sexual assaults. Victims view their own lifeless bodies being dragged, dropped, violated, abused, and raped, not as participants in the scene but as observers of it. Viewing their bodies as having undergone abuses that they don’t remember, intensifies the damage to the victims’ sense of their own identity and the coherence of their experience, further alienating them from their own experience and their own bodies. It works to undermine their confidence in their own ability to know themselves.⁴

Louise du Toit claims the damage rape does to victims is to make them see their own bodies through the eyes of their rapists as passive objects, and to see their own agency through the eyes of their rapists as powerless. The victim is treated like a thing. For the rapist her body has the advantages of a “corpse”—it can be used and abused with abandon—without the disadvantages, its abjection or putrifaction (du Toit 82). The victim is forced to confront her own mortality and her body as corpse. It splits her experience into seeing her body as a corpse while experiencing it as a living body; she becomes a sort of *living corpse*. Of course, du Toit is speaking metaphorically when she talks of the corpse-like feeling of victims who were conscious of their attacks. She is not talking about recent cases of unconscious girls whose limp bodies were dragged around, violated, and described as “dead girls” completely “lifeless,” a “living corpse.” For girls and women who are victims of nonconsensual sex, sexual assault, or rape while unconscious, referred to as “dead girls” by their rapists, and later shown pictures of their own inanimate bodies being violated, the perception of their bodies as a living corpse is even more dramatic.

Discovering that one has been raped while unconscious can cause different types and levels of harm than the trauma of sexual assault while awake.⁵ The fact that victims discover their victimization from third parties or recordings undermines a sense of coherent existence that cuts to the heart of the sense of self. It is as if this happened to someone else and yet undeniably did not. The victim may come to question herself, to experience her life as fragmented, and to fear unconsciousness, even sleep. As Cressida Heyes argues, “women who have been sexually assaulted while unconscious report that they become hyper-vigilant, unable to close their eyes for fear of losing control and becoming vulnerable again” (Heyes). Rape while unconscious damages the victim’s sense of herself as an agent in ways unique to this form of rape. Victims who are raped while unconscious or asleep may find restful sleep impossible, fearing that if they go to sleep or pass out, they will be attacked again. Furthermore, they can no longer rely on the “anonymity of sleep,” a time when every living creature requires a safe space to retreat from the world (Heyes). The anonymity of sleep is further disturbed if images of the victim’s sleeping body are disseminated through social media. What should be a time of restful recovery and restoration becomes a dangerous time of special vulnerability to sexual assault followed by ridicule through social media.

Social Media and Continued Victimization

Perpetrators can continue their victimization of targets of sexual assault using social media. Posting photographs and jeering comments extends the damage to victims beyond the rape itself. “Sexual assault is a crime of power and dominance,” says psychologist Rebecca Campbell. “By distributing images of the rape through social media, this is a way of asserting dominance and power to hurt the victim over and over again” (Fuchs et.al.). Rape has become a spectator sport in which rapists pose for the camera and victims are subject to creepshots distributed or posted as trophies or entertainment, which adds a new layer of trauma and shame onto these crimes. Photographs and videos have been used to further torment and shame victims, adding another layer of victimization to the sexual assault itself (Shim). The trauma of victimization not only becomes public, but also infinitely repeatable. It can go viral. It doesn’t go away. Its presence on social media extends the victimization and trauma into an infinite future that makes closure or healing more difficult, if not impossible (Heyes).

Indeed, the shame over photographs of their naked bodies in compromising positions being treated as living corpses has led some victims to kill themselves rather than face public scorn. For example, in April 2013, in two distinct cases, teenage girls killed themselves after photographs of their sexual assaults were posted online (Fuchs). In text messages, they both suggested that they couldn’t go on living with the public shame of everyone seeing their violated bodies. Many rape survivors feel shame over being sexually assaulted, even if when they don’t blame themselves, and even when only their perpetrator knows about it. Social media and the public spectacle of party rape intensifies this shame, and adds another layer of shame, namely the shame of being photographed while compromised and victimized. The dissemination of creepshot photographs of sexual assault adds another type of trauma to the trauma of sexual assault. Friends and strangers, anyone with access to the Internet, might see pictures that compound the trauma of sexual assault and take its harms to another level.

Many feminists have discussed the devastating effects of rape on victims.⁶ For example, du Toit claims that the victim’s world is “unmade” (du Toit). Discussing her own rape, Susan Brison says, “I felt as if I was experiencing things posthumously,” which resonates with the idea of one’s own body as a *living corpse* (Brison 8). Brison and du Toit discuss this living corpse-like experience for rape victims who are aware of their rapes, relive them, testify

to them, and continue to be traumatized by the experience of them afterwards. But for a woman who sees her rape for the first time through the eyes of others, this experience of one's own body as not one's own, as one's own body as a living corpse, can only be intensified. And for women whose sexual assault is documented, recorded, and posted on social media, the reliving of the incident and the retraumatization is extended indefinitely.

Ann Cahill argues, "rape, in its total denial of the victim's agency, will, and personhood, can be understood as a denial of intersubjectivity itself" (Cahill 132). Certainly, rendering their victims unconscious is an effective way for rapists to avoid dealing with the intersubjectivity usually involved in having sex, consensual or nonconsensual. Sexual predators deny intersubjectivity by using rape drugs and alcohol to insure that their victims are not conscious or only semiconscious. This strategy not only makes it easier to rape girls and women, but also allows the perpetrator to avoid the intersubjective dimension of sex. In these scenarios, girls and women function as "living dolls" with which men pleasure themselves. Drugs and alcohol can leech the victim's subjectivity from the scene and make her more like an object or "living corpse" than a sex partner, or even a resisting victim. They may also leech the rapist's sense of guilt or responsibility, helping him absolve himself of the crime by saying, "what she doesn't know won't hurt her." Or, as one participant claimed in the Steubenville, Ohio rape case, "we don't know whether or not she wanted it." Like the rapist prince in the legend of Sleeping Beauty, these perpetrators may even imagine that their victims enjoyed it.

Open Valorization of Lack of Consent

The growing use of rape drugs and alcohol to render girls unconscious, and thereby easily rapeable, combined with sentiments expressed in the Yale fraternity chant, "My name is Jack, I'm a necrophiliac, I fuck dead girls," suggest a valorization and eroticization of sex with unconscious girls. Consider, for example, in 2014, a fraternity at the University of Wisconsin planned a party to incapacitate "hot" girls using punch spiked with the drug Rohypnol (flunitrazepam); the girls were given an all-you-can-drink pass, and their hands were marked with a red-X, presumably so that fraternity brothers could easily make out their targets.⁷ Several girls ended up in the hospital. Rape drugs can be lethal at high doses. It is unclear whether or not the "rape conspiracy" was successful at the University of Wisconsin. If the girls were drugged unconscious and had no memory of sexual assault, how would we know, unless the perpetrators confessed or the hospitals used rape-kits? Using drugs like Rohypnol help insure that the victim can't testify against her rapist, especially if she remains unconscious during the entire attack. What is clear is that in cases involving date-rape drugs, the goal on the part of perpetrators is to incapacitate their victims and make them easy prey for sexual assault. The goal is to have sex with a passive, unconscious, unresponsive, "lifeless" girl. Lack of consent is assumed. Nonconsensual sex with an unconscious woman puts the man in complete control of the woman's body. Certainly, "sex" with inanimate girls is not about intimacy, and perhaps not even pleasure, but control. These fraternity men are trophy hunting for prime party rape prey. As the Yale chant suggests, these fraternity men want sex with "dead girls."

Perhaps this valorization and eroticization of sex with "dead girls," a form of pseudo-necrophilia, is also a product of pornography, especially zombie porn or snuff porn. If intelligent college students want to have sex with unconscious girls, this form of pseudo-necrophilia as the ultimate macho sexual power trip has become eroticized in our culture. Of course, social media is filled with pornographic images of naked women, whether it is professionally made porn, pornographic selfies, or creepshots. Pornography has penetrated mainstream culture, not just with the prevalence and availability of pornography on the Internet, but also in our everyday lives (Green, Bauer 77–78). The "mainstream penetration" of pornography is evident in "the way people are presenting themselves for cameras," which "is much more sexualized than it once was" (Green). Pornographic photographs have also become part of party rape. Creepshots of party rape are circulated on social media. It is noteworthy that in most of the recent high profile rape cases there have been groups of young men involved, some of whom took photos and videos using cellphones. This suggests that rape has become a spectator sport worthy of candid photographs to be disseminated during and after the event. These young men are "having fun," and they see the photographs of naked "dead" girls in compromising positions as "funny."⁸ Pseudo-necrophilia has gone mainstream.

Has absolute powerlessness on the part of girls and women become the height of a new erotic fantasy? Has this form of pseudo-necrophilia become a new norm for sex on college campuses? Recent cases of sexual assault on

unconscious “dead” girls suggest that something about the victim’s complete powerlessness and lack of agency has become erotic, fun, or even funny. In addition to the eroticization of unconscious women, then, it is crucial to consider the power dynamics in sexually violating someone powerless to resist. Raping an unconscious woman is the ultimate power trip, proving absolute dominance over another human being, and a woman in particular. And pictures of sexual assault have become new forms of trophies mounted on the Internet.

As I pointed out earlier, some scholars have argued that sports culture, military culture, and other aspects of dominant culture, including movies and video games, promote the idea that masculinity is gained and proved by dominating girls and women, especially through sex and rape.⁹ Although rape and the connection to masculinity is not new, it is particularly troubling that rape is becoming openly valorized, as evidenced by groups of college men chanting rape slogans, and the value put on lack of consent also endorsed in these slogans. Rape is becoming a group activity with spectators. And, in some cases, it is a planned event, as for example, in the fraternities accused of “rape conspiracy” for serving punch spiked with rape drugs in order to incapacitate their “rapebait” (Swartz, Frampton). While there always has been rape, including gang rape, what seems new is the public valorization of “nonconsensual sex” and its display on social media. If in the past rapists acted in the shadows and kept their acts a secret, now they chant in public about rape, record their sexual assaults, and post pictures for entertainment online. Rape has become a form of public entertainment.

Recording, Not Reporting: “Pictures Don’t Lie (Women Do)”

Ironically, in some recent high profile cases, because the victims were unconscious—and in some cases didn’t even know they had been raped—rape was easier to prove, try, and convict. This suggests that the “testimony” of unconscious girls is more believable than that of conscious ones. While the testimony of young women is challenged, discounted, and often at best put into the context of *He-Said versus She-Said*, the recent phenomenon of creepshot photographs of rapes, and recording of unconscious rape victims taken with cell phone cameras, has brought about some high-profile convictions. As one detective said in the Vanderbilt rape case, “pictures don’t lie” (“Steubenville”). In spite of statistics that false reporting is extremely low, too often the suspicion is that rape victims can and do lie.¹⁰ In some recent high profile cases, however, the victim didn’t even know she had been raped. In these cases, the rape was recorded and not reported. And, in these cases, it seems that the mute “testimony” of a visually “lifeless” “dead girl” is more powerful than the sorrowful testimony of victims aware of their attacks.

For example, on June 23rd 2013, an unconscious Vanderbilt honors student was gang raped by four Vanderbilt football players, two of whom were later convicted on all counts, and two of whom have yet to stand trial, as of this writing.¹¹ The victim has no memory of the rapes. The next day, her then boyfriend and one of the perpetrators, Brandon Vandenburg, reportedly told her that she’d vomited in his room and he’d taken care of her all night. Embarrassed, she thanked him. Two days later, investigating vandalism in the dorm, campus police saw surveillance videos of the football players dragging the unconscious woman down the hallway of the dorm, taking her into Vandenburg’s room, then going in and out of the dorm room, dragging the half-naked unconscious woman, dropping her several times, giggling, smiling, and happily taking pictures of her, even close ups of her butt, and at one point covering the surveillance camera with a towel. Supposedly, Vandenburg’s roommate was asleep on the top bunk during part of the assault and later left the room. Several other men in the dorm saw the football players manhandling the unconscious woman, several men saw the videos of the rape, even while it was going on, and not one of them reported it to authorities. Two of Vandenburg’s friends in California received photos and videos throughout the night, one of them commenting in a message back to Vandenburg that they should “gang bang” the “bitch,” make sure she “doesn’t wake up,” and then “get rid of her.” (WKRN Staff)

By the end of the investigation, police had confiscated cellphone photographs and videos of rape, sodomy with a water bottle, and other acts of sexual assault. In their own words, the players were “clowning” for the camera. They were taking pictures as if they were on vacation, to show their sexual prowess, and because they thought it was funny. At first, the victim denied that she’d been raped. She couldn’t believe it. The police had to show her the photographs and videos in order to prove it to her. When interviewed, the detectives said this was the first time that they had to convince the victim that she’d been raped. Rather than being reported, the rape was recorded.

As strange as it seems, recording instead of reporting is becoming more common. Girls are finding out they've been raped when pictures taken by the rapists or by-standers are posted on social media or sent around as text messages. For example, on August 11th, 2012, in Steubenville, Ohio an unconscious high school student was sexually assaulted while by-standers watched. Photographs and videos that circulated on social media showed the perpetrators talking about rape while assaulting her. Later, texts and tweets also joked about rape, making light of the fact that the girl was "so raped," and slept through "a wang in the buttole" (Ley). The victim didn't know that she'd been raped until she saw the pictures. The boy who posted photographs was found guilty of distributing child pornography since the girl was under age (Davidson). And, one of the perpetrators defended himself, saying, "It isn't really rape because you don't know if she wanted to or not" (Ley). This sentiment makes clear that in these young people's minds, or at least in this person's mind, consent and desire are not only mental states, but also the same mental state.¹² Furthermore, the fantasy is that if a girl is unconscious, and neither affirmative nor negative consent can be given, "sex" with her is not really rape. Echoing the age-old myth of Sleeping Beauty, these men imagined their unconscious victim actually might be consenting, perhaps even "wanting" it.

Many rape cases that come to light via social media or cellphone photographs feature groups of people, mostly men, watching as unconscious girls are dragged, dropped, sexually abused, and photographed. Some of these by-standers take pictures with their phones rather than report the crimes. In these cases, cellphones become part of the sexual assault. Rapists and by-standers take pictures for fun or entertainment, and generally to enhance the experience. They have even more "fun" distributing the pictures to friends or on social media sites. Take, for example, a young woman who first discovered she had been gang raped on Panama City beach in Florida when a video appeared on the nightly news. Hundreds of people watched. Seemingly part of the scenery or entertainment on that crowded beach, someone recorded it using a cell phone (Stapleton). Reportedly, she was drugged with a drink offered to her on the beach and then two Troy University (Alabama) students sexually assaulted her. A spokesperson for the local sheriff's office said, "there's a number of videos we've recovered with things similar to this, and I can only imagine how many things we haven't recovered." Through social media "we have been able to find video of girls, incoherent and passed out, and almost like they are drugged, being assaulted on the beaches of Panama City in front of a bunch of people standing around" watching (Stapleton). A popular Spring Break destination for college students, Florida beaches are also a hotspot for college rapists who prey on intoxicated girls. Perhaps as troubling as the sexual assault itself is the fact that rather than help the victims, by-standers watch or take videos and post them online.

Pictures of unconscious girls in compromising positions are sent around like funny cat videos. While these images retraumatize the victim and celebrate sexual violation; they can also be used as hard evidence of sexual assault or rape, which, as we've seen, is notoriously difficult to prove, and even more difficult to prosecute and convict (Carmon). Pictures and videos taken as part of the "fun" of sexual assault can be used to convince a jury that assault took place (Grinberg). They also are making it apparent to our culture at large that sexual violence is considered "fun" and "funny" by lots of young people who enjoy a good party, especially if it involves unconscious girls (Shim). But, as we've seen, for victims, their humiliation can go viral and seemingly last forever on social media (Shim). As noted earlier, two rape victims killed themselves in response to social media pictures of, and comments about, their rapes while unconscious (Shim). College student Elisa Lopez was sexually assaulted on the subway and subsequently traumatized by a creepshot video circulating on the Internet. She said that she could recover from the attack, but the video wouldn't go away. The video haunted her and made it impossible for her to continue with her life as she had before (Filipovic). This is the case with many of the victims whose sexual assault is circulated or posted on social media. Many of them find the public humiliation even more traumatic and upsetting than the sexual assault itself.

In addition to becoming part of the harassment of victims, photographs taken by the perpetrators also can be used against them in court. New apps for cellphones, however, such as Snapchat where pictures or messages sent around disappear after twenty-four hours, or YikYak where messages disappear, seem designed to circumvent this possibility. But, even these apps are bringing to light rapes and victimization that may have remained hidden otherwise. For example, YikYak chatting at Stanford revealed that an eighteen-year-old girl, who was unconscious at the time, was raped by a Stanford varsity swimmer, described as "a clean-cut star athlete" and "the all-American boy next door" (Glenza & Carroll). Rumors about the sexual assault circulating on YikYak eventually lead to an investigation into a crime that might otherwise never have been reported. Social media, then, can serve

a complicated double function when it comes to sexual assault and rape. On the one hand, it can be used to further humiliate and harass victims of sexual assault. On the other hand, it can be used to alert authorities to sex crimes and it can provide evidence to try and convict perpetrators.

Social Media and the Objectification of Women

Arguably, social media such as Facebook, Snapchat, and Tinder were invented as part of a culture that objectifies and denigrates girls and women. It is well known that Facebook founder and Harvard graduate Mark Zuckerberg, now one of the richest men in the country, invented the social media site Facebook to post pictures of girls for his college buddies to rate and berate (Egan). And, it was recently uncovered that Stanford graduate Evan Spiegel, inventor of Snapchat, which is estimated to be worth at least three billion dollars, sent messages during his days in a fraternity referring to women as “bitches,” “sororisluts,” to be “peed on,” and discussed getting girls drunk to have sex with them (Hu). The wildly popular hook-up site Tinder, with 1.6 billion “swipes” and 26 million matches a day, has changed the way people date (Yi). Now using proximity sensors, the mobile app allows users to view pictures and swipe right if they like what they see and swipe left if not. If there is a match between two users who swipe right, then they can message each other or “keep playing.” Tinder was seeded on college campuses by former University of California students and co-founders Sean Rad and Justin Mateen; it has generated new urban slang, “tinderslut” to refer to women who use tinder to hook-up with men. Rad and Mateen faced criticism when they gave the term two emoji thumbs up on social media.

Both Tinder co-founders are also involved in a sexual harassment suit wherein Mateen is accused of severely and repeatedly harassing the former Vice President of marketing for Tinder, Whitney Wolfe, who claims that he sent her harassing sexist messages calling her a “slut,” a “gold-digger,” and a “whore,” along with insulting her in public while Rad watched on and did nothing (Bercovici). Wolfe also claims that Rad and Mateen refused to name her as a co-founder because she is “a girl” (Bercovici). Given the continued use of social media to target, harass, and humiliate young women, it is telling that all of these technologies were born out of sexist attitudes towards women. Facebook and Snapchat were explicitly designed to denigrate women. And, many social media sites, like other forms of traditional media, bank on images of attractive girls and women. Photographs of girls and women looking sexy and cute are the mainstay of some sites, especially creepshot sites.

“Creepshots,” as they are called, are photographs of women’s bodies taken without their consent. The lack of consent is essential, as is outlined on websites that specialize in creepshots such as tumblr’s *creepshooter*, *creepshots.com*, and metareddit’s *creepshots*. Metareddit’s website specifies, “Creepshots are CANDID. If a person is posting for and/or aware that a picture is being taken, then it is no longer candid and ceases to be a creepshot. A creepshot captures the natural, raw sexiness of the subject [. . .]. Use stealth, cunning and deviousness to capture the beauty of your unsuspecting, chosen target.” Clearly, girls and women are seen as unsuspecting “targets,” prey to be “shot” and “captured” on film. They are cut into pieces, valued for the body parts, anonymously taken from them by the camera and posted online. On all of these creepshot websites, there are subcategories such as “ass,” “poop sex,” “crouch,” “boobs,” “jailbait,” and “teen.”¹³

Some creepshot videos end up on pornographic sites. For example, college student Elisa Lopez was in disbelief when a coworker showed her a video circulating online in which a man was penetrating her with his fingers as she lay passed out on the subway train after partying with friends. Rather than help her, some bystander took a video and posted it online. Lopez tried without success to get the video taken down. Traumatized by the video, even more than the sexual assault, Lopez became depressed, her schoolwork suffered, and she almost ended up in the mental ward of the hospital. Although getting better, years afterwards, Lopez is still traumatized by the creepshot video (Filipovic). Because of the vigilance of Lopez and her friends, eventually a suspect was arrested for the sexual assault, but not for the creepshot, which damaged Lopez as much, if not more, than the assault itself (Dow).

Creepshots are valued because of the lack of consent on the part of the subject. Her agency is described as “vain attempts at putting on a show for the camera,” and thus to be evacuated from the images.¹⁴ Creepshooters are likened to hunters choosing a target. The camera is their weapon. Subjects of creepshots do not give their consent. Indeed, insofar as women are unaware that they are being photographed, they cannot give consent, unless moving through the world in their everyday activities wearing their everyday clothes (see “yoga pants” as a

subcategory of creepshots) constitutes consent. This suggests that women's bodies are public property; or that when women are in public, they are fair game, especially if they are wearing creepshot-worthy clothes. Creepshots display not only the "sexy" girl or her body part, but also the hunting prowess of the creeper photographer. This suggests a disturbing analogy to the rape of unconscious girls, especially now that creepshots are increasingly becoming part of the violation. Their lack of consent is the conquest, documented now through creepshot photographs posted online as trophies. Within this world of creepshots and rape drugs, nonconsensual sex is valued because the lack of consent is considered "hot."

As became apparent in both the Steubenville and Vanderbilt cases, along with the sexual assaults, taking creepshot photographs of unconscious naked girls or women and distributing them is a crime. In both cases, perpetrators were found guilty not only of rape, but also of taking and distributing illegal photographs. In the Steubenville case, perpetrators were charged with distributing child pornography (the victim was only sixteen). In the Vanderbilt case, Brandon Vandenburg's lawyer claimed "all" he was guilty of was taking the photos, and explained the cover-up saying, "at least he had the good sense to be upset afterwards" (Warren and Spargo). What also became apparent in these cases is the photographs and videos were an important part of the rape itself. The college men smiled and clowned for the camera, joked and jeered for posterity, and took pleasure not only in sexually abusing their victims, but also in capturing it on film, and then sharing it with friends. Reportedly, in the Vanderbilt case, Corey Batey told Brandon Vandenburg to "get this on camera," as he raped their unconscious victim.

In sum, while rape and debasement of women are not new, the use of social media to do so is. The use of ubiquitous cellphone cameras to take creepshots of unsuspecting women, including unconscious rape victims, makes clear that contemporary mainstream youth culture values lack of consent. In other words, it is not just that some men will take pictures or have sex without a woman's consent, but also photographs are valued more where there is no consent. Moreover, with creepshots, by definition the lack of consent must be obvious. The photograph needs to display the unsuspecting woman or her body parts, along with the fact that she doesn't know that she's being photographed. Of course, this makes an unconscious woman the perfect subject for creepshots. In addition, seeing women in compromising positions, naked, or sexually violated, is considered "funny." Again, candid camera or humor in humiliating photos has been around since photography itself, and so has pornography. If men used to secretly share pictures of naked women, however, now they do so publicly. And whereas in the past, pornographic pictures were produced for mass consumption but sold privately, even wrapped in brown paper and only to adults, now the Internet is filled with selfie porn, sexting photos, and creepshots of women who are not professionals. Rapists hamming for the camera, and taking creepshots of unsuspecting unconscious girls, are part and parcel of the patriarchal pornutopia in the age of social media.

Notes

- 1 For a discussion of the relationship between rape and manhood and masculinity, see Kimmel and Miedzian in *Transforming a Rape Culture*. In that same volume, Michael Messner discusses the relationship between violence towards women and sports culture.
- 2 See studies by Tieger, Malamuth & Check, Scully & Marolla, Clark & Lewis, and Gager & Schurr.
- 3 This is the way bystanders and the rapists described the victim of the Steubenville, Ohio rape and the way the juror described the video of the Vanderbilt rape victim.
- 4 For an insightful phenomenology of the effects of rape while unconscious or semi-conscious see Heyes. The author analyzes the importance of the anonymity and vulnerability of sleep, which becomes impossible for women raped while asleep.
- 5 "Dear Colleague Letter: Sexual Violence, Background, Summary, and Fast Facts," 4 April 2011, , 15 June 2015. For discussions of PTSD and trauma resulting from sexual assault, and from the reporting of sexual assault, see Ullman & Peter-Hagene, Au et. al., and Leiner et. al. These studies show that PTSD and/or depression frequently

occur in victims after sexual assault. Reactions to victim's reporting dramatically affects subsequent symptoms (Ullman & Peter-Hagene).

6 According to a government report, "Victims of sexual assault are more likely to suffer academically and from depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, to abuse alcohol and drugs, and to contemplate suicide." Suicide.org reports that 33 percent of rape victims contemplate suicide and 13 percent of rape victims will commit suicide (Caruso). See also Archard, Brison, and Kim.

7 "Many women who attended the party had the red X on their hands, leading authorities to believe that they were part of a color-coded and premeditated plan to target certain individuals for possible date rape" (Mejia).

8 News reports of the Steubenville rape of a high school teenager and reports of rape of a Vanderbilt Senior include remarks by men involved that make clear they considered their actions "clowning" around, or fun, and the pictures of the girls as funny (Dean, Lay).

9 See Bruni. See also Jones, Jensen, and Messerschmidt. Robert Jensen describes "dominant masculinity" as "ready to rape" and "numbed, disconnected, shut down" (Jensen 185). In a 2000 study, James Messerschmidt found that adolescent male sexual violence was often motivated by social pressures to prove their masculinity.

10 Certainly the case of "Jackie" who reported a terrible gang rape at the University of Virginia, covered by *The Rolling Stone*, which subsequently turned out to be false, didn't help the cause of rape victims (Erdely, Coronel et.al.)

11 In July 2015, Vandenburg and Batey's original trial was declared a mistrial because one of the jurors was once a party in a sexual assault case. A new trial is set for November 2015.

12 For a philosophical delineation of differences between consent and desire, see Schulhofer.

13 See . 22 April 2015.

14 See . 22 April 2015.

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