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Sexual cyberbullying: Review, critique, & future directions

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ABSTRACT

Sexual cyberbullying is a relatively novel issue wherein various forms of technology including cell phone messaging, social media, and other online tools are used to harass another individual in a sexually explicit fashion, or to coerce an individual into providing private sexual information or engage in activities which are sexual in nature. The present article explores the relevant research to date on sexual cyberbullying. A methodological critique of this literature is discussed and suggestions for future research are provided. In particular, the importance of establishing a theoretical framework which can be used to better conceptualize and understand sexual cyberbullying and other forms of technologically mediated aggression is highlighted. Contextual factors which may also influence sexual cyberbullying, such as alcohol, hookup culture, and the recent discussion of revenge porn in the media, are also discussed.

1. Introduction

Cyberbullying is typically defined as an intentional act of aggression carried out repeatedly by one individual against another through the use of electronic media (Calvete, Orue, Estévez, Villardón, & Padilla, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Hinduja and Patchin, 2008; Smith et al., 2008; Ybarra and Mitchell, 2008a; Ybarra and Mitchell, 2008b). This aggressive behaviour can include the following: posting hurtful comments about an individual on a website or social media, excluding someone from an online group intentionally, sending derogatory or threatening messages (via email, text or another online messenger), distributing embarrassing or sexually explicit photos or other information via text message, cell phone applications or online, and spreading rumours, secrets or otherwise attempting to socially undermine peers (Calvete et al., 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Kokkinos, Antoniadou, & Markos, 2014; Pelfrey Jr & Weber, 2013; Pettalia, Levin, & Dickinson, 2013; Smith et al., 2008). Individuals who are involved in cyberbullying are typically placed into one of three categories: bullies, victims, and bully-victims (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006) with different predictors and outcomes relating to individuals in each group.

One area where cyberbullying needs to be explored more thoroughly is the domain of romantic interactions and relationships. In particular, this should be done in order to better understand the specific sub behaviour of sexual cyberbullying. Sexual cyberbullying will henceforth be defined as any sexually aggressive or coercive behaviour facilitated through the use of electronic media (i.e., text messages, social networking sites, cell phone applications, etc.). Such behaviours may include, but are not limited to: sending nude photos or sexually explicit messages to another individual without their express consent, threatening to share a nude photo of another individual online if he/she does not consent to sex, coercing an individual to send sexually explicit photos against his or her will, sharing a sexually explicit photos or messages with individuals other than whom it was initially intended for using electronic media, publicly making unwanted sexually explicit comments on a person's social networking site, etc. As distressing as such behaviours may seem, they unfortunately appear all too common. For instance, among college students, Lyndon, Bonds-Raacke, and Cratty (2011) found that 67% of participants surveyed endorsed engaging in at least one harassing behaviour towards an ex-partner via Facebook. Sadly, youth and college students are not the only ones engaging in this sexual cyberbullying behaviour. An Australian survey of 3000 adults found that 37% of women reported experiencing some form of online sexual harassment, with 25% experiencing “repeated and/or unwanted sexual requests” (Powell & Henry, 2014a, 2014b). This behaviour of sexual cyberbully appears to have negative consequences which may impact offline behaviour. For instance, Thompson and Morrison (2013a, 2013b) found that among college aged males, engaging in technology-based coercive behaviours (e.g. asking someone online for sexual information about themselves when that person did not want to disclose this information, posting a sexually suggestive message or picture to someone's online profile, sharing a sexually suggestive message or picture with someone other than who it was originally meant for, etc.) was related to hostility towards women, rape supportive beliefs, and peer approval of forced sex, as well as a

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number of other variables traditionally linked to victim blaming and sexual assault.

Given the ubiquity of technology and social media in the present era, as well as the constantly changing nature of these mediums, cyberbullying broadly, as well as sexual cyberbullying specifically, have the potential to seem inescapable for victims (Bios & Palmeri, 2018). Not only may an individual be victimized initially by a single perpetrator, but his or her victimization may be made available to a broad audience, thereby dramatically increasing the shame a victim may feel (Sourander et al., 2010). Coercive messages and threats can be sent through multiple mediums or networks with relative ease by perpetrators who are able to remain largely anonymous (Burton & Mutongwizo, 2009). Moreover, once an individual has been attacked, such as by having a nude photograph of them shared without their consent, it can be incredibly difficult for the victim to reclaim the privacy lost, and this may result in subsequent victimization (i.e. the photograph appearing again later on other sites) (Chawki & Shazly, 2013; Citron & Franks, 2014). In the often polarized world of the #MeToo movement, online mediums such as Reddit and 4Chan in fact appear to have become breeding grounds for hate groups who endorse both sexual cyberbullying of women, and whom often encourage face to face violence as well (Coles, 2018; Morrison, 2018; Tolentino, 2018). The rise of such groups, who self-identify as "involuntary celibates" or "incels" for short, combined with the potential for victimization to occur for numerous individuals on a massive scale understandably necessitates a better understanding of the processes by which this aggressive behaviour occurs, and subsequently methods for reducing both the occurrence of the behaviour by aggressors, and the impact experienced by potential victims.

Unfortunately, given the rapid growth of technological media and mediums, research on cyberbullying is only in its infancy. Moreover, even less of the scholarly work on cyberbullying has focused on this behaviour among adults, with an emphasis on its role in relationships and sexual interactions. This paper reviews current literature on sexual cyberbullying. The potential of sexual cyberbullying to be associated with offline sexual coercion and harassment is also detailed. A methodological critique of current literature is offered, as well as a suggestion for use of social norms theory as a potential theoretical framework within which sexual cyberbullying can be better understood. Finally, suggestions for future research are offered, with an emphasis on the need to further examine contextual factors which may shape intimate behaviours both offline and online among young and emerging adults.

2. Search strategy, selection, and inclusion criteria

The following terms were drawn from the current literature and used to form the search strategy to review literature of sexual cyberbullying: ((cyberbullying OR 'cyber bullying' OR 'online aggression' OR 'online harassment' OR 'internet aggression' OR 'internet harassment' OR 'social media aggression' OR 'social media harassment') AND ('sexual aggression' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'sexual assault') AND ('college' OR 'young adult' or 'emerging adult')). Similarly, to collect literature associated with social norms theory and hookup culture respectively, the following search terms were used: (('social norms' OR 'social norms theory') AND ('college' OR 'young adult' OR 'emerging adult')) AND(('hookup' OR 'hooking up' OR 'hookup culture') AND ('college' OR 'young adult' OR 'emerging adult')). These various terms were used in combination together to examine the following databases: PsychINFO and PsychArticles. Google scholar was additionally used. Searches were also conducted from the references of included articles, as well as through database lists of "papers which cited this article". This search was conducted from August 2017–February 2018. Papers included in the present review had to meet the following criteria for inclusion: (i) studies had to have been published after 2003, as cyberbullying was defined as a term in that year (Bauman & Bellmore, 2015); (ii) studies had to be published in peer-reviewed journals; and (iii) studies had to be published in English. Once identified on databases, articles' abstracts' were reviewed to assess whether or not they were eligible for inclusion, at which time full-text articles were retrieved. It should be noted that the present article only reviewed literature published in English. As such, the present review may not fully encompass all of the current literature on sexual cyberbullying.

3. Cyberbullying

Though it is a relatively new area of study, cyberbullying has gained increasing attention from researchers and the public alike. Cyberbullying covers a wide variety of behaviours from online social exclusion to explicit threats delivered via social media apps, text messages, or other electronic media (Calvete et al., 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Hinduja and Patchin, 2008; Kokkinos et al., 2014; Pelfrey Jr & Weber, 2013; Pettalia et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2008; Ybarra and Mitchell, 2008a; Ybarra and Mitchell, 2008b). Cyberbullying has been documented in individuals as young as eleven (Bastiaensens et al., 2014; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla, & Daciuk, 2012; Twyman, Saylor, Taylor, & Comeaux, 2010) and as old as college age (Baldasare, Bauman, Goldman, & Robie, 2012; Francisco, Simão, Ferreira, & das Dores Martins, 2015; Kokkinos et al., 2014; Kowalski, Morgan, & Limber, 2012; Rafferty & Vander Ven, 2014).

Cyberbullying has also often been defined as being intentional, and requiring a distinct imbalance in power between perpetrator and aggressor (Baldry, Farrington, & Sorrentino, 2016; Olweus, 2012). However, it should be noted that this definition may not necessarily be applicable to cyberbullying among older populations, specifically college age, as individuals in these groups often report engaging in cyberbullying behaviours (e.g., sending aggressive messages via social media, posting embarrassing pictures of someone to social media without his or her consent, etc.) as a "joke" or "for fun" or without the explicit intent to harm or distress the other individual (Baldasare et al., 2012; Ehman, Lair, & Gross, 2018; Francisco et al., 2015).

In addition to occurring across various mediums and being perpetrated by a wide variety of individuals, cyberbullying can be difficult to monitor due to the often anonymous nature of the internet which can be manipulated by aggressors, either intentionally or unintentionally, to escape identification. As such, prevalence rates for cyberbullying have been difficult to obtain, with studies reporting victimization rates ranging between 11 and 40%, and some studies indicating that victimization may be as high as 72% (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Tokunaga, 2010; Twyman et al., 2010).

Cyberbullying reporting by college aged individuals may be particularly suspect, as research has demonstrated that these individuals do not often see their behaviour as "cyberbullying", due to the fact that these individuals deny having negative or aggressive intentions towards their victims (Baldasare et al., 2012). These individuals often report that this behaviour is actually a form of "joking" and is intended to be "funny". In fact, in their survey of 561 college students, Francisco et al. (2015) found that 36.4% of individuals reported engaging in cyberbullying "just for fun". Given these discrepancies in their reporting of cyberbullying behaviour generally, additional study is likely warranted to examine rates of other forms of cyber aggression (Ehman et al., 2018).

Regardless of perceived or actual motivations of those involved, cyberbullying has been demonstrated to have a serious negative impact. Cyberbullying involvement as a victim has been associated with lower self-esteem, poorer academic performance, increased hostility and detachment, increased general and social anxiety, increased aggressive and risky behaviour, increased reporting of depressive symptoms, psychosocial problems, decreased ability to concentrate, negative mood, and increased reporting of suicidal ideation (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Schenk &

Fremouw, 2012a, 2012b; Tokunaga, 2010; Ybarra, Espelage, & Mitchell, 2007a, 2007b). Furthermore, many of these symptoms are reported even when controlling for traditional forms of bullying and abuse (Campbell et al., 2012; Ybarra et al., 2007a, 2007b). Though these symptoms vary across studies depending on frequency, length, and severity of cyberbullying occurring, they are present in research examining both youth and college students (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Schenk, Fremouw, & Keelan, 2013; Ybarra et al., 2007a, 2007b).

Victims are not the only individuals who experience negative outcomes associated with cyberbullying. Individuals who are cyberbullies, as well as those who are both bullies and victims have been found to have significantly higher scores on clinical scales of depression, paranoia, phobic anxiety, psychoticism, interpersonal sensitivity, and hostility than individuals who were uninvolved in cyberbullying (Schenk et al., 2013). These individuals also report significantly more suicidal ideation than individuals who did not report any involvement in cyberbullying (Schenk et al., 2013). Cyberbullies and bully-victims are also more likely to engage in illegal behaviour including illicit drug use, both drug related and violent criminal activity, various forms of interpersonal aggression, and underage drinking (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Pelfrey Jr & Weber, 2013; Schenk et al., 2013).

4. Sexual cyberbullying

4.1. Epidemiology

To date, there does not exist a specific name for the subset of cyberbullying behaviours that are sexual in nature. These behaviours include but are not limited to: harassment, stalking, attempted solicitation, coercion, and outright extortion (Chawki & Shazly, 2013; Citron & Franks, 2014; Jones, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2012; Lyndon et al., 2011; Powell & Henry, 2014a, 2014b; Ybarra et al., 2007a, 2007b). A study conducted by Ybarra et al. (2007a, 2007b) found that 15% of the youth, aged 10–15 surveyed ($N = 1588$) reported being the victim of unwanted online sexual solicitation in the past year, with 3% of those surveyed indicated that these unwanted online sexual solicitations occurred monthly or more often. This survey, conducted as part of a national cross-sectional online survey defined unwanted sexual solicitation as an individual endorsing at least one of the following experiences: another individual attempting to get them to talk about content of a sexual nature online when they (the youth being surveyed) did not want to, someone asking them online for sexual information which they did not desire to reveal (e.g. body appearance, sexual acts engaged in previously, etc.), or being asked to engage in some form of sexual contact online which they (the youth) did not want to do (Ybarra et al., 2007a, 2007b). Furthermore, according to Jones et al. (2012) the online sexual harassment of youth has been on the rise. A survey of 1500 youth (aged 10–17) found that 11% of individuals surveyed had experienced online sexual harassment, where sexual harassment was measured using a screener of three questions regarding experience of sexual harassment in the past year (Jones et al., 2012). These findings represent a 6% increase in online sexual harassment or sexual cyberbullying experienced by youth in the past year from rates in 2000, and a 9% increase from similarly calculated rates in 2005 (Jones et al., 2012).

One specific form of sexual cyberbullying is the request for “sexts” or messages containing sexual or nude photos or messages of a sexual nature (Thomas, 2017a, 2017b). Such messages can either be traditional text messages or can be messages delivered through a variety of messaging services on social media platforms and apps (Dir & Cyders, 2015). An analysis of 462 “stories” regarding sexting and sexual coercion submitted by adolescent women online to Viacom found that more than 90% of the women ($N = 462$; median age = 15) reported engaging in unwanted, though technically consensual, sexting (Thomas, 2017a, 2017b) typically to avoid conflict with their partner or to “prove” their affections. A tenth of participants in this survey reported receiving repeated requests for nude photos, and 14.3% of stories depicted an incident in which a man continued to request even after being told “no”. Furthermore, 38% of respondents described stories in which they reported that they sent photos after being coerced via anger, repeated pressure, and threats of secondary consequences (e.g. distributing photos if additional ones were not sent, spreading rumours, etc.) (Thomas, 2017a, 2017b).

This use of technology to engage in sexual cyberbullying is not limited to younger individuals. Among college students specifically, Lyndon et al. (2011) asked participants how often they had engaged in specific behaviours to monitor, provoke, or harass a former partner on Facebook (e.g. Updated a status to make an ex-partner jealous, Created a false Facebook profile of an ex-partner to cause them problems, Used Facebook to spread false rumours about an ex-partner, etc.). These questions were answered on a four point Likert type scale, with frequencies ranging from “never” engaging in the behaviour, to engaging in it “all of the time”. Using these questions, created for the study, Lyndon and colleagues found that 67% of participants ($N = 411$; 69.8% White; 96.1% heterosexual) surveyed endorsed engaging in at least one harassing behaviour towards an ex-partner via Facebook. Furthermore 50% of participants reported engaging in two or more of these behaviours at least some of the time. However, it should be noted that the present study did not collect data on aggressive acts that were sexual in nature (e.g. distributing nude photos of a former partner without consent) but instead focused on broader harassing behaviours.

In a series of studies involving small focus groups ($N = 39$; 87% White) Melander (2010) interviewed college students using open ended questions about intimate partner violence and aggression among college students, as well as how technology could specifically be used to facilitate the perpetration of these forms of violence. These taped group interviews (one female only group and two male only groups) were then transcribed and coded to reflect various typologies of intimate partner violence, these codes were then in turn used to delineate common themes discussed by students. This qualitative analysis determined that specifically among college students, chief issues concerning cyberbullying and intimate relationships were partners' ability to exert “control” and to engage in “quick and easy violence” through the use of social media. Furthermore, college students were concerned that information or situations that previously would've remained private within a relationship (e.g., information of a sexual nature) could be easily made public using technology.

A study by Reed, Tolman, and Ward (2016a, 2016b) demonstrated that college student concerns about the use of technology and intimate partner aggression appear well founded. In a survey of 356 undergraduate students utilizing a thirty-eight item measure created for the study, participants were asked to indicate whether they engaged in or experienced certain technologically mediated aggression (e.g. monitoring a partner's information on a cell phone or computer without their consent, using technology to monitor a partner's whereabouts, sharing an embarrassing photo or video of their partner without their permission, pressuring a partner to take a sexually suggestive or nude photo or video, and threatening to distribute private or embarrassing information about their partner without their permission). If individuals indicated that they had experienced or engaged in such behaviour, they were asked to rank the frequency with which they had experienced or engaged in it in the past year, ranging from “0 times” to “More than 5 times”. According to this measure, 62.6% of students in relationships ($n = 321$) reported using digital media to engage in some form of intimate partner aggression or harassment. Additionally, individuals who were victims of this sort of technological intimate partner harassment were more likely to also be victims of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse (Reed et al., 2016a, 2016b). Halligan, Knox, and Brinkely (2013) reported similar findings in their survey of 259 undergraduate students that also utilized measures uniquely crafted for their study (Halligan et al., 2013). Furthermore, they found that students who were in abusive relationships identified technology

use as being a barrier to ending contact with their abuser (Halligan et al., 2013).

Thompson and Morrison (2013a, 2013b) surveyed 800 college males on their behaviours towards and attitudes about relationships with women. Using a five item Likert-type scale created for the study, participants were asked to report on their engagement in online sexual interactions, including sexual harassment and solicitation. Participants also completed measures of the following: anger, impulsivity, sexual compulsivity, hostility towards women, high risk drinking, rape supportive beliefs, sexual abuse in childhood, and inter-parental conflict in childhood, peer pressure to have sex and peer pressure of forced sex, perceived negative sanctions against sexual violence, pornography exposure, and demographic information. It was reported that 21.9% of the young men surveyed engaged in at least one form of "technologically based coercion". These behaviours were exclusively sexual in nature and included the following: attempting to get someone to talk about sex online when she did not want to, asking for sexual information that another person did not want to reveal, posting a sexually suggestive message or picture to someone's social media profile, and sharing a sexually suggestive photo or message with someone other than the originally intended recipient (Thompson & Morrison, 2013a, 2013b). These online behaviours demonstrated potential for "real world" consequences, as individuals who engaged more in this technological sexual coercion were also more likely to hold rape supportive beliefs, and endorse peer approval of forced sex (Thompson & Morrison, 2013a, 2013b).

4.2. Consequences of sexual cyberbullying

As with "real world" sexual harassment, online victimization has been associated with negative psychological and psychosocial outcomes. As part of the "National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence", Mitchell, Finkelhor, Wolak, Ybarra, and Turner (2011a, 2011b) conducted extensive telephone interviews over the course of five months with 2051 youth ages 10–17. Assessment included questions regarding online victimization (e.g. "Has anyone ever used the Internet to bother or harass you or to spread mean words or pictures about you?"), offline victimization (e.g. experience with any of the following: physical assault, sexual victimization, witnessing violence, maltreatment, peer/sibling victimization, property victimization, and indirect exposure to violence), trauma symptomatology, delinquency, and life adversity. Data from this nationally representative sample revealed that being a victim of online sexual harassment in the past year was related to higher scores on measures of trauma and delinquency. Additionally, being a victim of online harassment was associated with offline sexual harassment, rape, being flashed, and psychological and emotional abuse (Mitchell et al., 2011a, 2011b). It should be noted that online sexual harassment experience was assessed by asking two questions constructed specifically for the study.

Similar findings have been reported by Ybarra et al. (2007a, 2007b). Adolescents (n = 1588) aged 10–15 who had used the internet at least once in the previous six months were administered measures of perpetration and victimization of internet harassment and sexual solicitation in the past year, expression of anger, offline victimization of physical and relational aggression in the past year, and perpetration of offline physical and sexual aggression. Authors found that anywhere between 23.8 and 76.5% of youth victims of online sexual harassment were also victims of offline relational harassment. In spite of this wide discrepancy in linking offline and online behaviour, 100% of youth who were classified as both perpetrators and victims of online sexual harassment and solicitation reported being offline perpetrators of physical and relational aggression (Ybarra et al., 2007a, 2007b). 75.2% of these individuals also reported being perpetrators of offline sexual aggression (Ybarra et al., 2007a, 2007b). These individuals also reported greater illicit substance use (Ybarra et al., 2007a, 2007b). It should be noted that as with other studies, online harassment and victimization were measured using a questionnaire designed specifically for this study.

This trend in sexual cyberbullying appears to extend into the college years. For example, McGinley and colleagues surveyed 2855 college students (58% female; 54% White; 84.4% Heterosexual) across five time-points during their college career. Authors used a measure of sexual harassment during the past year which included questions about harassment related to gender (e.g. crude or offensive sexual remarks associated with one's gender), unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. These questions included two items specifically related to sexual harassment and coercion that occurred online, and were answered on a three-point Likert-type scale ranging from "never" having experienced a specific form of harassment, to having experienced this form of harassment "more than once" in the past year. Participants also answered questions regarding anxiety, depression, marijuana use, and binge drinking. Across all waves of data collection, 4–11% of participants reported experiencing sexual coercion, and 20–42% reported experiencing some form of unwanted sexual attention or harassment. Additionally, 3–12% of participants reported receiving some form of sexual harassment via technology. Technological forms of harassment included offensive and sexual texts, emails, and hurtful or offensive comments on social media that were sexual in nature. Through growth modelling, students were categorized as either chronically or infrequently harassed across all modalities. Relative to students who were classified as infrequently harassed, students who were chronically victimized experienced increased depression, anxiety, marijuana use, and binge drinking. As one would expect, women were at increased risk for being chronic victims when compared to men, as were sexual minority students when compared to majority members. Based on the aforementioned studies, the directionality of problem behaviour and experience and perpetration of sexual cyberbullying is unclear. However, it is apparent that numerous negative outcomes are associated with both being a perpetrator of sexual cyberbullying, as well as being a victim. As such, further study is warranted to ascertain the directionality of these relationships.

5. Methodological critique

Although the research base is somewhat limited, this review suggests that the online behaviour of sexual cyberbullying can have serious negative psychological and social impact for both victims and perpetrators. Moreover, sexual cyberbullying appears to be a growing phenomenon meriting further exploration. The research on sexual cyberbullying would benefit from addressing several common methodological issues. For instance, research has to date largely utilized non-standardized measures that differed greatly across studies. In addition to over reliance on instruments being created by authors for their particular investigation, the nature of these measures also vary widely from measures consisting of two items, one question for victimization and one question for perpetration, to broader measures assessing for both offline and online perpetration and victimization of aggression in intimate relationships (Mitchell et al., 2011a, 2011b; Halligan et al., 2013; Reed et al., 2016a, 2016b; Ybarra et al., 2007a, 2007b). Still other studies were largely qualitative in nature and coded response sets or stories provided by participants or focus groups rather than making any attempt at formal measurement (Thomas, 2017a, 2017b; Melander, 2010). Moreover, many studies lacked a distinction between aggressive acts which occurred in the context of a sexual or romantic interaction, versus those which fit more broadly under the umbrella of technologically facilitated aggression (Lyndon et al., 2011). While these assessment strategies are an initial step towards increasing our understanding of sexual cyberbullying, creation of a standardized measure of sexual cyberbullying perpetration and victimization with demonstrated reliability and validity is an important next step. Standardized measures will facilitate consistency across the field, likely increasing reliability (e.g. replication of findings) of subsequent findings. Such standardization could also assist in increasing understanding

as to what types or subtypes of online behaviour (e.g., cyberbullying, sexual cyberbullying, specific forms of sexual cyberbullying, etc.) are most strongly associated with face to face aggressive and sexually aggressive behaviour, as this link is presently still unclear.

In addition to lacking consistency in measure usage, present research has largely been conducted on samples of white heterosexual individuals, with an emphasis on males as aggressors or bullies (Thompson & Morrison, 2013a, 2013b). However, several researchers have reported that sexual aggression and victimization is a significant problem among sexual minorities. A survey conducted by Hershberger and D'Augelli (1995) of 165 lesbian and gay youth (M age = 19.08; 75% male) from community centres in metropolitan areas across the United States found that 10% of their sample reported experiencing some form of sexual assault in their lifetime. More recently a systematic review conducted by Rothman, Exner, and Baughman (2011a, 2011b) which reviewed seventy-five studies examining the prevalence of sexual assault victimization among gay, lesbian, and bisexual men and women in the United States found that the prevalence rates for childhood sexual assault for males appears to range from 4.1–59.2% (median 22.7%) and from 14.9–76.0% for females. With regards to sexual assault experiences as an adult, this ranges for men from 10.8–44.7% (median 14.7%), and from 11.3–53.2% for females (median 23.2%). Moreover, when compared to heterosexual individuals, individuals who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual report significantly more experiences as a victim of sexual violence.

As part of the second wave of the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (n = 34,653), Hughes, McCabe, Wiksnack, West, and Boyd (2010) found that women who identified as lesbian or bisexual were significantly more likely to report childhood sexual assault than heterosexual women, and bisexual women were also significantly more likely to report experiences of childhood physical abuse, intimate partner violence, and non-partner violence as well. Moreover, gay men were twice as likely to report any form of victimization as heterosexual men (Hughes et al., 2010). Similar findings have been reported by Balsam, Rothblum, and Beauchaine (2005), and Heidt, Marx, and Gold (2005). Furthermore, Heidt et al. (2005) found that gay, lesbian, and bisexual women were significantly more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to report sexual re-victimization (e.g. contact or penetrative assault reported in both childhood and adulthood). Given that minority students, particularly those who are of a sexual minority (e.g. not heterosexual), are at increased risk for traditional forms of sexual aggression (McGinley, Wolff, Rospenda, Liu, & Richman, 2016), it is imperative that more research be conducted on individuals in these groups. Moreover, research is limited overall, with few studies focusing on sexual cyberbullying, and fewer still focusing on this phenomenon among college aged individuals.

Present research of sexual cyberbullying also lacks a clear distinction between what predicts one's status as an aggressor or as a victim. In research on cyberbullying more broadly, individuals can often be categorized into three classes: victims, bullies, and bully-victims (Olweus, 2012). Yet research to date has not examined whether or not these distinctions are present with regards to sexual cyberbullying behaviour. While research on sexually aggressive behaviour might lead one to posit that aggressors would be more likely to be male and victims more likely to be female (Thompson, 2014; Abbey, Parkhill, BeShears, Clinton-Sherrod, & Zawacki, 2006; Koss et al., 2007, etc.) given that sexual cyberbullying has the potential to be anonymous and otherwise disrupt traditional power dynamics, it is important to establish whether or not these categorical distinctions apply in this domain. Additionally, it is important to consider that, with any form of victimization, particularly victimization that is sexual in nature, there may be reporting biases due to shame, self-blame, and fear of stigma (Cantor et al., 2015). As such, research on sexual cyberbullying may face a response bias, which will need to be addressed in future research in order to fully understand the nature and scope of this behavior, as well as potential consequences for all parties involved.

Another gap in the present literature on sexual cyberbullying behavior is the extent to which perpetration in this domain is associated with or predicts face to face sexual aggression. Given that links have been found in studies of youth between traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Kowalski et al., 2012; Olweus, 2012) it seems likely that similar parallels might be present between sexual cyberbullying and face to face sexual aggression. While a number of studies have demonstrated that belief in the anonymous nature of technological media predicts cyberbullying behavior (Barlett, 2015; Burton & Mutongwizo, 2009; Sourander et al., 2010), it is also possible that engaging in aggressive behaviour in this apparently “safe” environment, may also increase the likelihood than an individual is responding aggressively in other contexts. As such, future research should examine the interaction between sexual cyberbullying and face to face sexual aggression.

Due to the relatively new nature of scholarly research on sexual cyberbullying, as well as the rapid increase in technological platforms through which communication can occur (e.g. text messages, cell phone apps, social media websites and messenger services, etc.) present research is limited in the domains in which it explores sexual cyberbullying. For instance, current research is typically limited to single mediums, such as text messages with sexting (Thomas, 2017a, 2017b), or to single social media platforms, such as Facebook (Lyndon et al., 2011). However, given the variability in types of information shared and presented on social media sites, and the ever evolving mechanisms of communication on cell phones (e.g. apps) and computers, research which examines sexual cyberbullying behaviour in a greater array of contexts would provide invaluable information. Examples would include examination of this behaviour on traditional social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.), versus those which are specifically designed to facilitate intimate relationships (e.g. Tinder, Bumble, OkCupid, etc.).

6. Conclusions and future directions

With every technological change human ingenuity creates, comes a parallel concern about how such advances might fundamentally change how we relate to one another. Yet, time and again, it appears that human interactions continue to be shaped by our basic tendencies to continue to engage in behaviours which appear common or accepted, and refrain from those behaviours which appear uncommon or disapproved of by the majority; we are a species that has survived based on our ability to conform with the desires and behaviours of our fellows, as isolation typically meant extinction. However, the struggle with technology is that it allows for our data on the beliefs and behaviours of those around us to be skewed, individuals whose behaviours make them outliers can use technology to make their voices heard more loudly to a larger audience; sexual cyberbullying is likely no different. Yet technological advancement is not the only factor that shapes the present context of sexual cyberbullying. Of particular interest are the trends of “revenge porn” and “hookup culture”. To date these variables have been examined in a limited capacity, though this is somewhat unsurprising given the novelty of these behaviours. Another factor which may play a role in sexual cyberbullying is the collegiate culture, which often involves heavy alcohol consumption. Explorations of these contextual variables may provide greater insight into factors shaping or facilitating sexual cyberbullying.

While revenge porn and hookup culture have received limited study, alcohol use has been extensively studied in the context of “real world” interactions, sexual intimacy, and violence among college students, and these data may provide insight into how alcohol use may affect online behaviours. For instance, likely due to its disinhibition effect, alcohol has been associated with increased participation in casual sex, engaging in more physical intimacy than intended, increased experience with regretted or unwanted sexual experiences, increased likelihood of being a victim of sexual coercion and assault, as well as increased tendency to engage in sexually coercive behaviour (LaBrie,

Hummer, Ghaidarov, Lac, & Kenney, 2014; Olmstead, Billen, Conrad, Palsey, & Fincham, 2013a, 2013b; Palmer, McMahon, Rounsaville, & Ball, 2010a, 2010b; Fossos, Kaysen, Neighbors, Lindgren, & Hove, 2011; Fair & Vanyur, 2011; Flack et al., 2007). Given alcohol's potential to contribute to numerous consequences in face to face interpersonal interactions, it is important to understand how alcohol may affect sexual cyberbullying behaviour.

Revenge porn is a term typically used to refer to the act of an individual (typically a former significant other) who shares nude photos of a former partner with others online without his or her consent (Citron & Franks, 2014; Thomas, 2017a, 2017b). This is done in order to get revenge on the former partner for the breakup or for some perceived slight (Citron & Franks, 2014; Thomas, 2017a, 2017b). Sometimes photos shared as 'revenge porn' also contain the victim's personal contact information, which can lead to further victimization and harassment by new perpetrators (Chawki & Shazly, 2013; Citron & Franks, 2014). Similarly, individuals who have already shared photos with a current or former partner may be extorted with the threat of revenge porn. Victims of this behaviour are informed that if they do not share additional content (photos, videos, etc.) with the aggressor this image will be shared with others online without their consent (Chawki & Shazly, 2013). Few data have been collected to determine the prevalence rates of these behaviours, either for victimization or perpetration. However, an Australian survey of 3000 adults found that 37% of women reported experiencing some form of online sexual harassment, with 25% experiencing "repeated and/or unwanted sexual requests" (Powell & Henry, 2014a, 2014b). Given the prevalence of this behaviour and the potential it could have for negative psychosocial outcomes, it would seem essential to consider how it might relate to or drive sexual cyberbullying. Moreover, given the number of high profile cases of revenge porn that have been present in the media in recent years, it may be that this behaviour is being seen as more common, and therefore more acceptable than it previously might have been. Thus, we would expect similar behaviours, such as sexual cyberbullying to be increased as well, particularly among individuals who were familiar with the idea of revenge porn or who believed close peers had engaged in this practice.

Hooking up is a loosely defined term typically used to describe a casual or uncommitted intimate encounter between two individuals that may or may not include sexual intercourse (Aubrey & Smith, 2013; Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012; Bernston & Luff, 2014; Fielder & Carey, 2010; Fielder, Walsh, Carey, & Carey, 2014; Owen & Fincham, 2008a, 2008b; Olmstead et al., 2013a, 2013b; etc.). Though definitions differ slightly, the primary defining factor of a "hook up" appears to be the absence of individuals' expectations for more traditional romantic involvement in the future (Aubrey & Smith, 2013; Garcia et al., 2012; Fielder et al., 2014; Owen & Fincham, 2008a, 2008b; Olmstead et al., 2013a, 2013b; etc.). This trend of casual intimate encounters has gained attention recently due to its popularity among college students (Fielder & Carey, 2010; Owen & Fincham, 2008a, 2008b; Fielder et al., 2014; Olmstead et al., 2013a, 2013b; Grello & Welsh, 2006, etc.). However, to date little work has been done examining how hookup culture as a norm might interact with traditional sexual and gender dynamics or attitudes about the acceptability or non-acceptability of promiscuous sex. Conflicts between these various norms frameworks which exist in face to face interactions might then be extended to online behaviour. As such, it is imperative to understand how this shift in sexual scripts in the real world intimacies of college students may be shaping online sexual scripts and subsequently sexual cyberbullying behaviour.

Moreover, grounding future research in a theoretical framework, such as that of social norms, is essential, as the literature is currently lacking such a consistent conceptual framework to explain behaviours such as sexual cyberbullying. Social norms theory posits that human behaviour is often motivated or guided by what individuals believe is typical behaviour for others in their social group (Scholly, Katz, Gascoigne, & Holck, 2005a, 2005b). This theory also proposes that our beliefs about others' attitudes and behaviour is often incorrect. Ultimately this can lead to continued engagement in extreme or dangerous behaviour, such as binge drinking, because the individual assumes the behaviour is "normal". As noted above, hookup culture is another example of a shifting social norm. Social norms are typically parsed into two distinct categories: descriptive norms and injunctive norms. Descriptive norms describe what we believe others are doing, or the frequency with which they are engaging in a behaviour (Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2007a, 2007b). In contrast, injunctive norms are our perceptions of what others think and believe to be "normal" or acceptable. Preliminary research has focused on the use of descriptive norms to understand problematic behaviour of college students, such as binge drinking and risky sexual behaviour (Baer, Stacy, & Larimer, 1991; Neighbors, Lee, Lewis, Fossos, & Larimer, 2007a, 2007b; Perkins, 2002a, 2002b; Scholly et al., 2005a, 2005b). Some preliminary work has also examined the role injunctive norms play in shaping sexually intimate and sexually aggressive behaviour among college students (Borsari & Carey, 2003; Larimer, Turner, Mallett, & Geisner, 2004; Schultz et al., 2007a, 2007b; Dardis, Murphy, Bill, & Gidycz, 2016; Lambert, Kahn, & Apple, 2003). Given that these norms appear to shape behaviour in offline domains, it seems likely that social norms would serve as a useful theoretical framework for understanding sexual cyberbullying. Moreover, as research has demonstrated that social norms are mutable and can be shaped, it is possible that modifying social norms, both injunctive and descriptive, may serve as a method for combatting or decreasing sexual cyberbullying.

In summation, sexual cyberbullying is a recent but prevalent phenomenon which poses significant potential consequences for victim, aggressors and individuals who are both victims and aggressors. One domain in which this behaviour has yet to be thoroughly examined is the domain of intimate and romantic relationships. However, preliminary research on this topic appears to indicate that this behaviour is widespread and is associated with a number of "real world" psychosocial consequences for all those involved. Present research suffers from some methodological shortcomings including the following: lack of standardized measure use, samples limited in diversity, studies being restricted in the environment in which sexual cyberbullying is studied (e.g. only texting, or only specific social media platforms, etc.), and a lack of attention to contextual factors including alcohol use, hookup culture, and revenge porn.

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