

**Title:** Rape Culture's Presence on Social Media  
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Rape culture consists of ideologies and behaviours that condone and normalize sexual violence, which can include victim blaming and slut shaming (Grubb and Turner 2012). There is new emerging research that addresses how feminist activism is engaged on social media, but there is even less research addressing how and if social media exacerbates rape culture and the acceptance of rape myths (Stubbs-Richardson, Rader and Cosby, 2018). Studies have shown that rape myth acceptance exists among both men and women, but what may be dangerous, are the potential societal impacts of these negative attitudes being shared on social media for large audiences to view (Grubb and Turner 2012). Although social media is a strong platform for the expression or exchange of ideas and to participate in larger conversations about societal issues, rape culture has been digitized, and allows for a new avenue for rape culture to prevail and for victim blaming to take place (Zaleski et al. 2016).

Twelve years ago, Tarana Burke started the 'Me Too' movement to support survivors of sexual assault and end sexual violence (Tarana Burke, 2006). Ten years later in 2016, the 'Me Too' movement and has had enormous support by many around the world. This movement has brought light to numerous allegations and has provided women with the courage to speak up against their perpetrators of sexual violence (Hayes, 2018). The 'Me Too' movement runs on the assumption that most people believe sexual violence is an important topic, worth discussing and eliminating in society. But social media has the power to reinforce rape culture and negative attitudes towards sexual assault, negatively impacting healthy dialogue. A post will appear

briefly on someone's newsfeed, where the content can include inaccurately cited stories by the creator of the post. This post is viewed by large audiences, if it doesn't go viral, and the shares and content are not monitored so long as it is not an explicit post. Users will read the headline, rarely diving deeper into the story (Stubbs-Richardson, Rader and Cosby, 2018). The headline will read, like one posted by the Journal de Montréal, "Presumed gang-rape victim had consumed too much alcohol" following the assault of a 15 year old child (Toula Drimonis, 2017). This leads the reader to believe that this child's experience can be discredited due to the consumption of alcohol and is an example of the digitization of rape culture. Examples like this can be seen on Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, or any other platform.

Twitter has proven to be a great platform for sociologists to analyze the presence of rape culture through tweets. Ash and their colleagues (2017), demonstrated in their study that problematic attitudes and ideologies of rape culture were reinforced in the subset of tweets they analyzed, following an African-American football quarterback for Florida State University who was not convicted of sexual assault following allegations. They observed words used to describe slut-shaming and money seeking motives of the survivor in the tweets that they viewed. Rape culture also includes talking about the perpetrator as a victim, which was observed in their analysis. For every tweet that spoke positively about the victim, another 6 attacked her (Ash et al, 2017). This serves as good emphasis to of the pervasiveness of victim blaming that prevails on social media. Victim blaming and questioning is the driving force that occurs on social media which can feed into existing societal ideologies to only reinforce their existence (Zaleski et al. 2016).

The digitization of rape culture allows for secondary socialization to occur on the web, that complements and builds upon the primary socialization that occurs at home in the family (Stubbs-Richardson, Rader and Cosby, 2018). The digitization of rape culture also allows for the dissemination of visual evidence or content relating to a specific event of sexual violence. Content can exist as a tweet, comment, post, video, photograph. The support of rape culture on social media has begun to change the way in which sexual violence is experienced by the survivor in the aftermath, often worsening the experience and feeling re-victimized (Dodge, 2016). Much of the cyberbullying that occurs on social media following a sexual assault, would be categorized as sexual violence if it were to occur in person. But because of its online presence, these comments are often being normalized and considered only under the vague umbrella of cyberbullying. As the form in which the evidence of a case of sexual assault can vary, it makes it hard to monitor online. Sexual violence, whether it occurs in person or online should not be normalized to anything lesser, as the nature of the damage is both emotional and psychological in addition to physical. The concept of rape culture is manifested as those who share photos and comment slut shaming comments on photos for example. Not only is a photo itself proliferating and temporally extending the horrible experience, but comments supporting its proliferation can exist in the form of victim blaming or sexual assault. There is less policing and consequences online, which enables the permeation of rape culture through the notion that sexual violence is tolerated.

On the level of the individual, re-victimization can occur much more readily on the internet. Digital dissemination adds additional harm to so many involved. Zaleski's paper (2016) argues that victim blaming and questioning, clouds people's judgement into believing that rape is a feminist subculture or individual issue. It is really a systemic problem of our society as a

collective whole; blame cannot be placed on the victims especially if the problem is to be eliminated (Zaleski et al. 2016). With higher rape myth acceptance among men, which social media seems to contribute to, there is higher rape proclivity, increasing the likelihood of rape being committed (Grubb and Turner, 2012). An intersection between cyberbullying and sexual violence online must occur for crimes to be punished appropriately online. The trend of expressing sexuality online will not stop, but we must understand what is online sexual violence and must not tolerate and normalize unacceptable behaviour and ideologies due to their online nature.

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