

# Nonconsensual Porn as a Form of Intimate Partner Violence: Using the Power and Control Wheel to Understand Nonconsensual Porn Perpetration in Intimate Relationships

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## Abstract

Over the last decade, nonconsensual porn (NCP), or the sharing of sexually explicit material without a person's consent, has become a growing problem with potentially far-reaching adverse consequences for victims. The purpose of this article is to propose and consider a framework for advancing the field's understanding of NCP within the context of intimate relationships including situating NCP relative to other forms of relational abuse. Specifically, we examined the extent to which NCP in intimate partner relationships was perpetrated using tactics from the Power and Control Wheel through a summative content analysis of U.S. news stories on NCP from 2012 to 2017. This analysis established that NCP has been perpetrated using all eight of the abuse metatactics in the Power and Control Wheel, with the three most common being emotional abuse, coercion and threats, and denial/blame/minimization. Treating NCP in relationships as a potential form of partner violence provides a basis on which to understand the etiology, manifestation, motives, and impact of this form of abuse and informs practitioners' ability to design prevention efforts and engage a trauma-informed response to survivors.

## Keywords

nonconsensual porn, revenge porn, intimate partner violence, digital abuse, sexual abuse, Power and Control Wheel

In February 2014, a 21-year-old college student Carly Hellstrom awoke in Tallahassee, FL, to find her cell phone full of missed calls and texts from worried friends. While she slept, her ex-boyfriend from freshman year posted a nude photo of her online, and it was spreading across the internet. Within days, the photo would gain over 100,000 views, making it the first item associated with her name on all major internet search engines. After she tried unsuccessfully to have the photos removed, Hellstrom turned to the police department for help, but based on the current state of the law, the police explained, there was nothing they could do (Hope, 2015).

While there is not yet a national law in the United States criminalizing the nonconsensual dissemination of sexually explicit images, these actions are now illegal in nearly all U.S. states (Cyber Civil Rights Initiative, 2019). Nonetheless, intimate image abuse continues to wreak havoc on the lives and careers of people from all backgrounds. For example, in 2019, California Representative Katie Hill was the victim in a high-profile case of "revenge porn." Media outlets across the country published countless stories detailing how Hill's estranged husband, in cooperation with Republican

operatives, published intimate photos of Hill online without her consent (e.g., Franks, 2019). Hill ultimately resigned, putting an end to a House Ethics Committee investigation into her alleged affair with a congressional aide. In light of her experience, Hill has vowed to work to further "... defeat this type of exploitation" upon leaving office (Brehman, 2019).

Stories like these have appeared in the news for over a decade. However, social science research on nonconsensual pornography (NCP, also known as "revenge porn," "cyber rape," "involuntary porn," and "slander porn"; Powell & Henry, 2017a) has been slow, especially in light of the rapid

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national and international growth of this form of digital sexual abuse (e.g., Henry et al., 2019). However, researchers are starting to examine the prevalence and nature of NCP victimization and perpetration on a large scale. In a recent investigation of over 3,000 adult social media users in the United States, 1 in 12 reported at least one instance of NCP victimization in their lifetime, and 1 in 20 reported having perpetrated NCP (Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2019). Consistent with sexual double standards, women reported higher rates of victimization and lower rates of perpetration than men, and women victims had lower levels of well-being than women nonvictims and men victims (Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2019).

However, health and social science researchers have yet to systematically theorize about the etiology, correlates, and consequences of NCP. The purpose of this article is to propose a framework for advancing the field's understanding of NCP within the context of intimate relationships (Citron & Franks, 2014) including situating it relative to other forms of relational control and abuse. To better understand the relationship between NCP and features of intimate partner violence (IPV), we performed a summative content analysis of U.S. news stories on NCP among intimate partners from 2012 to 2017. In this analysis, we examined the extent to which each report of NCP was perpetrated using tactics from the Power and Control Wheel (Pence & Paymar, 1993), which outlines a pattern of power and control in relationships, that is relevant to NCP pathways.

### *Definition and Prevalence of NCP*

In the last decade, digital sexual interactions have become increasingly widespread due to an increase in technologies that enable multimodal communications, as well as changing norms around such exchanges (Smith et al., 2011). Sexting, for example, is common among young adults in the United States, with about half of all those aged 18–26 years having sent nude or seminude photos or videos of themselves to others (Benotsch et al., 2012; Dir et al., 2013; Drouin & Landgraff, 2012; Drouin et al., 2013; Gordon-Messer et al., 2012) and two thirds having received sexually explicit photos (Dir et al., 2013). Among a sample of single adults aged 21–75+ ( $M = 47$ ), 15.5% reported having sent a sexual image of themselves via text and 23.4% reported receiving a sexual image via text (Garcia et al., 2016). These images, or sexts, are most often sent in the context of a committed intimate partnership (Drouin & Landgraff, 2012; Garcia et al., 2016), although they also occur in potential, casual, and adulterous sexual and romantic relationships (Drouin et al., 2013; Garcia et al., 2016).

Research among adolescents and emerging adults also suggests that sexual images are typically originally shared in the context of an intimate relationship (Klettke et al., 2014). For example, a study using a cross-sectional national telephone survey of participants aged 10–17 years found that nearly 1 in 10 respondents created or received a “sext,” and over half reported that these images were shared within the context of a romantic relationship (Mitchell et al., 2012). Additionally,

research by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2008) found that 46%–48% of young adults believe it is common for sexually explicit photos to be shared with people other than the intended recipient, and 24% of young adult women and 40% of young adult men say that images originally intended for someone else had been shared with them. Among the predominantly middle-age sample in Garcia and colleagues' (2016) study, 22.9% of those who had received sexual photos by text also shared them with others (19.6% of women, 25.3% of men), and typically more than three additional people.

The uploading or sharing of sexually explicit material without a partner's consent, specifically for the purpose of humiliating or intimidating a partner or ex-partner, was originally labeled “revenge porn” (Citron & Franks, 2014). The term “revenge porn” emerged between 2005 and 2010 and was media-generated rather than evolving from scientific work (Henry et al., 2017). The reality is that revenge porn falls under the umbrella of “nonconsensual pornography” which refers more generally to the distribution of sexually explicit images of individuals without their consent (Citron & Franks, 2014). NCP does not include commercial pornography, although commercial and amateur websites have profited from nonconsensually disseminated sexual images (Fletcher, 2014). Further, NCP is considered one of many types of technology-facilitated, image-based sexual abuse (Henry et al., 2017; Powell & Henry, 2017a) proposed to lie on a continuum including offenses such as sexualized photoshopping, upskirting, and sextortion (McGlynn et al., 2017).

In late 2016, Lenhart and colleagues (2016) published a data memo describing, for the first time, the prevalence of “revenge porn” in the United States. Using a nationally representative sample of 3,002 internet users aged 15 or older, these researchers conducted phone-based interviews asking participants about their experience with cyberabuse, including whether anyone had ever threatened to or actually did “. . . post nearly nude or nude photos or videos of you online to harm or embarrass you” (Lenhart et al., 2016, p. 14). Results of this study found that 4% of all participants, or about 1 of every 25, had someone threaten to post and/or post sexually explicit images of them without their consent. However, this study specified that the posting of images must have been “online” and with the intent “. . . to harm or embarrass,” excluding anyone whose images were shared by via other means (e.g., text, email) or whose perpetrators were motivated by other reasons (e.g., for profit, for amusement).

One nation-wide study examined NCP victimization and perpetration among over 3,000 adult Facebook users aged 18–97 years ( $M = 40.31$ ; Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2019). Using a broad definition of NCP that did not specify perpetrator motive or means of distribution (e.g., “Has anyone ever shared a sexually explicit image or video of you without your consent”), the researchers found higher rates of victimization than Lenhart and colleagues (2016). Specifically, 12.8% of participants in this study reported having been either victimized by or threatened with NCP at some point in their lives, and 8% of

participants had an explicit image of them shared without their consent (Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2019). This estimate is closer to that found in a 2017 study of image-based abuse among Australians aged 16–49, in which 11% of participants reported having had a sexual image of themselves distributed without their permission (Henry et al., 2017).

Results from both U.S. studies, however, reflected some of the same key features. First, both found that women were overall more likely to report being victims of NCP than men (Lenhart et al., 2016; Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2019). Ruvalcaba and Eaton (2019) additionally found that men were twice as likely to report having been perpetrators of NCP than women, with 7.26% of all men participants reporting perpetration versus 3.29% of all women across all age groups. These studies suggest that NCP is a gendered phenomenon as well as a sexualized one. Both studies also found that younger adults and LGBT individuals were at a greater risk of NCP victimization than older adults and cis/hetero individuals, respectively.

In addition to being a gendered phenomenon, NCP is often committed between intimate partners or ex-partners (Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2019), consistent with the experiences of victims Carly Hellstrom and Congresswoman Katie Hill described earlier. The fact NCP most often occurs in the context of current or former intimate relationships has long been assumed by researchers, politicians, and the popular press and is evident in the term “revenge porn.” However, this term is still a misnomer (Franks, 2017), as NCP committed in relationships may not have been revenge-motivated, and the term wrongly “. . . implies a kind of justice against someone who inflicted an injury” (Greenhouse, 2014).

Victims of NCP experience grave social, psychological, and emotional harms from both the nonconsensual exposure of their bodies to the public and from speaking out about the abuse (Chiarini, 2013; Hegarty, 2019; Jacobs, 2013). Research done with NCP victims shows that they experience a range of negative mental health outcomes due to their victimization, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Bates, 2017), as well as lower levels of well-being than their nonvictimized counterparts (Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2019).

A few scholars have described and examined relationship-based NCP as a form of IPV (Henry & Powell, 2015; Powell & Henry, 2017a; Reed et al., 2016). For example, Reed and colleagues (2016) included threatening to share or sharing a “sexually suggestive image of me without permission” (p. 1564) in their assessment of experiences of digital dating abuse among college students, along with technology-perpetrated stalking and harassment. Other work has examined parallels between NCP and sexual assault (Bates, 2017), suggesting that both stem from rape culture and gender inequality (Powell & Henry, 2017b). While papers like this have made sound arguments for situating NCP relative to other forms of abuse and violence, no work to date has systematically examined how NCP in relationships meets the definition of IPV using established relationship violence frameworks. This work is especially needed given that news media and public figures, like State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle, have been

increasingly referring to intimate image abuse as a “form of domestic violence” (Ovalle, 2015).

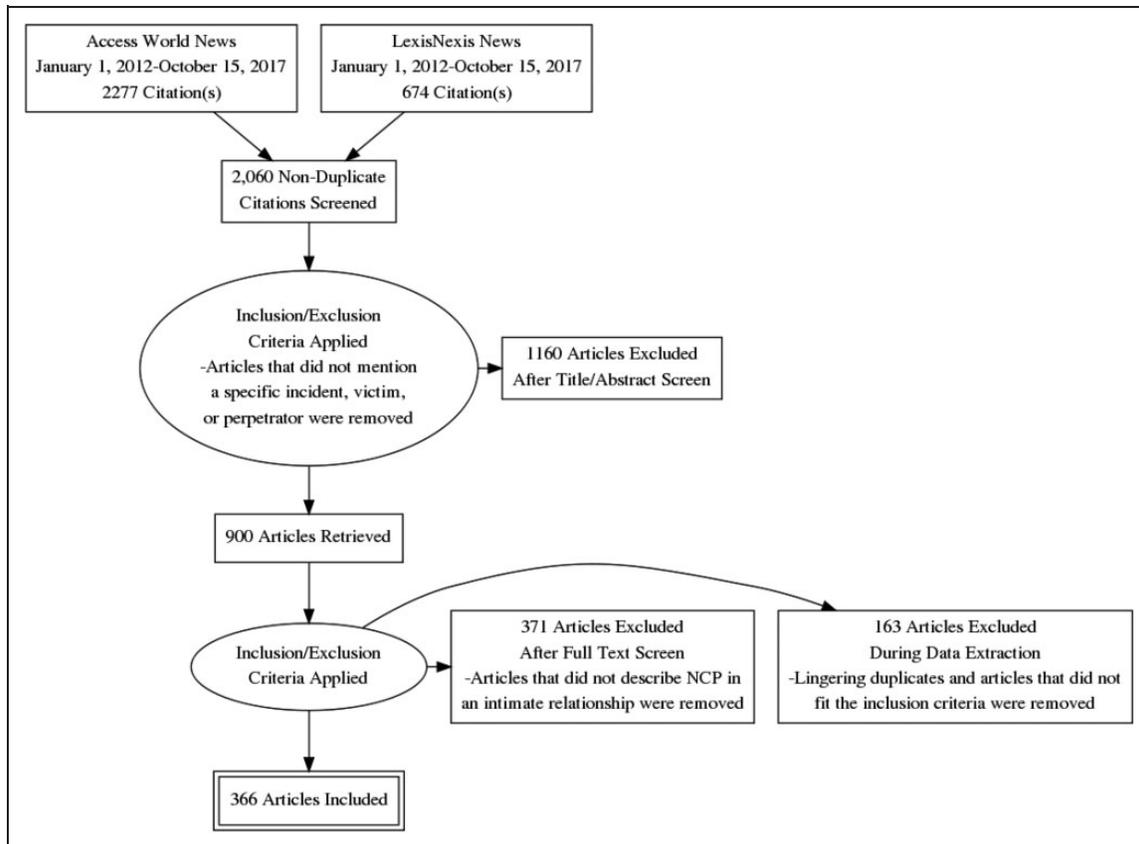
The lack of prior situation of relationship-based NCP within IPV frameworks potentially limits an understanding of the most expansive approaches to prevention efforts and the work of practitioners interacting with those impacted by NCP. The purpose of the present article is to examine NCP in intimate relationships through the lens of the Power and Control Wheel (Pence & Paymar, 1993) to further advance the field’s understanding of NCP as an extension of abuse tactics within abusive intimate relationships. Using a widely used and well-supported framework to characterize NCP within the dynamics of IPV will set the stage for programs of research that systematically tests interconnections between emerging and established relationship abuse behaviors, assists researchers in developing models for predicting and reducing NCP perpetration and victimization, and aids practitioners in working with NCP victims.

### *NCP and the Power and Control Wheel*

The Power and Control Wheel was developed in the 1980s to assist practitioners in supporting women victims of domestic violence and holding batterers accountable for their actions (Pence & Paymar, 1993) and is now used to characterize and intervene on a variety of abusive relationship behaviors. The wheel depicts a constellation of metatactics that abusers use to maintain power and control over their partners. There are eight “spokes” in the wheel, each of which displays a metatactic, including intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, minimizing/denying/blaming, using children, economic abuse, male privilege, and coercion/threats for clarity. Together, these spokes make up an interrelated and interlocking system of abusive and violent behaviors (Dutton & Starzomski, 1997) that conceptualize IPV as a sociocultural and structural syndrome that goes beyond perpetrator pathology (Pence & Paymar, 1986).

The Power and Control Wheel has received much empirical support and attention since its inception. For example, researchers have examined predictors and consequences of Power and Control Wheel tactics (Dutton & Starzomski, 1997; Else et al., 2009) and have used the wheel as a framework for developing legal remedies for IPV (Candela, 2016), to understand abuser’s written letters to victims (Dukes et al., 2002), and to understand family and animal abuse (DeGue, 2011). The wheel is also widely used in many practice settings including in domestic abuse intervention programs, psychosocial educational programs, and in medical and treatment settings (Contrino et al., 2007; Love is respect.org, 2019; YWCA Spokane, 2019). While the wheel may be too individualistic for use in some cultures (e.g., Crichton-Hill, 2001; Rankine et al., 2017), it has robust validity in diverse Western populations (e.g., Dutton et al., 2001; Else et al., 2009).

The Power and Control Wheel has also been extended to understand a variety of relationships where abusive behavior has created, and is fueled by, power imbalances. For example, wheels have been tailored to understand workplace bullying (Scott, 2018), same-sex abusive relationships



**Figure 1.** Search and screen process.

(Roe & Jagodinsky, 1995), and medical professionals' abuse of DV patients (Cosgrove, 1992). In 2017, a Power and Control Wheel specifically on technology and abuse was developed (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2017). While the new technology wheel is an advancement for the field, NCP is not explicitly mentioned in this wheel, despite the fact that "posting false and hurtful information" and "sending disturbing information" are both listed in the coercion/threat spoke.

In the present article, we posit that NCP is being perpetrated via tactics identified in the original Power and Control Wheel. While recent work has theorized that nonconsensual porn may be used as a form of "technology facilitated coercive control" (Dragiewicz et al., 2018) in the abuse of intimate partners, no work to our knowledge has tested this empirically. In this article, we use summative content analysis to understand how the spokes of the Power and Control Wheel (Pence & Paymar, 1993) have been used in the perpetration of nonconsensual porn in relationships, based on 5 years of published news cases in the United States.

## Method

To test the possibility that NCP in relationships is perpetrated using tactics from the Power and Control Wheel, we performed content analysis on U.S. news articles published over a 5-year

period (2012–2017). Content analysis is a qualitative research method that interprets and codes textual material to make replicable, valid inferences (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2016). It is especially useful and common in analyses of media and communication messages (Riffe et al., 2019). The specific technique we used to identify the presence of tactics from the Power and Control Wheel in news articles was summative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Summative content analysis begins with identifying content in samples of text, for the purpose of understanding the contextual and latent use of the words or content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Therefore, our first step was to develop a database of published U.S. news articles for coding. A diagram illustrating the search and screening process for our database development can be seen in Figure 1 (PRISMA Flow Diagram Generator, 2019).

The news databases LexisNexis News and Access World News were utilized to find all articles published in U.S. newspapers that used the terms "revenge porn\*," "nonconsensual porn\*," or "non-consensual porn\*" in the headline or first paragraph. The use of both databases served to ensure full coverage of all existing news stories, based on best practices in media research (e.g., Weaver & Bimber, 2008). The database search was conducted for articles published between January 1, 2012 and October 15, 2017, and newspapers, newswires, and web-only sources (with the exception of college newspapers and audio sources) were included. The initial search produced

2,277 hits in Access World News and 674 hits in LexisNexis News, for a combined total of 2,951 news sources.

After the initial article search, identical instances of articles were removed using a data processing software, bringing the total from 2,951 to 2,060. Articles were then reviewed by hand and any article that did not mention a specific incident, victim, or perpetrator were removed. For example, a great deal of articles described proposed or enacted legislation around NCP, discussed NCP and related phenomenon (e.g., sexting) in an abstract sense. Others reviewed debates around the legality of NCP, the “right to be forgotten,” and the nature of free speech. These types of articles did not describe an actual incident of NCP in which Power and Control Wheel metatactics might be reported and were therefore removed from the database. Removing these left 900 articles.

Articles that did not describe NCP in an intimate relationship were removed next. For example, some articles described NCP that was perpetrated between friends and ex-friends, roommates or acquaintances, or strangers. This left 529 articles in our database. The remaining articles were hand-reviewed by the second author to remove any lingering duplicates or articles that did not fit the inclusion criteria. This left us with a total of 366 U.S. news articles.

Next, to develop the codebook for our content analysis, we used a combination of deductive and inductive coding methods. We first used deductive codes derived directly from definitions of the eight spokes in the Power and Control Wheel (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Two independent coders (the first and second author) applied this initial codebook to 50 published news articles selected at random from the database. In doing so, the coders made independent judgments about whether the instance of NCP described in each news article was perpetrated using any of the Power and Control Wheel spokes. The coders then came together to update the codebook based on inductive insights gained from initial close reading and application of the preliminary codebook. Definitions and examples in the codebook were then extended to better capture the variety of examples of each spoke that were observed in the articles.

Using this updated codebook, the coders then independently reviewed and coded 50 additional articles. Interrater reliability was .91 as assessed by percent agreement based on the presence of a spoke (Boyatzis, 1998). Any disagreements were then resolved by reaching consensus through discussion of the original article. The second author then proceeded to code the remaining articles independently, as well as recoding the initial 50 articles used to develop the codebook.

## Results

A total of 366 U.S. news articles met the inclusion criteria for analysis. Among these articles, 161 unique cases of nonconsensual porn perpetration were described. The most widely covered case, the instance of NCP perpetrated by celebrity Rob Kardashian against celebrity and ex-girlfriend Blac Chyna in 2017, was reported in 38 independent news articles. Most cases of NCP were only described in a single article in the database

(69.5%); on average, cases were described in 2.19 separate news articles ( $SD = 3.78$ ).

Of the 366 news articles describing NCP perpetration in intimate relationships, 90.71% described the perpetrator using at least one spoke of the Power and Control Wheel in their perpetration of NCP (332/366; see “Critical Findings” section). Similarly, 91.3% of the 161 unique cases of NCP described the perpetrator as using a metatactic from the Power and Control Wheel in their NCP perpetration (147/161). On average, each individual case (322/161) and each article (731/366) described the perpetrator applying 2.00 metatactics from the wheel in their commission of NCP. Some actions met the codebook criteria for multiple metatactics. For example, sending NCP to a victim’s child could be coded both as “using children” and as “emotional abuse.”

Below, we report the frequency of the Power and Control Wheel abuse tactics for the 161 unique cases of NCP, as well as for the full set of 366 unique news articles. Descriptions of the coding schema for each metatactic, and examples illustrating each metatactic, are provided. Table 1 describes the definitions of the original spokes in the Power and Control Wheel (Pence & Paymar, 1993), the way we operationalized each spoke as relevant for perpetrating NCP, and the frequency of each spoke in our database. The full database of articles is available from the first author.

## Critical Findings

- In our U.S. news database, we found evidence that non-consensual porn (NCP) has been perpetrated using all eight of the abuse metatactics in the Power and Control Wheel
- 90.71% of U.S. news articles and 91.3% of unique cases of NCP between 2012 and 2017 described the perpetrator using at least one spoke of the Power and Control Wheel in their perpetration of NCP (332/366 and 147/161)
- The most commonly described tactics were emotional abuse (90.7% of all cases), minimizing/denying/blaming (28% of all cases), coercion and threats (24.8% of all cases)

## NCP Is Perpetrated Using Emotional Abuse

The first metatactic in the Power and Control wheel is emotional abuse, which includes humiliating and putting down one’s partner, making someone feel guilty or bad about themselves, and playing mind games (Pence & Paymar, 1993). For the present analysis, cases of NCP were coded as containing emotional abuse when NCP was used with the intent to humiliate or put down one’s partner, making them feel bad about themselves. Text was also coded for this tactic if the images were shared broadly (e.g., to social media or to a website dedicated to “revenge porn”), were

**Table 1.** Summary of Power and Control Wheel Spokes and Frequencies.

Spokes	Definition of Original Spoke	Definition for Perpetrating NCP	Frequency of Spoke
Using emotional abuse	Putting her down; making her feel bad about herself; calling her names; making her think she's crazy; playing mind games; humiliating her; making her feel guilty	Using NCP to humiliate or put down one's partner; sharing the images broadly (e.g., to social media or to a "revenge porn" website); posting images alongside the victim's personal information; sending images to family and friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 90.7% of all cases (146/161)</li> <li>• 87.4% of all news articles (320/366)</li> </ul>
Using intimidation	Making her afraid by using looks, actions, gestures; smashing things; destroying her property; abusing pets; displaying weapons	Using NCP to make a partner feel afraid or terrified; sharing images to make the victim feel there is no safe place for them to go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13.7% of all cases (22/161)</li> <li>• 8.5% of all news articles (31/366)</li> </ul>
Denial, blame, and minimization	Making light of the abuse and not taking her concerns about it seriously; saying the abuse didn't happen; shifting responsibility for abusive behavior; saying she caused it	Making light of the abuse inflicted on the victim; denying that he/she perpetrated it; attempting to justify or make excuses for posting the NCP; shifting the responsibility for the abuse onto the victim; implying the victim deserved or "asked for" it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 28% of all cases (45/161)</li> <li>• 29.2% of all news articles (107/366)</li> </ul>
Using male privilege	Treating her like a servant; making all the big decisions; acting like the "master of the castle"; being the one to define men's and women's roles.	Leveraging the advantages of the male gender role, such as the sexual double standard, by perpetrating NCP with images containing both the male perpetrator and the female victim; disseminating a photo to illustrate that a female partner was sexually servile.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18.6% of all cases (30/161)</li> <li>• 16.1% of all news articles (59/366)</li> </ul>
Using economic control	Preventing her from getting or keeping a job; making her ask for money; giving her an allowance; taking her money; not letting her know about or have access to family income	Using NCP as a form of blackmail or extortion; using NCP to damage a victim's career or professional reputation; profiting off a nonconsensual image; using NCP to coerce the victim into paying takedown or legal fees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18% of all cases (29/161)</li> <li>• 16.9% of all articles (62/366)</li> </ul>
Using coercion and threats	Making and/or carrying out threats to do something to hurt her; threatening to leave her, to commit suicide, to report her to welfare; making her drop charges; making her do illegal things	Threatening to disseminate NCP; using NCP to extort victims (overlapping with the abuse tactic of using economic control) or to coerce or threaten them to (falsely) confess or to engage in unwanted sex acts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24.8% of all cases (40/161)</li> <li>• 38.3% of all articles (140/366)</li> </ul>
Using children	Making her feel guilty about the children; using the children to relay messages; using visitation to harass her; threatening to take the children away	Using NCP to make one's partner feel guilty about their children; sharing or threatening to share NCP with a victim's child; publicly sharing NCP with the intent for children to one day see or be bullied for it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5% of all cases (8/161)</li> <li>• 2.7% of all articles (10/366)</li> </ul>
Using isolation	Controlling what she does, who she sees and talks to, what she reads, where she goes; limiting her outside involvement; using jealousy to justify actions	Threatening of using NCP with the express intent to isolate or make a victim feel completely alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.2% of all cases (2/161)</li> <li>• 0.5% of all articles (2/366)</li> </ul>

Note. NCP = nonconsensual porn.

posted alongside the victim's personal information, or were sent to family and friends.

In our analysis of U.S. news articles, this tactic appeared more frequently than any other. Specifically, the tactic of emotional abuse appeared in 90.7% of all unique cases of NCP perpetrated in intimate relationships (146/161) and 87.4% of all news articles in the database (320/366). In one example, a 25-year-old Ogden man was arrested when

police received a report that he had sent an inappropriate image of his ex-wife to her father (Park, 2015). This tactic was coded for emotional abuse because it was sent to a family member. Given the stigma against nudity between adult children and their parents in the West (McCaughan, 2016), especially around father-daughter nudity which is associated with incest (Stroebe et al., 2013), sending sexually explicit materials of a victim to her father is potentially

even more humiliating than sending these materials to other family members.

In another example, Brittany Hura shared nude photos of her ex-boyfriend on social media, writing that he “can’t pleasure a girl” (Hitt, 2017). In this case, the perpetrator leveraged norms around hegemonic masculinity to humiliate the victim (Kimmel, 2006; Stephens & Eaton, 2014), implying that he failed to meet the standards for “successful” manhood, which include heterosexual sexual prowess and expertise (Flood, 2007). In another case, a 34-year-old Michigan perpetrator posted NCP of his ex-girlfriend online and sent them to her family members, allegedly hoping the emotional harm she endured from this abuse would drive her to suicide (Fruchtnicht, 2018).

The most commonly represented case of NCP in our database, between celebrities Rob Kardashian and Blac Chyna, also clearly illustrated the tactic of emotional abuse. In July of 2017, Kardashian posted private, nude images of his ex-partner Blac Chyna to his Instagram social media account, including images of her butt, breasts, and genitals. When his Instagram account was suspended, Kardashian resorted to posting the images on Twitter, with captions such as “This woman is so disrespectful and I don’t care” (Sblendorio, 2017). Captions such as these demonstrate that the perpetrator was seeking to punish the victim with public humiliation.

Public humiliation is also an evident motive for many slut-shaming and revenge porn websites, with titles such as “ChangeMyReputation.com” (Rocha & Perry, 2015). Hunter Moore, the man behind what was once the largest revenge porn website on the internet, also openly admitted to Nightline News that he launched isanyoneup.com for the purpose of “public humiliation” and referred to himself on Twitter as a “professional life-ruiner” (Dickson, 2014; Karlinsky et al., 2012).

Victims of NCP are also at risk of ongoing humiliation and sexual harassment from viewers of the intimate images (Citron, 2014). For example, New York City resident Matthew Herrick’s ex-boyfriend posted NCP of him on Grindr, a dating app. Alongside the NCP he posted Herrick’s personal details and a message inviting individuals to his apartment, and to the restaurant where he worked, for sex (Scheller, 2015). In some cases, the posts included messages warning viewers that Herrick may be initially resistant toward their advances but to continue to pursue him “as part of an agreed upon rape fantasy or role play” (O’Brien, 2017; Scheller, 2015). Within just 5 months, Herrick had over 1,000 unfamiliar men arrive at his home and workplace expecting sex. In a similar case, Hollie Toups experienced in-person humiliation and harassment after topless images of her appeared on a revenge porn website along with links to her social media accounts and a Google map of her location (Bambauer, 2014).

### *NCP Is Perpetrated Using Intimidation*

The second metatactic in the Power and Control Wheel relevant to NCP perpetration in relationships is the use of

intimidation. Intimidation was originally conceptualized in the Power and Control Wheel as including making a partner feel afraid by using looks, gestures, and behaviors. Examples of intimidation included damaging property, using menacing gestures, and displaying weapons (Pence & Paymar, 1993). For the present study, text was coded for the intimidation metatactic when NCP was used to make a partner feel afraid or terrified. For example, NCP might be shared to make the victim feel that there is no safe place for them to go. The threat of dissemination of NCP can also be used to intimidate victims. Intimidation with NCP may cause victims to obtain restraining orders or change names, addresses, and phone numbers (Szydowski, 2018)

In our analysis of U.S. news articles, this tactic occurred in 22 of 161 unique cases of NCP (13.7%) and 31 of all 366 news articles (8.5%). In one example, a man from Utah refused to delete nude images he had of an ex-girlfriend and showed them to several acquaintances. Ostensibly, the man’s refusal to erase the images was “in case he needs blackmail material” (Reavy, 2015). In Wisconsin, another perpetrator told his ex-girlfriend “Say anything else to me, and I’m going to post these [nude] pictures on Facebook” (Savidge, 2013), attempting to instill fear in the victim and solicit compliance. This instance of perpetration behavior was also coded as an example of “coercion and threats.”

In another example from our database, Antonio Giansante from Miami Beach was arrested in 2015 on possession of child pornography, video voyeurism, and cyberstalking (Ovalle, 2015). He created fake social media profiles of his ex-girlfriend using nude images of her, including from when she was under 18 years of age. He then sent Facebook and Instagram requests from profiles featuring these images to her coworkers, serving to intimidate her at work as well as abuse her economically and emotionally. Still other perpetrators have been charged with “felony intimidation of a victim” for the ways in which they used NCP (e.g., *Wisconsin State Journal*, 2015).

### *NCP Is Perpetrated Using Denial, Blame, and Minimization*

The third metatactic used in NCP perpetration is minimizing, denying, and blaming. In this tactic, the abuser makes light of the abuse he/she inflicts on the victim, denies the abuse, and/or shifts the responsibility for the abuse onto the victim. In the present analysis, text coded for this theme included instances where a perpetrator of NCP attempts to make light of the abuse inflicted on the victim or denies that he/she perpetrated it. Instances where the perpetrator attempts to justify or make excuses for posting the NCP, shifts the responsibility for the abuse onto the victim, or implies that the victim deserved or “asked for” the NCP, were also coded for this theme.

In our analysis of U.S. news articles, this tactic occurred in 28% of all unique cases of NCP (45/161) and 29.2% of all news articles (107/366), making it the third most common metatactic. When Holly Jacobs discovered that her social media

account had been hacked in 2009 and her profile photo replaced with a nude photo she once sent to her boyfriend, she immediately called him (Scheller, 2015). His first response was to claim that he, too, had been victimized. By the end of the conversation, Holly was so convinced of her partner's innocence, and his own distress, that she ended up apologizing for wrapping him up in the ordeal (Miller, 2013; Scheller, 2015). Years later, after becoming a nationally recognized and leading activist in the fight to end NCP, Holly won a settlement against her ex-partner who pled no contest to NCP in court. His claims of innocence, and of his own victimization, were denials and distractions (Scheller, 2015).

The first known "revenge porn" case in the state of New York also involved a perpetrator who used denial and minimization. While admitting to sharing naked photos of his girlfriend on his Twitter account, and sending them to her employer and family members, he purported to have done so with her permission—a claim vigorously denied by the victim (Yaniv, 2014). In this way, he attempted to minimize the extent of the abuse and of his guilt. Other abusers have attempted to deny culpability using the pretense that they perpetrated NCP in an effort to help the victim. While being tried for harassment, one perpetrator claimed he sent a link to a sex video of his ex-lover to her and to her friends and family "... because she was an old friend and I wanted to warn her" (Linning, 2015).

### *NCP Is Perpetrated Using Male Privilege*

The next metatactic, using male privilege, involves leveraging the advantages and power of the male gender role to abuse a victim. In the Power and Control Wheel, this includes tactics such as acting like the "master of the castle," making all the big decisions, and treating a woman partner like a servant (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Consistent with the gender asymmetry typically observed in abusive heterosexual relationships (e.g., Hamby, 2014), research specifically examining the distribution of sexual images without consent finds that women are more likely to be threatened and/or victimized than men (Eaton et al., 2017; Lenhart et al., 2016). Because of the gender differences in victimization rates, NCP in relationships should be treated as a form of gender-based violence (Henry & Powell, 2015; Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2019) and can be partly on the basis of gender differences in privilege and power.

One example of male privilege is the sexual double standard, in which women are judged more harshly than men for engaging in the same sexual behavior (Zaikman & Marks, 2014). In NCP, male perpetrators leverage the double standard by disseminating, without fear of personal harm, images that contain sexual content from the woman victim and the perpetrator himself (e.g., Fink & Segall, 2016; Johnson, 2015; Marsh, 2017). The fact that male perpetrators commonly post sexual images containing themselves as well as their partner points to their awareness that the female partner will experience negative consequences they will not. In sum, text coded for this theme included instances where the perpetrator leveraged the advantages and power of the male gender role to

control a victim, such as posting sexually explicit images containing both the male perpetrator and the female victim. Any NCP case where a male partner disseminated a photo to illustrate that his female partner was sexually servile was also coded for male privilege.

In our analysis of U.S. news articles, the tactic of using male privilege occurred in 18.6% of all unique cases of NCP (30/161) and 16.1% of all unique news articles (59/366). For example, "Jane," a Chicago woman, discovered that her ex-husband had been surreptitiously taping their sexual encounters and posting them online, including pictures and videos taken on their honeymoon. While her ex had the privilege of posting these without fear of public repercussions for himself, Jane suffered a host of emotional, social, and physical consequences from the NCP and compares her experience to that of being raped (Fink & Segall, 2016).

### *NCP Is Perpetrated Using Economic Control*

Another metatactic of the Power and Control Wheel is economic abuse, whereby abusers endeavor to attain power over victims by preventing them from getting or keeping jobs, taking money they earned, or hiding family income (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Examples of economic abuse include using NCP as a form of blackmail, to damage a victim's professional reputation, to profit off their image without their consent, or to coerce the victim into paying takedown and other legal fees. When perpetrators threaten to distribute NCP to secure money or other favors from victims, it is known as "sextortion" (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2016). NCP can also be used to threaten one's career by sharing it with a victim's employer or coworkers in an effort to damage their professional reputation and cause termination.

In our analysis of U.S. news articles, economic abuse was coded in 18% of all cases (29/161) and in 16.9% of all articles (62/366). Kisha, a woman from the Bronx, NY, recounted how her ex demanded that she give him US\$400, threatening to release her intimate photos on Facebook if she did not comply. In one case, Noe Iniguez, an angry ex-boyfriend, allegedly posted a topless photograph and derogatory comments about his ex-girlfriend on her employer's Facebook page and encouraged her firing from the company (Garen, 2015). Other victims were forced to resign after their images had been directly sent to their employer (Barnum, 2016). Still others have explained that the distribution of these images to work colleagues has prevented them from being hired (Zilbert, 2017) or from securing internships (Marsh, 2017).

Intimate partners have also attempted to profit off the images of their high-profile victims by selling photos and tapes. Abusers may share their victim's intimate photos on websites that require takedown fees with the intent that the victim would incur steep fees to remove intimate content from the internet. In one high-profile case, the actress Mischa Barton alleged in 2017 that an ex-boyfriend had secretly recorded nude videos of her showering and shared them with another ex-boyfriend of hers, who shopped the tape to porn sites (Kenneally, 2017). Ms.

Barton had to hire an attorney and sue her ex-partners to prevent the sale of her photos and videos (Farhi, 2017). In another case, one woman had intimate screenshots secretly taken of her during video chats with her ex-partner, and the ex-partner attempted to sell the photos to the victim's male friends.

As an additional economic consequence, victims who want to remove nonconsensual images from the internet can be subject to hefty fees. For example, slut-shaming websites require those depicted in the photos to pay hundreds of dollars to have their image(s) removed (Federal Trade Commission, 2015). Takedown and "reputation management" services that use the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) to remove content from websites can cost upward of \$199 for every site they remove images from (e.g., DMCA.com, 2017) or require 6- or 12-month paid subscriptions (e.g., DMCA Defender, 2017). Even these efforts are not enough, however, as images frequently spread to dozens (Finch, 2015) or even hundreds of sites over the course of many years (Alter, 2017).

### *NCP Is Perpetrated Using Coercion and Threats*

The metatactic of coercion and threats includes coercing one's partner into doing unwanted things (e.g., dropping charges) as well as threats such as threats to hurt or leave a partner (Pence & Paymar, 1993). NCP in relationships can be committed using coercion and threats to extort victims to pay them money, thereby also overlapping with the abuse tactic of using economic control (ABC7, 2017). There are also instances of NCP being used to coerce or threaten partners to (falsely) confess to accusations or to engage in unwanted sex acts.

In our analysis of U.S. news articles, the metatactics of coercion and threats was found in 24.8% of all cases (40/161) and in 38.3% of all articles (140/366), making it the second most common metatactic in our analysis. For example, an 18-year-old Demario Hunter succeeded in sextorting a 19-year-old woman with a recording of the two having sex. He used the recording to "get her to have sex with three 15-year-old friends." The woman then called 911 when Hunter threatened to release the video if she didn't have sex with a fourth person (his cousin; KHOU, 2017).

Citron and Franks (2014) note that abusers also use NCP against their partners when they attempt to leave the relationship. After a woman broke up with Stephen Belbin of Massachusetts, Belbin

began contacting her mother and her friend, and threatened that he was on his way back to Massachusetts to "kick (the victim's) teeth in" The woman said Belbin had also threatened to show up at her home armed... he also sent nude images of the woman to her friend, and warned her that he intended to send them to others. (Manganis, 2017)

### *NCP Is Perpetrated Using Children*

According to the Power and Control Wheel, the metatactic of "using children" includes making one's partner feel guilty

about their children, threatening to call social services to remove the children, or involving children in disputes (Chavis & Hill, 2009; Pence & Paymar, 1993). In the present study, text coded for this theme included instances where NCP was used to make one's partner feel guilty about their children, sharing or threatening to share NCP with a victim's child, or publicly sharing NCP with the expressed intent for children to one day see or be bullied for.

In our analysis of U.S. news articles, using children was coded in 5% of all cases (8/161) and in 2.7% of all articles (10/366). In one case, Jovica Petrovic, a Florida resident, tormented his ex-wife's family with hundreds of the former couple's intimate photos by sending them to her home, her children's school, and her employer. Petrovic even sent a package disguised as a bid from a local construction company to her real-estate developer ex-husband while her children were staying at that home.

Ben [the victim's ex-husband] figured it was a request for a bid and tossed it on the kitchen counter. His seven-year-old son opened it. Inside were glossy photos of the child's mother engaged in oral sex with Petrovic. Some of the printouts had captions . . ."

Petrovic also sent postcards with the intimate photos to the parents of the victim's children's friends (Phillips, 2013). Many more victims fear their children will Google their names one day and find the nonconsensual images (Feit, 2015) or that their children will be bullied in school due to classmates knowing about the images (Corrao, 2017). Other cases involve threatening to distribute NCP in an effort to control the movement or custody of the children. Michael Hamel of Florida posted a naked photo of his ex-girlfriend on Facebook and threatened to post many more if she "let a guy around their child" (Filosa, 2016).

### *NCP Is Perpetrated Using Isolation*

The final spoke in the Power and Control Wheel is using isolation. The wheel considers actions to be isolating if they involve controlling what a victim does, who she sees and talks to, what she reads or where she goes. Additionally, actions taken to limit her/his outside involvement or using jealousy to justify actions are classically characterized as isolation (Chavis & Hill, 2009; Pence & Paymar, 1993). Cases were coded for isolation in this study if NCP was threatened or used with the express intent to isolate or make a victim feel completely alone.

In our analysis of U.S. news articles, using isolation was coded in 1.2% of all cases (2/161) and in 0.5% of all articles (2/366). Although rare, it appears that NCP can be wielded as a tool to intentionally isolate a victim when it is systematically disseminated to all of a victim's contacts—including neighbors, co-workers, bosses, a victim's partner's coworkers and bosses, and friends/family, in an attempt to isolate the person. In the case of Jovica Petrovic, he shared his ex-wife's intimate photos and videos with hundreds of her contacts including her family, friends, neighbors, children's families and

schoolteachers, other ex-husband's business partners and more (Phillips, 2013). The victim stated that the entire family became isolated—her ex-husband's business associates, who had received postcards of her intimate photos, stopped socializing with them. The children were not invited over to birthday parties. Petrovic even created a website with the victim's intimate photos and timed the mailing of his postcards to community events in the victim's neighborhood, so partygoers would discuss the postcards at the events.

When interviewed regarding his motives for the harassment, Petrovic repeatedly referenced *The Game*, the 1997 psychological thriller in which Michael Douglas' character tries to commit suicide after living through an elaborate hoax. "I think he was turning this into something like that movie," [Officer] Jackman said, "that it would be so traumatic that the person couldn't deal with it, that they'd eventually try to take their own life." During Petrovic's trial, his victim stated that the website did indeed bring her to the brink of suicide. "I wanted to die," she said. "I didn't know what to do to get it to stop" (Phillips, 2013). This particularly heinous example illustrates the isolation and despair that NCP can wield when it is systematically disseminated to a victim's entire community.

## Discussion

In this article, we used the Power and Control Wheel (Pence & Paymar, 1993) as an organizing framework in conducting a summative content analysis of all published U.S. news stories on NCP in intimate relationships from 2012 to 2017. This analysis established that NCP has been perpetrated using all eight of the abuse metatactics in the Power and Control Wheel, including emotional abuse (90.7% of all cases), minimizing/denying/blaming (28% of all cases), coercion and threats (24.8% of all cases), male privilege (18.6% of all cases), economic abuse (18% of all cases), intimidation (13.7% of all cases), the use of children (5% of all cases), and isolation (1.2% of all cases). In our analysis, our intention was not to confine NCP in intimate relationships to a singular framework or conceptualization but rather to use a widely accepted, contextual abuse framework to understand a relatively new abuse phenomenon with broad adverse social and health impacts, particularly for women (Bates, 2017; Ruvalcaba & Eaton, 2019).

The most commonly used of the eight metatactics was emotional abuse. Perpetrators intentionally posted to websites designed to shame former partners (e.g., Agar, 2015), they sent images to victim's family and friends (Fruchtnicht, 2018), including the victim's children (Phillips, 2013), and they included text with the intimate images intended to humiliate victims (e.g., Hitt, 2017). The predominance of the emotional abuse tactic in our database is consistent with research on IPV which finds that psychological and emotional abuse is more common than physical or sexual abuse (Gormley & Lopez, 2010), though NCP is also a form of sexual violence (Powell et al., 2018). While emotional abuse may at first seem trivial, it is often a precursor for more "severe" forms of abuse (Eaton &

Matamala, 2014; O'Leary, 1999). Moreover, victims can report that emotional and psychological abuse is the most painful form of IPV (Murphy & Cascardi, 1999).

The least commonly used spoke in the Power and Control Wheel in the perpetration of NCP in relationships was the spoke of isolation. Instead, isolation is likely a downstream consequence of NCP rather than a specific tactic an abuser uses to perpetrate NCP. In general, however, we illustrate that NCP is an important extension of technology-related aspects of abuse that should be considered by researchers and practitioners in working with those at risk for IPV, those victimized, and in designing prevention interventions.

Although our analysis demonstrates connections between NCP and features of IPV as described by the Power and Control Wheel, it is not designed to accurately estimate the frequency with which such connections occur. Because our study coded news articles, which are usually short and rarely furnish the full details of any story, our study likely underestimates the true incidence of specific metatactics used in the U.S. general population to perpetrate NCP. Additionally, the news articles were generally based on publicly available data such as police reports or court documents and/or victim and perpetrator accounts. Many of these sources document only the most provable allegations, and many victims or perpetrators are reluctant to share the details of their full story with the media, further decreasing the mention of specific tactics in news articles.

While we present an approach that may be informative and useful for the field, there are several limitations of our approach that must be noted. First, our analyses come from media stories pitched for broad audience capture rather than interviews directly with victims (or perpetrators). Similar national studies conducted by the Centers for Disease Control have utilized media stories to summarize school-based homicide characteristics (Centers for Disease Control, 2008). With this said, we recommend that future studies include direct interviews with victims and perpetrators, to explore (additional) potential nuances of NCP that should be further elucidated within frameworks such as the Power and Control Wheel. Further, future studies should also investigate the contexts for how, when, and why NCP is used within intimate relationships, relative to and in conjunction with other types of abuse (e.g., verbal and physical abuse). For example, do abusive partners resort to NCP (an extreme public form of humiliation) when other coercive control tactics (e.g., verbal abuse) and physical abuse are not effective in "controlling" their partner? Do abusers use NCP primarily when a partner is threatening to end the relationship, if they suspect their partner has been unfaithful, or when they are intoxicated?

While the goal of our study was to overlay NCP on the standard Power and Control framework, additional information is needed on other contextual risk and protective factors, at the intersection of gender, race and ethnicity, economic privilege, sexual orientation, and different ability (Chavis, & Hill, 2009), that could be useful for researchers and practitioners when working with victims and designing interventions. Also, while we utilize the Power and Control Wheel because consistent

themes indicate that NCP is an extension of an interlocking pattern of abuse used in relationships, certainly other lenses and frameworks are possible and should be constantly probed as the field gains additional information on NCP. Finally, we recognize and appreciate that sexting itself is not inevitably problematic (Hasinoff, 2015), and it may in fact be a normative and healthy form of sexual communication for both women and men (Temple, 2015; Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011). Instead, we are concerned with understanding the nature of digital and image-based sexual abuse and violence, specifically the sending of sexual images without consent.

These limitations notwithstanding, we illustrated that within the context of abusive intimate relationships, NCP is perpetrated using a wide variety of tactics to maintain power and control over victims, including all eight of the metatactics in the original Power and Control Wheel, which was designed using testimony from hundreds of battered women in a Duluth shelter (Pence & Paymar, 1993). As a result of this emerging abuse epidemic, victims of NCP are often unable to stop the spread of images, forcing them to leave their jobs, transfer schools, relocate, or even change their names (Hope, 2015). In this regard, the negative impact on victims may be especially extensive and long-lasting, including potentially prolonged trauma and other unique long-term social, emotional, economic, and psychological consequences.

In light of our findings, experiences with NCP and other forms of digital sexual abuse should be considered for inclusion in future studies aiming to characterize the full spectrum of dating, domestic, and IPV (see “Implications of the Review for Practice, Policy, and Research” section). For practitioners, we recommend incorporating nonconsensual porn into prevention and intervention planning for those at risk for IPV. For example, individuals in relationships where features of the Power and Control Wheel are present (e.g., coercion, emotional abuse) can be educated about the fact that NCP is often perpetrated using these metatactics, which form an interlocking system of power and control executed in varied and overlapping ways. Therefore, sharing nude images in the context of an abusive or relationship puts them at risk for NCP victimization. Due to the extensive and lasting impact that NCP has for victims, these conversations and intervention approaches should consider the additional advocacy and support that may be needed for NCP victims around relocating, identifying a new job, protecting their safety, and protecting family members.

While advocacy and support services have converged on some effective treatments for victims of IPV, such as the use of cognitive behavioral therapy (Arroyo et al., 2017), and are aware of patterns of service usage for IPV victims (e.g., high rates of physical and mental health service usage on college campuses; Sabina & Ho, 2014), the nature of NCP may require additional types of treatment, support planning, and services. For example, victims of NCP may need amplified advisement on legal issues such as copyright law (Fink, 2015), relevant state criminal laws (Cyber Civil Rights Initiative, 2019), and how to present the digital evidence to law enforcement to promote action (Johnstone, 2013). Victims of NCP may also need

greater access to online and phone-based help services, given that those with mobility and/or communication challenges may be particularly susceptible to all forms of image-based abuse (Henry et al., 2017).

## Implications of the Review for Practice, Policy, and Research

### Practice

- Intervention approaches for victims of NCP should consider the additional advocacy and support that may be needed for relocating, identifying a new job, protecting victim’s safety, protecting family members, and legal issues such as copyright law, state law on NCP, and the preservation of digital evidence
- Individuals in abusive relationships should be warned about the use of NCP as a tool for power and control

### Policy

- NCP should be treated by lawmakers and law enforcement as a potential form of intimate partner violence
- A comprehensive national law criminalizing NCP is needed in the United States

### Research

- Research on intimate partner violence should assess experience with NCP perpetration and victimization

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