What’s Trending? #SexualAssault: An Exploratory Study of Social Media Coverage of Teen Sexual Assaults

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ABSTRACT AND ARTICLE INFORMATION

Social media play a significant role in the lives of many, particularly teenagers. For heavy users of social media, great significance is attributed to the messages posted in the virtual world. In the aftermath of sexual assault, victims, offenders, friends, family, the community, and virtual strangers have the ability to weigh in on the assault. Little research has explored these societal reactions on social media. The current exploratory, qualitative study examines social media responses to four highly publicized cases of teenage sexual assault: Daisy Coleman, Jane Doe, Audrie Pott, and Jada. Five major themes were identified via thematic analysis, including victim blaming/shaming, offender support, family/survivor utilization, victim support, and offender blaming. A thematic map, definitions, and examples of these themes are provided within. Consistent with commonly held rape myth beliefs, victim blaming/shaming appeared as the most common reaction on social media, with a large parallel response of offender support. Victim support emerged as a popular theme only after family members and the survivor spoke out, facts of the rape emerged, and media attention grew. The theme of offender blame was the most difficult to find amid the messages targeting the victim. The discussion highlights the significance of major trends, relationships among themes, and the potential repercussions of such social media presentations. Additional recommendations for education on the reality of sexual assault and awareness of healthy and responsible social media usage are disclosed.

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Although research demonstrates that sexual assault victimization can occur at any age (Kilpatrick, Edmunds, & Seymour, 1992; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), younger individuals are at an increased risk. In fact, 79% of sexual assaults are perpetrated against victims younger than 24 years of age, while ages 12 to 17 account for 32.8% of cases (Office for Victims of Crime, 2014). Rape continues to be the least reported of all crimes (Truman & Langton, 2015), and the continued support of rape myths by survivors, their support systems, law enforcement officials, and the general public may be a major reason for this lack of disclosure.

Social media have become a way for teenagers to learn of and pass judgement about sexual assault, as teens account for a large proportion of social media consumers. Ninety percent of teens use social media daily, while 25% state they are using it constantly...
throughout the day (Lenhart, 2015). Moreover, for many teenagers, social media have become more than just a way to connect. It has become a tool to define one’s self-worth and to fulfill an emotional need (Kim & Lee, 2011; Rosen, Whaling, Carrier, & Cheever, 2013; Sas, Dix, Hart, & Su, 2009). The purpose of this exploratory, qualitative study is to identify and explore major themes that are present within the context of social media reactions to teenage sexual assault. The research utilizes four highly publicized sexual assault cases: Daisy Coleman, Jane Doe, Audrie Pott, and Jada. The literature review provides an overview of rape myth acceptance, rape myths in the media, and the impact of these myths on survivors. Literature continues with teen social media usage, the impact on wellbeing, and the coverage of sexual assault on such platforms. The qualitative methodology, case summaries, and thematic development are described. The results provide an overview of social media responses to these cases by theme, each highlighted with social media messages. A final reflection details the reality of sexual assault, repercussions that can develop when sexual assault becomes fodder for social media dissection, and the need for further education on safe social media behavior.

**Literature Review**

**Rape Myth Acceptance**

Burt (1980) was one of the pioneers of defining and measuring the impact of rape myths, which are stereotypical false beliefs about rape. These myths place responsibility with the victim, creating an antagonistic environment for survivors of sexual assault. Accountability for the perpetrator is often minimized by rape myths that attribute the sexual assault to various factors, from an uncontrollable sex drive to alcohol use. Additionally, these myths often imply that a “certain kind of woman” gets raped, that women’s behavior and clothes contribute to their rape, and that many women lie about their victimization (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Examples of such myths include “she is saying it was rape because she wants to protect her reputation,” “she asked for it by wearing those clothes,” and “she had it coming because she was drinking.” These myths help to remove blame from the offender (Suarez & Gaddalla, 2010). As a result, these commonly held beliefs contribute to a denial of injury and a lack of justice for those victimized, and they negate blaming the perpetrator.

Researchers have explored adherence to these ideas and potential repercussions, often measuring attitudes via rape myth acceptance scales (Burt, 1980; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999). Researchers report that 25 to 35% of respondents support rape myths (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). These attitudes that directly endorse victim blaming have a dramatic effect on the pervasiveness of rape myths (Suarez & Gaddalla, 2010). Although many people may be hesitant to blame the victim directly, it is common for respondents to attribute blame to the victim’s actions such as drinking, flirtatious behavior, or clothing choice (McMahon, 2010). Among college students, Buddie and Miller (2001) found that the majority of their sample subscribed to at least some of these myths.

Overwhelmingly, studies have found that men support pro-rape attitudes and are quicker to adopt rape myth beliefs than women (Brady, Chrisler, Hosdale, Osowiecki, & Veal, 1991; Check & Malamuth, 1983; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Russell, 1990; Suarez & Gaddalla, 2010; Whatley, 1996). Suarez and Gaddalla (2010), in a meta-analysis, found that oppressive attitudes towards women, sexist beliefs, and approval of interpersonal violence were highly predictive of rape myth acceptance. Social position may also influence one’s understanding of these misinformed stances on sexual assault. Membership into an elite group, such as an athletic team, military branch, or fraternal organization, is associated with a higher level of rape myth acceptance (Crosset, Ptackek, McDonald, & Benedict, 1996; Koss & Cleveland, 1996; Suarez & Gaddalla, 2010).

**Effects of Rape Myths on Sexual Assault Survivors**

Research recognizes that survivors are often revictimized by the lack of social support they receive postrape (Yamawaki, Darby, & Queiroz, 2007). One of the most significant sources of judgment can come from the victim’s social network (Ullman, 1996). By displaying an adherence to rape myths, friends and family demonstrate the cultural belief that the blame for sexual assault lies with the victim (Burt, 1980). Victim-blaming tends to be even more common when the perpetrator is an acquaintance instead of a stranger (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003; Monson, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, & Binderup, 2000) or when the victim is a member of a minority group (Tillman, Bryant-Davis, Smith, & Marks, 2010).

Survivors often display these rape myth beliefs through expressions of self-blame, guilt, and difficulty defining their assault as rape, thus often choosing to remain quiet in fear they will not be believed or supported (Finkelosn & Oswalt, 1995; Heath, Lynch, Fritch, McArthur, & Smith, 2011; Starzynsky, Ullman, Filipas, & Townsend, 2005). Scholars have found that those who are raped by an acquaintance and possess a belief in rape myths are less likely to report their assault to law enforcement (Heath, Lynch, Fritch, & Wong, 2013). Minority women are more likely to
subscribe to rape myths and to internalize their assault, keeping the rape to themselves (Tillman et al., 2010; Heath et al., 2013). Survivors who report a lack of support are also likely to avoid seeking prosecution of the rapist (Anders & Christopher, 2011).

Presentation of Rape Myths in the Media

The media have reinforced rape myth beliefs. Research notes that the media have a significant influence on consumers’ attitudes (Bryant & Oliver, 2009). Cultivation theory argues that the way media portray a particular event or topic can greatly influence their audiences’ beliefs (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Specifically, higher rates of media consumption have been linked to higher rates of rape myth acceptance (Kahlor & Morrison, 2007).

Primetime depictions of sexual assault have consistently perpetuated rape myths (Cuklanz, 1999). In a content analysis of primetime television dramas, Brinson (1992) found that among portrayals of sexual assault, 46% of the time women were depicted as “asking for it,” 42% of the incidents alluded that the woman “wanted” to be raped, and 38% portrayed a victim who was lying about the assault. In soap operas, rape references increased 10 times over 10 years, perhaps due to popular media coverage of rape trials (Greenberg & Hofschrir, 2000).

In the print media, headlines and article contents can impact readers (Galeste, Fradella, & Vogel, 2012). For example, when examining coverage of the Kobe Bryant sexual assault case, 10% of online headlines endorsed a rape myth, while 65.4% of the stories contained at least one rape myth. One article included 15 myth endorsing statements. Only 14% of the articles included a negative comment about the accused’s character (Franik, Seefelt, Cepress, & Vadello, 2008). Scholars also exposed college students to myth-endorsing and non-myth headlines. Male students exposed to the myth-endorsing headlines were more likely to hold these rape-supportive attitudes than female students (Franik, Seefelt, & Vadello, 2008). Students who were exposed to an article endorsing rape myths were likely to believe the defendant was innocent, while those who were exposed to a myth-challenging article were more likely to support the victim’s allegation (Franik, Seefelt, Cepress, & Vadello, 2008). Research gives credence that messages related to sexual assault that appear in the media, including social media, will greatly impact the beliefs and understanding of those who absorb these messages.

Teens and Social Media

Social media play an important part in teenage communication. According to the Pew Research Center, over nine out of 10 teens (ages 13 – 17) go online daily; half of these teenagers go online several times a day, and almost one out of four teens rate their online usage as constant. Much of this online activity comes in the form of social media. Seventy-one percent of teens say they are on Facebook, over half use Instagram, 41% use Snapchat, and 33% use Twitter (Lenhart, 2015).

When exploring personality, popularity, and self-esteem of Facebook users, Zywica and Danowski (2008) found powerful trends of social enhancement and social compensation. Introverts with low self-esteem were likely to use social media as a venue to appear more popular and involved, appearing to be more comfortable sharing private information and expressing themselves online (Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel, & Fox, 2002). These introverted individuals will often reach out to social media for an alternative social group (Barker, 2009). Extroverts with higher self-esteem used Facebook to enhance their popularity, appearing to be popular in both realms (Zywica & Danowski, 2008). These highly confident extroverts express communicating with their peer group as the main reason they engage in social networking sites (Barker, 2009).

Self-presentation becomes a very important element of social media, as users want to be viewed as socially desirable. Self-affirmation and a desire to be viewed as worthy may guide many users’ behaviors and decisions on social media. People want to be liked, and for many, something as simple as one’s number of virtual “friends” is positively related to the user’s self-esteem, happiness, and perceived social value (Kim & Lee, 2011; Rosen et al., 2013). Users develop profiles that are typically positive in nature, thus eliciting positive responses from those in their network (Sas et al., 2009). When comments are unflattering or unsupportive, many platforms allow users to delete messages and friends from their online social network (Toma & Hancock, 2013). Meh dizadeh’s (2010) results suggest that individuals who are more narcissistic and have lower self-esteem were more likely to frequently use Facebook and provide self-promotional content. However, this desire to manage one’s virtual impression may be linked to an increased risk for major depression (Romcr, Bagdasarow, & More, 2013; Rosen et al., 2013; Wilcox & Stephen, 2013; Ybarra, Alexander, & Mitchell, 2005).

There has been a growing trend of rape disclosures online, documentation of the assault being shared by others on social media, and societal virtual expressions of victim blaming and shaming. There also have been a number of reported teen suicides after the use of social media following their sexual assaults (Campbell, 2013). Rape is motivated by power and dominance, and thus, when perpetrators share images of the assault on social media, power and dominance
over the victim occurs repeatedly (Fuchs, Kelley, & Lubin, 2013). Additionally, the problem of victim blaming is intensified via social media networks that reinforce one another’s blaming techniques; thus, as the assault is shared repeatedly through social media avenues, the shame can become worse than the original assault (Fuchs et al., 2013).

**Methodology**

This qualitative study seeks to understand how the public responds via social media to highly publicized cases of teen sexual assault.

**Case Selection**

The current study focuses on Maryville’s Daisy Coleman, Steubenville’s Jane Doe, Saratoga’s Audrie Pott, and Houston’s Jada. These cases were selected based on similarity of case details and the parallel level of media attention each received. Each of these cases involved teen victims with juvenile offenders who were acquaintances; alcohol was a factor in each case; all originated in a small town; each included documentation and/or videos of the assault as evidence the rapes did occur; and all offenders were popular athletes. These cases acquired rapid, local attention before they reached the national level, thus spurring popularity and controversy via news outlets and social media.

**Data Collection & Analysis**

Researchers will now detail four cases which were analyzed using a thematic analysis. The goal was to explore the content of social media messages following a teenage sexual assault. This approach allowed the researchers to make comparisons, extract commonalities, and look for unique occurrences (Yin, 2003). After an extensive review of news stories surrounding each individual case, the researchers turned to popular social media sites to explore social reactions to the incidents. Twitter and Facebook emerged as the most popular and publicly viewed networking sites and, therefore, were the main sources of information and examples for this study.

To begin, each researcher used general search terms including the victims’ names and/or case name. For example, in the Steubenville case, the victim’s name was not made public, so “Steubenville rape” was used as an initial search term; yet, in the case of Audrie Pott, the researchers began with “Audrie Pott” as the search term because her name was made public. As the original search progressed, additional terms emerged, thus expanding the search to include more case related data. #JadaPose, #JusticeForDaisy, and #SteubenvilleRape were common hashtags used on Twitter, and similar terms were entered into Facebook to search additional social media messages.

To allow for a manageable review of materials, search parameters were established. Posts on both Twitter and Facebook were reviewed from the date of the assault to two years following the assault. The review focused on one comment and/or message from each individual user in this timeframe, with the focus being on the first message from a particular username. With each of the four cases, the researchers reviewed approximately 500 posts. In accordance with thematic analysis, the goal of the research was not to develop quantifiable results, but instead was designed to identify and report common trends amongst the data in the form of theme development (Braun & Clark, 2006). After individual familiarization with the social media responses, each researcher coded messages, condensed their codes into themes, and developed individual thematic maps. Upon a review of the thematic maps, the three researchers collectively revised, defined, and operationalized each theme (Braun & Clark, 2006) and were able to develop a holistic thematic map to organize the data (see Figure 1, which demonstrates thematic coding and relationships within the data). This inductive approach resulted in five broad themes including victim blaming/shaming, offender support, family/survivor utilization, victim support, and offender blaming. The analysis of these themes includes overall theme presentation, the function of each theme and the overall effects of such trends (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Kitzinger, 2004).

Case summaries, major themes, examples of social media messages, and the larger relationships amongst the themes and case facts are detailed within. Due to the controversial and potentially offensive nature of the posts, all names and identifiers have been excluded to promote anonymity of the original source. None of the messages were corrected for grammar or dialect.

**Case Summaries**

**Daisy Coleman:** As Diaz and Effron (2014) reported on ABC News, 14-year-old Daisy Coleman of Maryville, Missouri was the victim of a rape by 17-year-old Matthew Barnett. A freshman cheerleader and senior football player at Maryville High School, the two teens were acquaintances. Coleman and a friend were drinking and texted Barnett, who then picked the girls up at her home. At a party hosted by Barnett, Coleman consumed a drink provided by him and had no subsequent memory. An incoherent Coleman was raped by Barnett while a friend recorded the assault (Kemp, 2013). The boys left Daisy in her front yard in below freezing temperatures in little
clothing. Her mother found her and took her to the emergency room. A rape kit revealed that she had been assaulted.

Barnett was initially charged with sexual assault and child endangerment (Diaz & Effron, 2014). Once charges were made public, Coleman and her family began to endure intense harassment. In addition to being a popular football star, Barnett’s grandfather was a former state representative and state trooper (Associated Press, 2014). Many refused to believe the allegations against Matthew Barnett. Charges against him were eventually dropped (Diaz & Effron, 2014), and a special prosecutor was appointed to the case. Barnett pled guilty to a misdemeanor charge of child endangerment. Daisy’s mother lost her job, and her brother was severely bullied. Daisy admitted that she attempted to take her life on at least two occasions. Shortly after the Coleman’s left Maryville, their house was “mysteriously” burned to the ground (Caulfield, 2013).

Figure 1. Thematic Map

Jane Doe: On August 11, 2012 a 16-year-old girl became the victim in a highly publicized rape case known as “the Steubenville, Ohio Rape.” Trent Mays and Ma’lik Richmond, popular football players at Steubenville High, were identified as the two teen offenders. At a party that evening, witnesses report the victim became highly intoxicated early; she needed help walking and had a hard time making conversation (Macur & Schweber, 2012). A baseball player dared others to urinate on the incapacitated victim. Along with other football players, Mays and Richmond carried the victim to a second party, held by a football player who later served as a testifying witness (Macur & Schweber, 2012). Mays, Richmond, the victim, and the witness were in his car when he recorded Mays assaulting the incoherent victim, stating she would not be able to remember it. He admits to sharing the video with a friend (Macur & Schweber, 2012).

At the third party, witnesses described the victim as unable to stand or walk and “sleeping” (Macur & Schweber, 2012). Mays exposed himself to initiate oral sex. At the same time, Richmond stood behind the unresponsive victim as he penetrated her with his fingers. A friend of Mays’s captured and shared photos of these events with several others. The friend claimed he told Mays to stop in fear that Mays would face
After disclosing incomplete memories with her parents, numerous pictures, videos, and comments circulating on social media and text messages told a more complete story (Macur & Schweber, 2012). Evidence was handed over to police. It was too late to perform a rape kit. Mays and Richmond were arrested several days later (Macur & Schweber, 2012). Police struggled to build a case as witnesses reported being afraid, and many rallied around the offenders. Police recovered two photographs of the naked, passed out victim on Mays’ cell phone. Both Mays and Richmond were charged as juveniles with rape and kidnapping. The victim has struggled with socializing and depression, refusing to attend school. The victim and family were threatened, friends stopped communicating, and parents forbid their children to associate with the victim (Macur & Schweber, 2012).

Audrie Pott: On September 2, 2012, 15-year-old Audrie Pott from Saratoga, California, was raped. Audrie and a friend began drinking while waiting for friends. Witnesses say Audrie was already drunk when peers arrived, including three 16-year-old males (Burleigh, 2013). The boys took an unresponsive Audrie to a room, where they removed her clothes, drew on her skin with markers, digitally penetrated her, and photographed each other violating her body (Burleigh, 2013).

The following morning. Audrie woke up with no clothes on and no recollection of what happened. Audrie later communicated with the three boys on Facebook. She learned that they took nude photographs of her, which they claimed were deleted (Burleigh, 2013). Two days later, the photos circulated around school. Audrie’s friends noticed that she had cuts on her arms and was skipping classes. Audrie stated to peers that her life and reputation were ruined. On September 10, 2012, just a few days after her assault, Audrie hanged herself.

Audrie’s friend took information about the events preceding Audrie’s suicide to the school board (Burleigh, 2013). On April 11, 2013, all three boys were arrested on suspicion of committing two felonies and one misdemeanor and charged as juveniles (Burleigh, 2013). Two of the boys received 30-day sentences to be served on the weekend, and the third boy was sentenced to 45 consecutive days (Burleigh et al., 2013).

Jada: On July 1, 2014, Jada, a 16-year-old, was invited to a house party in Houston, Texas. A male host offered her punch that rendered Jada incoherent and unconscious. Jada recalls being taken upstairs, but woke up nude the next morning with no memory of the evening (Stewart, 2014). As weeks passed, pictures of Jada passed out in minimal clothing surfaced on social media with the hashtag #JadaPose. Quickly others started mimicking the pose and posting their photos online, prompting Jada and her mother to file a police report.

Months later, a 16-year-old male classmate was arrested and charged with sexual assault (Dahl, 2014). Four days later after the first arrest, 19-year-old Clinton Onyeahialam, turned himself into authorities regarding Jada’s rape. Onyeahialam was charged with two counts of sexual assault of a child, as authorities stated there is evidence Jada was not his only victim that night (Dahl, 2014). Despite requests for her name to be withheld from the media, Jada decided to speak after her identity was shared online (Stewart, 2014). Jada stated that she did not want to hide and wanted to address rape culture in our society to prevent other teens from experiencing the same humiliation that she has endured.

Results

Victim blaming/shaming, offender support, family/survivor utilization, victim support and offender blaming emerged as predominant themes in these cases. The messages that originated shortly after the rapes were overwhelmingly in support of the accused and blamed or shamed the victim. This trend continued to be the most pervasive even as national media attention grew and global social media responses were made. The themes are not mutually exclusive, as some posts had multiple themes present. For example, in the Steubenville case of Jane Doe, one tweet encompassed concepts consistent with a victim blaming and an offender support theme. The tweet read, “Be responsible for your actions ladies before your drunken decisions ruin innocent lives. #rape #Steubenville” (Respondent 1, March 17, 2013, [Twitter]).

Victim Blaming/Shaming

Victim blaming/shaming was the most prominent theme observed in these cases. This theme included any subscription to the rape myth that the victims’ actions led to the assault; thus, they should be held accountable. Blaming the assault on the victim’s behavior, their drinking or promiscuity, would be included in this thematic definition. Also included are any posts that were demeaning, punishing, or aggressive towards the survivor. This theme was present in all four cases.

Daisy. Much of the response in Daisy’s case was outrage at the victim. Many social media users stated that Daisy’s actions were to blame for the assault: “No one ever got this much attention for being raped... I’m smart enough not to not myself in those situations”
Another poster noted, “Well she went with him she should have not” (Respondent 3, October 18, 2013, [Facebook]). The shaming aspect emerged in the messages that included name calling and negative labels. An example was in a Twitter post that read, “Fuck yea. That is what you get for being a skank :) #jordanandmattarefree.” (Respondent 4, March 14, 2012, [Twitter]). Others proceeded with messages that included sentiments that Daisy lied about her assault and deserved the ridicule that followed: “Hope she realizes this just made her look stupid and not get sympathy. Except the dumbass people believed her #jordanandmattarefree” (Respondent 5, March 13, 2013, [Twitter]).

Jane Doe. Comments blaming the victim were common in this case. Examples include, “Remember kids, if you're drunk/slutty at a party, and embarrassed later just say you got raped” (Respondent 6, March 17, 2013, [Twitter]). The reaction to the case of Jane Doe was heavily influenced by case facts that detailed the presence of alcohol. Immediately following the attack and continuing months later, social media respondents were referencing the victim’s consumption of alcohol. Posts such as “passed out? at 16??? what from?? alcohol? You play with fire you are going to get burnt…” (Respondent 7, March 20, 2013, [Facebook]) and “well dont pass out” (Respondent 8, March, 18, 2013 [Facebook]) excuse the actions of the perpetrator and states that the victim deserved to be assaulted. Comments such as “not just at the 3rd house. I’m not saying what they did isn’t wrong but it’s not rape… It’s the girls fault #dondrink” (Respondent 9, March 17, 2013, [Twitter]) and “Maybe if you don’t want to get raped, don’t get blackout drunk. Just a thought #Steubenville” (Respondent 10, March 19, 2013, [Twitter]) actually acknowledge the rape and fail to attribute blame to the offender. Alcohol was not the only victim blaming factor noted. The classic myth of clothing choice was found in statements such as “Sorry ladies, skimpy clothing is pretty much implied consent. Don’t dress like a whore if you don’t want to be treated like one. Simple” (Respondent 11, March 17, 2013, [Twitter]). This quote, along with basic statements like “I have no sympathy for whores” (Respondent 12, May 10, 2012, [Twitter]), uses name calling to shame the victim.

Audrie. Audrie’s case is unique in that when exploring social media for messages about her assault, little was found prior to her suicide. One major trend found in posts about Audrie’s assault was sharing a bingo board that detailed common rape myths and behaviors that provided a multitude of victim blaming terms and scenarios, indicating that her actions led to her rape. A Twitter post exemplified this victim blaming trend reading “play stupid games win stupid prizes… don’t play adult games if you can’t face adult consequences, and keep your fucking clothes on” (Respondent 13, n.d., [Twitter]). Another example read,

It was her fault, she never should have been there. It’s like guys who get killed in bar fights, stay out of those bars and it never would have happened. Go to places with dirtbags and you deal with the repercussions of that. (Respondent 14, n.d., [Facebook])

When social media starting calling for charges of sexual assault and murder, a new and even crueler form of victim blaming emerged. Messages included reasons not only for her rape, but for her death. Comments such as “It’s called PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY and SELF RESPECT and if this girl HAD EITHER she’s be alive today” (Respondent 15, n.d., [Twitter]) and “… if the girl had any common sense she’d be alive. Everyone knows this stuff happens when alcohol gets involved, and look what happened when she went out drinking” (Respondent 16, n.d., [Facebook]) illustrate this concept.

Jada. “Maybe they shouldn’t drink alcohol at parties and they won’t do a #Jadapose” (Respondent 17, July 19, 2014, [Twitter]). In Jada’s case the war of words was strengthened with imagery to shame her. Her assailants had photographed her on the floor, nude and clearly incapacitated. The photograph spread across social media and soon people began to mock the picture, creating a nationwide trending hashtag: #JadaPose. Broderick (2014) noted that in one weekend, the #JadaPose mockery pictures had been referenced on Twitter more than 1,000 times. Figure 2 provides a visual example of a young man lying on the ground and mocking the young victim with #Jadapose as a reference.

Figure 2. A Tweet Mocking Jada
Other comments included the tagline #Jadapose and accused Jada of falsifying the rape and ruining the boys’ lives. Examples of such comments include “Like #Jadapose. She got drunk at a party, then made up a false rape claim” (Respondent 18, July 11, 2014, [Twitter]) and “I will #jadapose all fucking day... Lying about rape is not cool u can seriously ruin somebodies life” (Respondent 19, September 30, 2015, [Twitter]). These comments serve as another form of shaming, alleging that the victim lied and should feel guilt for the pain they have caused the accused.

**Offender Support**

Offender support was also one of the strongest themes in all but one of these cases. The support is strongest immediately following the assault and after any court rulings or decisions that are in favor of the accused. Messages that included explicit encouragement for the perpetrator, excused, or denied their behaviors, or celebrated their legal triumphs were classified in this category.

**Daisy.** In Daisy’s case, the presentation of offender support was overwhelming. Local classmates took to Twitter and Facebook in an effort to protect, praise, and celebrate the young perpetrators. One of the young perpetrators utilized social media to brag about his sexual appeal. Others immediately embraced his arrogant manner, following with statements such as “In the words of famous Matthew Barnett ‘if her name starts with abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz she wants the D’” (Respondent 20, October 13, 2013 [Twitter]).

One poster did not disregard the act of rape, but instead minimized the damage it caused the victim and maximized the costs to the perpetrator:

You gonna throw a boys life away cos he got a little pussy? The girl wasn’t hurt. No permanent damage. No death, no dismemberment, no scars. She woke up a little swore, it went away in a few days, so what. (Respondent 21, October 21, 2013, [Facebook])

Much support for the two charged in this case came after the verdict was announced and charges for sexual assault were dropped. The hashtag #jordanandmattarefree was quickly adopted, increasing the support for the boys. Many of the statements on social media appear to be from local classmates. Messages such as “Can’t sleep because I’m too excited #jordanandmattarefree” (Respondent 22, March 13, 2012, [Twitter]); “I’m going to be up all night with these #jordanandmattarefree hashtags. EVERYONE use it!!!! Even if you aren’t from Maryville. Just do it” (Respondent 23, March 14, 2012 Twitter); and “Schools back to normal cause #jordanandmattarefree” (Respondent 24, March 13, 2012, [Twitter]) demonstrate the types of social media feedback that the perpetrators in the case received.

**Jane Doe.** The Steubenville perpetrators received immediate messages of perceived innocence posted to social media. One tweet read “Those kids from Steubenville are completely innocent” (Respondent 25, March 17, 2013, [Twitter]). Another message stated that the media exaggerated the case and was blaming the perpetrators for a rape they did not commit: “I really wish people would STFU, {XXX} did not rape this girl. The media hyped the story up” (Respondent 26, July 10, 2014, [Twitter]). In addition to denying the assault occurred, some users not only claimed that the perpetrators were innocent, but they also claimed that the victim was embarrassed or regretted sex and therefore turned on the boys: “I’m defending him cause he didn’t raper her, she only went to the police cause she got exposed her” (Respondent 27, July 10, 2014, [Twitter]).

One post seemed to minimize the significance of the assault due to the defendant’s ages: “Cause come on, they’re not even 18 and their lives are seriously screwed up now because of that. It’s uncalled for” (Respondent 28, March 18, 2013, [Twitter]). Another message followed suit, minimizing the injury to the victim and focusing on the charges facing the two teens who perpetrated the assault: “ya way to go now these 2 guys lives are ruined... her vag would have been fine #Steubenville” (Respondent 29, March 17, 2013, [Twitter]).

**Audrie.** While it is possible that messages of offender support exist, researchers were unable to establish a presence of offender support in the case of Audrie Pott. Instead, much of the traditional media attention was protective of the young men. The defense attorney for one of the offenders released a public statement “urging the public to reserve judgment and said the boys should be ‘regarded as innocent’” (Mather, 2013, para. 1). It is important to recognize that while offender support was not abundantly present, the overwhelming victim blaming and shaming in this case directly shifts the blame from the offenders to Audrie, thus inadvertently supporting the boys.

**Jada.** One of the offenders noted on his Twitter account that Jada was a “hoe” and a “snitch.” Twitter followers followed suit: “Tell me how if you can snatch on ya brother? #jada” (Respondent 30, March 13, 2014, [Twitter]). More common was the denial of an assault: “that Jada hoe wasn't raped though #jadapose #CirocThot” (Respondent 31, July 10, 2014, [Twitter]) and “I already told y'all that Jada girl was not raped” (Respondent 32, July 15, 2014,
(Twitter]) are two examples of social media users denying the assault ever occurred. Others believed that consensual sex occurred, but that Jada then claimed rape when the pictures were released: “I knew dat girl jada was not raped she was just mad she got exposed” (Respondent 33, July 14, 2014, [Twitter]). These messages offer support of the boys’ innocence by denying the assault occurred.

**Family/Survivor Utilization**

Family/survivor utilization was not a major theme, but it seemed to pose a critical turning point in the social media coverage in Jada’s case specifically, and messages from Audrie and Daisy’s family were influential in their cases as well. When the survivors or their family became outspoken or put a face to the case, a larger national presence of support or demand to hold the offenders accountable developed. Often these messages were a cry for the case to be reexamined, to pressure politicians and law enforcement, and to take action against the offenders. Other times it was the victim herself expressing power or feelings of defeat. Any message of outrage, support, or outreach made by the survivor or family was recorded under this theme.

**Daisy.** In Daisy’s case, mainstream social media was utilized by her mother, demanding for the public to pay attention to her daughter’s case. She called upon Anonymous, an internet hacking group, to help shed light in a case she felt was forgotten:

> Where is anonymous now? My daughter has been terrorized to the point she tried to kill herself last night. She may never be ok. Where are you and your super hacking skills and internet help now......we really need them. (Respondent 34, January 6, 2014, [Facebook]).

Daisy created her own blog that was often referenced in social media posts. Her Xojane.com account documented the turmoil she experienced. Her statements ranged from a dark disposition, “I sat alone in my room, most days, pondering the worth of my life. I quit praying because if God were real, why would he do this?,” to messages of hope in a statement that noted “I not only survived, I didn’t give up. I’ve been told that a special prosecutor is going to reopen the case now. This is a victory, not just for me, but for every girl.”

**Jane Doe.** In Jane Doe’s case, she and her family fought to protect her identity and shield her from public scrutiny. As a result, the family and victim did not utilize social media as a tool.

**Audrie.** Audrie attempted to use social media to manage the distribution of the photographs taken during her assault. She sent messages and made posts pleading with her attackers to remove and destroy the images. Audrie took to social media prior to her suicide writing “My life is over.” For the Pott family, social media became a platform for awareness and reform after her death. The family’s specific actions are exemplified under the theme victim support.

**Jada.** Acknowledging that everyone knew who she was due to the overwhelming number of images and comments shared via Twitter, Jada refused to hide her identity (Broderick, 2014). Her image seen in Figure 3 depicts the way Jada reclaimed her name and developed a message of empowerment. With her fist raised as a sign of strength, Jada holds a sign that said #IAMJADA, a trend that gained widespread popularity around the world.

> With the combination of family/survivor pressure and increased national attention, two additional themes became more apparent as time lapsed. With the emergence of more information in the cases, there were calls for offender accountability/offender blaming and a surge in victim support. These messages were often expressed by a larger, external community who was advocating for a widespread change to reshape how we view sexual assault.

**Victim Support**

Victim support increased as the cases gained notoriety. As the messages of hate enraged the nation, social media presence in support of the victim began to grow into one of the more popular themes. However, it is important to note that despite the growth of victim support, messages of victim blaming/shaming and offender support also increased. Any messages of innocence or empowerment of the survivor were included in the theme of victim support.

**Daisy.** The level of inactivity in the case of Daisy Coleman incited supporters to call for justice. One Twitter user was horrified by the presence of evidence in the case and the lack of action on the part of the legal system, tweeting “How many recorded videos of
underage rape does it take to convict a football player? #Justice4daisy” (Respondent 35, November 12, 2014, [Twitter]). Daisy’s case caught the attention of the online hacking group Anonymous. With messages including “Justice4Daisy: Anonymous threatens to go after alleged rapists” (Respondent 36, October 15, 2013, [Twitter]), users spread the news about this underground group. A Facebook group titled ‘Justice for Daisy Coleman’ organized supportive events such as a rally and posted praise and support for the teen. Commonly associated with these messages were the hashtags #Justice4Daisy, #JusticeForDaisy, and #OpMaryville.

**Jane Doe.** Despite Jane Doe’s identity being carefully protected, her name was briefly shared by the media. Along with frustrations related to a failure to protect her identity, users criticized the media for the sympathetic approach they took towards the offenders in her case. One user noted “@CNN #janedoe was the #victim & will live with lifelong #rape trauma & you grieve for the #rapists? #Steubenville” (Respondent 37, March 17, 2013, [Twitter]). A message containing a Jane Doe tribute video (https://youtu.be/0jAWaZmK2Lg) was popularly retweeted. Others applauded the survivor with comments such as “#janedoe I am a survivor of #rape just one of millions who stand by your side you are loved we believe in you please know that #steubenville” (Respondent 38, March 14, 2013, [Twitter]). Social media support served to show Jane Doe and her supporters they were not alone, illustrated by the tweet “Courageous of the men and women of #Steubenville and their supporters speaking out against #Rape #JaneDoe Is Not Alone” (Respondent 39, February 2, 2013, [Twitter]).

**Audrie.** In the case of Audrie Pott, public support flooded social media only after she took her own life. Messages in support of her family, in memoriam of the teen, and in advocacy of ending cyberbullying and preventing teen suicide quickly developed. Individual projects, social initiatives, and calls to action were made following her death. #RIPAudriePott and other messages of support such as “Tragic story about Audrie Pott! Cyber Bullying is Not OKAY. #AudriePott #CyberBullying #StopCyberBullying” (Respondent 40, April 8, 2014, [Twitter]) and “Never Forget <3 #audrieppott” (Respondent 41, September 12, 2013, [Twitter]) were posted to raise awareness.

A Facebook Group called Bulldog Project, which seeks to put an end to bullying, quickly began posting information about bullying, suicide, and support for Audrie’s family and friends. The hashtag #bulldogproject was commonly associated with messages on Facebook and Twitter in regards to the case. The organization partnered with the Audrie Pott Foundation, which was started by Audrie’s parents, in an effort to end cyberbullying and provide scholarships and grants to educational programs. The foundation’s hashtag #audriepottfoundation also garnered great attention from social media users:

These last few years have been a BLESSING! I thank you all for you constant love and support. These past few weeks have been crazy but amazing. [...] Thank you to the Bulldog Project for also having me allowing me to be apart of your movement. And last but not least thee Audrie Pott Foundation what a great honor it is to be such a big part of this amazing cause. The Pott family I have so much love and respect for you. I greatly appreciate all of What you have done and will do in the near future!!!!” (Respondent 42, October 17, 2015, [Facebook])

Figure 4 shows an image that the Audrie Pott Foundation asked people to share, which immediately spread with the hashtags #StopSuicide and #AudriePottFoundation. Audrie’s family and the foundation pushed for legislation to end the delicate treatment of juvenile sex offenders, thus prompting significant support for #audrieslaw.

**Figure 4. Audrie Pott Foundation’s Suicide Prevention Awareness Campaign**

![Image](https://example.com/audriepottfoundation)

**Jada.** The case of Jada, as mentioned previously, was unique in the unprecedented level of public support. A statement from Twitter noted “Anyone who finds humor in this #Jadapose has lost all sense of Humanity and Compassion Rape is NOT FUNNY AND NOT A JOKE. SHE’S A HUMAN BEING” (Respondent 43, December 25, 2015, [Twitter]). This comment exemplifies the public disgust associated with the visual mocking of Jada. By publicly
confronting her accusers and her shamers, Jada was able to reclaim the hashtag #jadapose that was originally used to abuse her. Additionally, her famous #IamJada image inspired others to follow suit with similar images of support, including from many celebrities. Other commonly observed supportive taglines included #JusticeforJada, #Justice4Jada, and #IStandWithJada.

**Offender Blaming**

Offender blaming was a theme less present, when compared to victim blaming/shaming and offender support. Even in messages of support for the victim, the fault of the offender was rarely noted. In some cases, social media posts would say that the perpetrators needed to be held legally responsible, thus blaming them indirectly. Posts that assign fault to or perpetrators needed to be held legally responsible, thus blaming them indirectly. Posts that assign fault to or

A 17 year old boy who will be technically a man at 18 and able to go to war should know better then to take advantage of a 14 year old girl. Tell me something if he has a sister would he want some creep to do what he did. (Respondent 50, n.d., [Facebook])

This message and others like it attacked excuses Barnett and others could use to justify his behavior.

**Jane Doe.** The backlash against the offenders in the Jane Doe case grew as the boys were welcomed back to the football field: “Re: rape culture in America, don’t forget about #steubenville, where convicted rapist is back playing HS football” (Respondent 51, December 5, 2014, [Twitter]). Additional frustration was expressed as the offenders were publicly proceeding in life as if nothing happened. Many felt the boys were being protected due to their popular status: “Shout out to #Steubenville for showing the world it’s okay to rape someone as long as you’re a football player #stayclassy” (Respondent 52, September 24, 2014, [Twitter]). Finally, users articulated that the boys’ behaviors made them rapists, deserving of punishment. One tweet stated, “when you put your body parts in a womans body who is blacked out drunk, it is called RAPE. You earned your sentences boys. #Steubenville” (Respondent 53, September 21, 2014, [Twitter]).

**Audrie.** In Audrie’s case, the offender blaming was intensified due to her suicide and the light sentences the young men received. Several comments expressed general frustration with the young men saying they should have left her alone. In response to a victim blaming comment, one person tweeted “Why would you take advantage of a girl who is PASSED OUT? Just leave her alone. Would you want someone to rape YOU while drunk? #AudriePott” (Respondent 54, April 12, 2013, [Twitter]). Another user expressed a growing trend against shamers stating “Too many beautiful girls are killing themselves. Boys it's very simple, don't rape. #Audrie #Rehtaeh” (Respondent 55, April 12, 2013, [Twitter]).

Other social media messages were more specific calling for punishments for the young men at the heart

It was difficult for many people to understand the minimal charges brought against the offender: “#Maryville total BS plea bargain 4 Barnette to NOT be charged w/RAPE. Must blame & destroy victim b/c #RAPE not enuf” (Respondent 48, January 9, 2014, [Twitter]) and “Since when did #rape qualify as a misdemeanor? Disgusting and NOT good enough. #maryville #Justice4Daisy #justice #anonymous” (Respondent 49, January 9, 2014, [Twitter]) exemplify this. Finally, users responded to the rape myths commonly displayed, attributing full blame to Barnett:

Criminology, Criminal Justice, Law & Society – Volume 18, Issue 1
of this case. Many felt the young men were being protected due to their age and posted comments such as “Don't care how old someone is... If a disgusting act is committed, they MUST pay for it... #AudriePott” (Respondent 56, July 24, 2014, [Twitter]) and “The rapists should have their names and faces plastered all over the Internet” (Respondent 57, July 5, 2013, [Facebook]).

Due to her suicide, many believed sexual assault was not the only charge that these boys should face, writing “file first degree murder on them seek the death penalty” (Respondent 58, n.d., [Facebook]) and “Prosecute those worthless punks to the fullest extent of the law” (Respondent 59, n.d., [Facebook]). Several posts recognized that due to the rape and bullying that led to Audrie’s suicide, these young men should be tried as adults: “Try them as adults! Trio held in connection w/ sexual #assault in wake of teen girl’s #suicide” (Respondent 60, April 12, 2013, [Twitter]).

Jada. Following the offensive copycat photos and Jada’s brave stance to speak out, Jada’s attackers became targets on social media. Many users called for the messages of victim blaming to shift to blaming the offenders. Twitter users tweeted “When will people stop blaming victims of rape rather than condemning their rapists? #everdaysexism #jadapose” (Respondent 61, July 19, 2014, [Twitter]) and “The blame & ridicule of rape victims must end. The shame lies with the rapists. #jadapose #IamJada” (Respondent 62, July 17, 2014, [Twitter]). Others took to the social media site to directly shame and even threaten the young men, writing “Drugging, raping a girl is an act of cowardly, do it to my daughter & I will search you to hell and I cut you into small pieces ok? #jadapose” (Respondent 63, June 21, 2015, [Twitter]) and “If you have sex w/ a person who is under the influence of drugs/alcohol, it was not consensual & YOU ARE A RAPIST #jadapose #JusticeforJada” (Respondent 64, July 11, 2014, [Twitter]). Many messages, including “I am relieved that TWO charged in alleged gang rape after #Jadapose” (Respondent 65, December 19, 2014, [Twitter]) and “This rapists drugged girls and raped them then they mocked the girls” (Respondent 66, December 19, 2014, [Twitter]), celebrated the criminal prosecution of the young men.

Discussion

Unlike stories shared via traditional news sources such as television news and newspapers, the content of social media is not held to ethical standards, is not checked for accuracy, and has immediate presence with an international audience. Although a news story may contain less than flattering content, it is rarely reaired or reprinted, is not easily retrieved, and does not present a platform for viewers to readily and constantly comment on the material. Social media sites allow an opportunity for any user to issue comments, criticisms, and, in some cases, abusive responses to stories they know little about.

The current study explored how social media users disseminate information regarding specific cases of teenage sexual assault. Consistent with previous research (Burt, 1980; McMahon, 2010), the most prominent themes were victim blaming/shaming and offender support. Most common among the themes were assignment of victim responsibility, claims of false reports, and regretted consensual sexual activity due to alcohol consumption. Statements like these are problematic as they further perpetuate and strengthen the social media consumers’ personal subscriptions to rape myths (Suarez & Gaddalla, 2010).

In each of these cases, the teenage victims knew their offenders. This relationship likely contributed to the significant level of victim blaming and failure to acknowledge the offenders’ wrongdoing (Abrams et al., 2003; Monson et al., 2000). Additionally, alcohol was present in each of the cases, thus increasing the blame attributed to the victim and reducing the culpability of the offender (Romero-Sanchez & Megias, 2010; Untied, Orchowski, Mastroleo, & Gidycz, 2012). Perhaps more important than the case details, people may be motivated to promote a moral difference between themselves and the victim. By attributing blame for the rape to the victim, it allows one to form feelings of self-protection and security. This type of “that would not happen to me” attitude is strengthened as individuals note specific behaviors of the victim that they would not mirror, thus creating a perception that they are safe from victimization.

Parallel to the victim blaming and shaming, offender support was a predominante theme. In these cases, the offenders each held an elite status in their community, whether it be the result of being a high performing football player or of their families’ wealth, name, or political standing. Posts that supported the offenders often focused on the idea that these young men were too valuable, too young, too pure, too normal, and had too valuable of a future to rape these victims. These correspond with society’s struggle to recognize that approximately 75% of sexual assaults are at the hands of an acquaintance, family member, or significant other (Truman & Langton, 2015) and that ordinary men, not monsters and villains, rape (Oregon Department of Human Services, 2016; Penny, 2012).

One journalist noted this reluctance when stating, “We refuse to accept that nice guys rape, and they do it often” (Penny, 2012). The social media posts that protected the perpetrators in these cases lessened or completely removed the offenders’ accountability and either directly or indirectly placed the blame back on the victims.
With victim blame and offender support dominating social media messages, victim support was not immediately evident in these cases. Following the assaults, light victim support was seen locally but was overshadowed by negative messages. Over time, these cases garnered national attention. This presented an opportunity for those educated on sexual assault victimization to come forward with messages of hope and support. With a broader audience the impact of the offenders’ elite statuses is lessened. A national audience does not value local athletics, small town political ties, and family wealth in the same way members of the victims’ and offenders’ communities do nor does it have a personal connection to the offenders. Therefore, as messages of victim support increased, so did the level of offender blaming.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, the five identified themes have a strong reactive pattern to one another. When a social media user is presented with a message of victim blaming and shaming, his or her own personal beliefs will guide their response. Consider a user who strongly subscribes to rape myths, thus attributing blame to the victim and removing responsibility from the offender. If that user views a post containing messages of victim blaming and shaming and wants to contribute to the discussion, he or she will likely respond with a similar message or a message of offender support. Similarly, if that same user is to view messages of offender blame and/or victim support, he or she is likely to counter those statements with messages of victim blaming/shaming and/or offender support, and so on. Unlike the other themes, family/survivor utilization acts in a lateral manner, attempting to mitigate victim blaming and shaming by promoting victim support.

The results of the current study are important as the traditional social network may no longer be a teenager’s strongest source of socialization. Instead, it is possible that messages received on social media sites outweigh the personal reactions and social support they receive offline (Ullman, 1996). These social media sites are being used to enhance socialization and to maximize social value (Kim & Lee, 2011; Rosen et al., 2013), by displaying one’s best self and attempting to solicit positive feedback from others (Sas et al. 2009). Attempting to control the messages about one’s self on social media, particularly when faced with mass responses and widespread coverage, as seen in these cases, has been documented to cause increased depression (Romer et al., 2013; Rosen et al., 2013; Wilcox & Stephen, 2013; Ybarra et al., 2005). The words and images posted in response to these women are still present years after their assaults, and at the time of this article, social media reactions and references to these four cases are still being shared.

Previous research recognizes that sexual assault survivors often experience a secondary victimization due to the absence of or negative nature of social support postrape (Yamawaki et al., 2007). In an effort to find support, survivors may turn to social media platforms. Despite the overwhelming negative messages demonstrated in this study, social media have the power to be a positive tool for sexual assault survivors. These cases illustrate that, in time, a community emerges to offer support and to counter message of hate that further perpetuate rape myths. While sharing many similarities, social media had different impacts on these four young victims. Jada used social media to reclaim her name, her image, and her confidence. Daisy Coleman attempted to manage media messages, and she and her family turned to social media for support with mixed response. Audrie Pott found the social media response to her assault so overwhelming that she took her own life shortly after photos and messages about her victimization emerged online. While Audrie was victimized directly, it is important to recognize that messages may also have an indirect, harmful effect on other survivors who identify with the victim.

**Conclusion**

Noting the reliance society, and specifically teenagers, has on social media, dealing with the issue of teenage sexual assault and social media is paramount. To combat this epidemic, the solution must be both proactive and reactive. According to Fairbain, Bivens, and Dawson (2013), there are three categories of prevention of sexual assault associated with social media: primary prevention – stopping it before it takes place, secondary prevention – preventing further harm once the sexual violence takes place, and tertiary prevention – dealing with the long term effects of sexual violence. To combat abuse on social media, Fairbain and colleagues (2013) propose “strengthening of individual knowledge and skills, promotion of community education of providers, fostering of coalitions and networks, changing organizational practices and influencing policy and legislation” (p. 21). We concur that education about sexual assault, related myths, victims, and perpetrators still remains one of our best weapons.

Little programming exists that targets sexual violence and social media specifically (Fairbain et al., 2013), yet several campaigns have emerged to promote healthy online behaviors. One such program engaging teenagers in healthy social media usage is “That’s Not Cool.” This organization is designed to reduce teen dating violence through online mediums. “That’s Not Cool” offers opportunities for teens to be responsible agents of change through “missions” each
month. These missions require teenagers to spread awareness and promote difficult conversations in their families, groups of friends, campuses, and community. For example, in October 2016, teens were challenged to host a viewing of the documentary Audrie and Daisy and to have subsequent discussions related to the issues of abuse and social media (That’s Not Cool, 2016). Programs such as these need to be evaluated, and those that are successful need to be funded and replicated. Campaigns specifically tailored to encourage healthy social media discourse following a sexual assault could be beneficial in reducing the harm caused by social interactions on these networking sites.

The current research explores social media responses in four highly publicized cases of teen sexual assault. While these results are not generalizable to all cases, the findings offer significant insight into social media reactions to these types of cases. The results indicate that social media are being used as a mechanism to revictimize teen sexual assault survivors, minimize the actions of the offenders, and promote rape myths. Due to the power and universal reach of social media, its contents resonate globally. When it comes to teenage sexual assault, social media messages are mostly counterproductive to the growing social movement designed to empower survivors, educate society, and maximize offender responsibility. Current findings serve as a foundation for further study into the content and power of social media messages following a sexual assault and can be replicated via a quantitative approach. A better understanding of the current landscape of social media following a sexual assault will promote dialog about the issues at hand. This needed discourse will guide programming and education designed to promote healthy, responsible online behavior. No teenage victim of sexual assault should be so traumatized by social media that suicide becomes his or her only option.

References


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**Endnotes**

1 APA format requires that social media posts include user names and links to online messages. These links include the user name of the source; therefore, even if given a pseudonym, the user’s identity would be known. Also, several posts were removed and accounts have been blocked, making the links unusable. Therefore, authors have included all social media messages as personal correspondences, citing them with a respondent number, date of post, and the platform where the message was found. In the case of Audrie Pott many messages were removed following her suicide. In the event a date is unavailable, n.d. is noted.