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Police Probe Rutgers Student Suicide Link to Sex Tape

Source: today.msnbc.msn.com

Police are probing whether a death leap taken by a Rutgers student is related to a sex-taping scandal in which two Rutgers students secretly filmed another 18-year-old student's sexual encounter and streamed it live on the Internet. Law enforcement officials tell NBCNewYork that Rutgers University student Tyler Clementi committed suicide last Wednesday by leaping off the George Washington Bridge and that act of desperation may be linked to the scandal. Authorities are working to determine whether the suicide was also the victim of the sex-taping crime, sources said.

Dharun Ravi, of Plainsboro, and Molly Wei, of Princeton, both 18, face two counts of invasion of privacy for secretly placing a camera in the victim's dorm room and streaming it live. Authorities say Ravi, who was Clementi's roommate, faces another two counts of invasion of privacy for allegedly trying to use the hidden camera to tape the same victim in a previous encounter two days before the second one hit the web. Wei surrendered to campus cops in New Brunswick on Monday and was released on her own recognizance. Ravi turned himself in Tuesday and was released on \$25,000 bail.

College police initially launched an investigation after finding out a hidden camera had been placed in the victim's Piscataway dorm room without permission. "The question is I think always the question of trust, whether or not you trust people in your life," said Rutgers Assistant Professor Mor Naaman, a former Yahoo research scientist. "The basic element you have is human nature that can exploit any technology to do any number of bad things to other individuals."

It wasn't immediately clear where or how the live feed was broadcast, and investigators took strict precautions to protect the identity of the victims.

A lawyer for Ravi declined requests for comment. It wasn't immediately clear if Wei, a first year pharmacy student at Rutgers' Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy, had an attorney.

According to the Associated Press, a Twitter account belonging to Ravi was recently deleted, but in a cached version retained through Google he sent a message on Sept. 19: "Roommate asked for the room till midnight. I went into molly's room and turned on my webcam. I saw him making out with a dude. Yay." Two days later, he wrote on Twitter: "Anyone with iChat, I dare you to video chat me between the hours of 9:30 and 12. Yes it's happening again."

Clementi's driver's license and Rutgers ID were found in a wallet left on the bridge on Sept. 22 after two witnesses saw someone jump from it, a law enforcement official told The Associated Press. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because Clementi's body hadn't been positively identified.

Paul Mainardi, a lawyer for the Clementi family, issued a statement confirming the teen's suicide. "Tyler was a fine young man, and a distinguished musician," said Mainardi. "The family is heartbroken beyond words. all. The family and their representatives are cooperating fully with the ongoing criminal investigations of two Rutgers University students." The statement also said that Clementi's body had not yet been recovered.

Steven Goldstein, chairman of the gay rights group Garden State Equality, said in a statement Wednesday that his group considers Clementi's death a hate crime. "We are heartbroken over the tragic loss of a young man who, by all accounts, was brilliant, talented and kind," Goldstein said. "And we are sickened that anyone in our society, such as the students allegedly responsible for making the surreptitious video, might consider destroying others' lives as a sport."

Ed Schmiedecke, the recently retired music director at Ridgewood High School, where Clementi graduated earlier this year, said Clementi was a violinist whose life revolved around music. "He was a terrific musician, and a very promising, hardworking young man."

Rutgers spokeswoman Sandra Lanman said the college is taking the situation seriously.

"The university takes these matters seriously and has policies to deal with student behavior," Lanman said in a statement. According to New Jersey law, illegally collecting or viewing images showing sexual contact involving another individual without that individual's

consent is a fourth-degree crime. It's a third-degree crime to transmit or distribute such images. The penalty for the latter offense carries a possible prison term of up to five years.

Was Tyler Clementi's Death a 'Hate Crime'?

Definition of a "hate crime":

Hate crimes (also known as bias-motivated crimes) occur when a perpetrator targets a victim because of his or her perceived membership in a certain social group, usually defined by racial group, religion, sexual orientation, disability, class, ethnicity, nationality, age, gender, gender identity, or political affiliation.[1]

"Hate crime" generally refers to criminal acts which are seen to have been motivated by bias against one or more of the types above, or of their derivatives. Incidents may involve physical assault, damage to property, bullying, harassment, verbal abuse or insults, or offensive graffiti or letters.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hate_crime

How should New Jersey punish the two Rutgers students whose live-streaming of a gay encounter ended in a roommate's suicide?

New Jersey prosecutors are weighing whether to charge Rutgers freshmen Dharum Ravi and Molly Wei with hate crimes, on top of invasion of privacy, for allegedly broadcasting live video of Ravi's roommate, Tyler Clementi, having a gay sexual encounter. Clementi leapt to his death off the George Washington Bridge a few days later. Do Ravi and Wei's actions merit a hate crime conviction, which would double the maximum five years they face in jail?

Of course it's a hate crime: Does anyone think Ravi would have "taped and mocked" Clementi if he "was with someone of the opposite sex?" says Steven Goldstein, chairman of gay-rights group Garden State Equality. Of course not. This is "one of the most unconscionable, hate-related deaths of a student" in New Jersey history, and "we can only hope the alleged perpetrators receive the maximum possible sentence."

Source: equalityfederation.salsalabs.com/o/35022/t/0/blastContent.jsp?email_blast_KEY=1812

Humiliation isn't murder: Charging Ravi and Wei with hate crimes would be "totally preposterous," says Alex Knepper in The Daily Caller. We don't know their motivation: "Were they out to destroy innocent life for kicks," as some are rashly asserting...? Just because Ravi and Wei deserve ridicule and punishment doesn't mean they are "killers." Clementi chose to kill himself, over the relatively small shame and humiliation of a sex tape.

Source: dailycaller.com/2010/09/30/rutgers-sex-tape-suicide-is-not-a-hate-crime/

It's a crime, period: Secretly broadcasting Clementi's tryst "was a felony," pure and simple, and it should be treated as such, says Harvey Silverglate in The Boston Phoenix, without subjecting it to "fuzzy, politically correct" analysis. "Are we to punish law violators only after we test them and ascertain that they had hate in their hearts?" If colleges want to make sure this kind of crime doesn't happen again, they should remind students of federal and state laws, and let them face the consequences if they break them.

Source: <http://dailycaller.com/2010/09/30/rutgers-sex-tape-suicide-is-not-a-hate-crime/>

Possible WN topic:

Should the students who secretly taped Clementi be charged with a hate crime? Why? Why not?