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Russian Programmer Linked to Mass Celebrity Nude Photos Leak

By The Moscow Times

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Actress Jennifer Lawrence arrives at the 2014 Vanity Fair Oscars Party in West Hollywood, California in this March 2, 2014 file photo.

A Russian programmer who uploaded thousands of naked Hollywood celebrities' photos to a U.S.-based website has denied hacking the pictures from Apple's iCloud storage system, saying the images were already available online.

Sergei Kholokovsky, who hails from the southern Russian city of Samara, was unveiled by British newspaper The Sun on Sunday as the brains behind a website that has published thousands of intimate photos of Western celebrities, in a scandal that has generated a media storm over Internet security and women's rights.

Intimate photos of more than 200 predominantly female celebrities — including actresses Jennifer Lawrence and Kirsten Dunst, and singers Rihanna and Selena Gomez — first appeared online at the end of August, and since then two more rounds of photos have been

released with the latest installment coming Sept. 26.

Despite denying accusations that he stole the images, Kholokovsky insists he sees nothing wrong with sharing the images online — even though some of the women involved have labeled it "a sex crime."

"'No, no [I don't think it is bad]. I think it is because the world view has changed about it. All people think it's OK, at least all my friends think so," Kholokovsky told Britain's Daily Mail newspaper on Tuesday.

Technology firm Apple, whose iCloud storage system is widely thought to have been hacked, giving access to celebrity users' photos, has said it will tighten security in the wake of the scandal.

But Kholokovsky, who said he does not own the photo-sharing website that he works on, told the Daily Mail that he believed the photos had been leaked by the celebrities themselves as a PR stunt.

"If you would like to know my opinion where these pictures are coming from, I think those celebrities release them themselves, for PR purposes," he said.

Kholokovsky added that the site in question was owned by another Russian man, who he had never met and who lives in Europe.

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