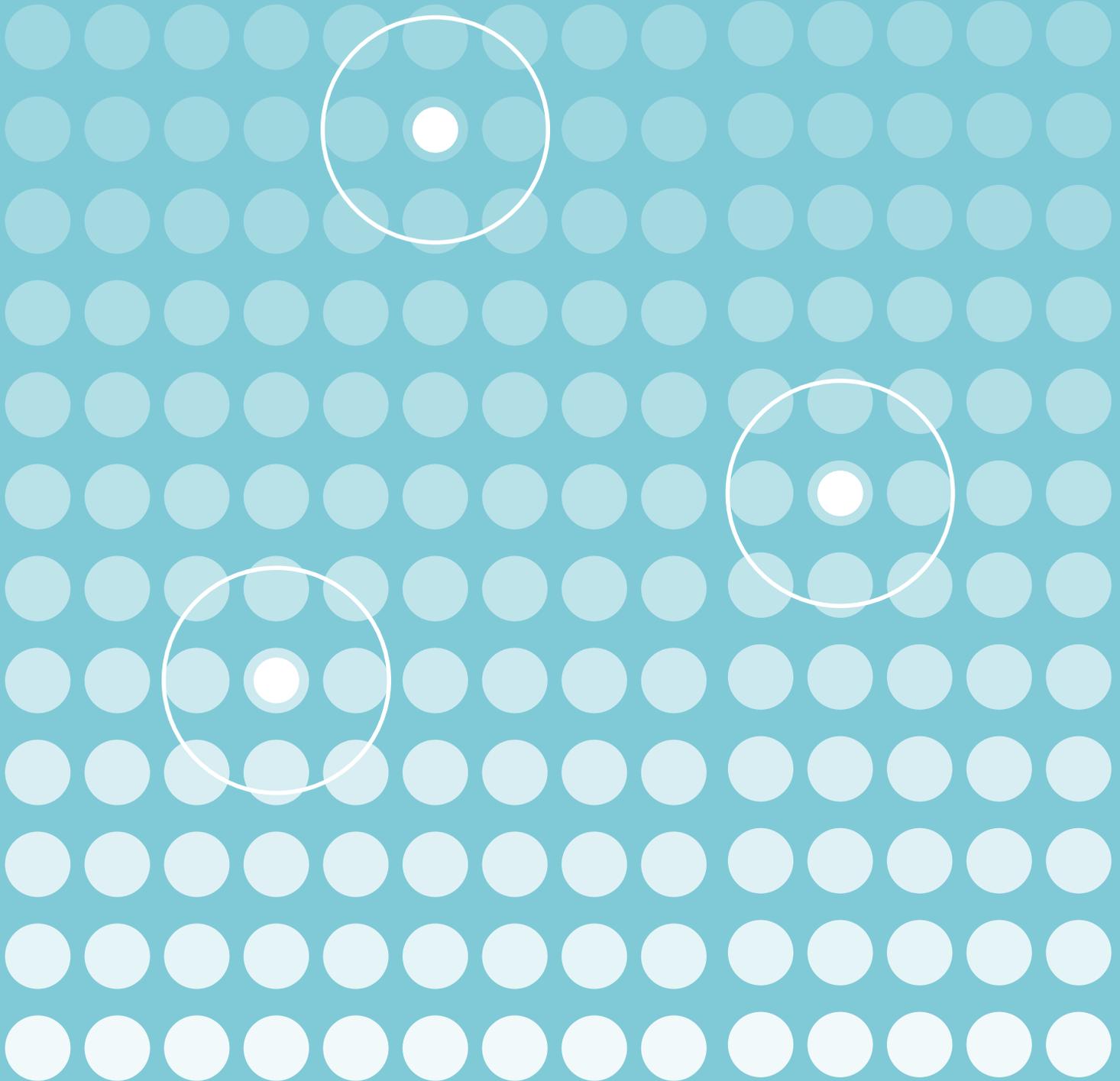
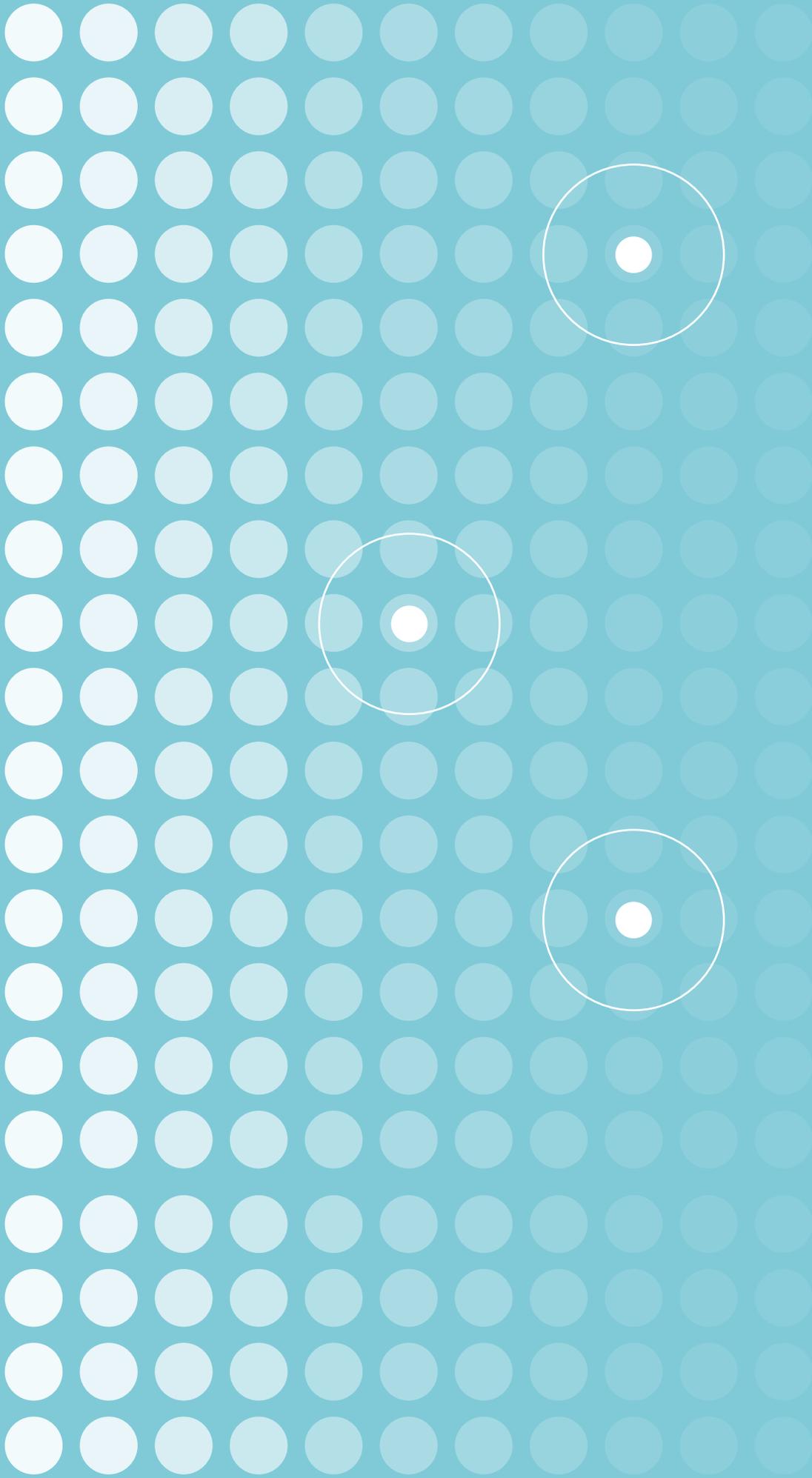


# INTIMATE PARTNER DIGITAL ABUSE

Report 01.18.17

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## Summary of Findings

Digital tools are often an integral part of healthy romantic relationships. Romantic partners frequently use digital tools to connect with each other through text messages, photo-sharing, social media posts, and other online activities. These same digital tools can be used in unhealthy ways, facilitating negative behaviors such as monitoring, unwanted picture sharing, and abusive messages—both within the romantic relationship and after the relationship is over. Better understanding how often intimate partner digital abuse is happening, to whom, and in what ways are critical pieces to understanding the scope of the problem.

This report, part of a series of research reports on digital harassment and abuse, examines the prevalence and impact of intimate partner digital abuse. Findings are based upon the results of a nationally representative survey of 3,002 Americans 15 years of age and older conducted from May 17th through July 31st, 2016. Respondents were surveyed on either their landline or cell phone. Interviews were conducted in either English or Spanish. Findings in this report refer to the 2,810 respondents who have ever been in a romantic relationship.

### 12% of respondents who have ever been in a romantic relationship have experienced intimate partner digital abuse

In order to examine the types of intimate partner digital abuse that respondents have experienced, we asked about 10 different types of online harassment and abuse.<sup>1</sup> Experiences included being monitored online or by phone, being purposefully embarrassed online, being called offensive names, and being stalked. Because they could be perpetrated by anyone, those who said they had these experiences were then asked who the perpetrator was. Respondents who said they were targeted by a current or former romantic partner are said to have experienced intimate partner digital abuse.

Overall, one in eight (12%) respondents who have ever had a romantic partner have been digitally harassed by a romantic partner in at least one of the 10 ways we asked about. These experiences were more common among particular individuals:

- Three times as many younger people (22%) as those who were 30 years or older (8%) reported being digitally harassed by a current or former romantic partner.
- 38% of individuals who identified as LGB have experienced intimate partner digital abuse, compared with 10% of heterosexual individuals.
- More than two times as many divorced/separated (19%) and never married (18%) adults were digitally abused by a current or former romantic partner than people who were married/living with their partner (7%).

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1. The 10 harassment experiences are: Monitored their online or phone activity without their permission, tried to embarrass them on purpose online, called them offensive names, stalked them online that is, repeatedly contacted online in a way that made them feel afraid or unsafe, threatened to post nearly nude or nude photos or videos of them online to harm or embarrass them, physically threatened them online, sexually harassed them online, posted nearly nude or nude photos or videos of them online without their permission, exposed sensitive personal information online that was damaging to them personally, professionally or financially, and harassed them online over a long period of time.

## Men and women experience intimate partner digital abuse at equal rates

12% of men have been targeted by a current or former romantic partner, as have 12% of women. This similarity in rates for men and women holds true for each of the different types of abuse we asked about.

## More victims with a history of intimate partner digital abuse experience personal or professional harms as a result of the abuse, compared with victims who have been targeted by other types of perpetrators

Although we do not know whether this was a direct result of the intimate partner digital abuse or other digital harassment experiences perpetrated by non-romantic partners, more people who were targeted online by current or former romantic partners at some point in their lives reported harms as a result of online abuse compared to victims who were targeted by other types of perpetrators (e.g. friends, family, or strangers). Compared to almost one quarter (23%) of victims who had non-romantic partner perpetrators, more than three-quarters (77%) of victims with a history of intimate partner digital abuse experienced a personal or professional harm as a result of the abuse. Additionally, more victims who were targeted by an intimate partner said their reputation had been damaged (28%) or they had to shut down an online account or profile (25%) as a result of their digital abuse experiences compared to victims who were targeted by other types of perpetrators (8% and 11%, respectively).

## 77% of victims of intimate partner digital abuse have used at least one protective strategy; one in six have gotten a restraining order or protection order as a result of their digital abuse experiences

The vast majority (77%) of victims of intimate partner digital abuse have taken some sort of protective action in response to their abusive experiences online, such as changing their contact information; reaching out to friends, family, or official sources of support; or withdrawing from communication platforms altogether — although we cannot say for sure whether these actions were taken as a result of digital abuse from their romantic partner or due to harassment from some other perpetrator. The most common protective strategy used by victims of intimate partner digital abuse was changing their phone number or email address (41%). In terms of seeking external support or protection, 16% have gotten a protection order or restraining order.

## Acknowledgements

This report was made possible by a grant from the Digital Trust Foundation. The authors would like to thank the Foundation for their support of this project.

### About Data & Society

Data & Society is a research institute in New York City that is focused on social, cultural, and ethical issues arising from data-centric technological development. To provide frameworks that can help address emergent tensions, D&S is committed to identifying issues at the intersection of technology and society, providing research that can ground public debates, and building a network of researchers and practitioners that can offer insight and direction. To advance public understanding of the issues, D&S brings together diverse constituencies, hosts events, does directed research, creates policy frameworks, and builds demonstration projects that grapple with the challenges and opportunities of a data-saturated world.

### About Center for Innovative Public Health Research (CiPHR)

The Center for Innovative Public Health Research, also known as CiPHR, examines the impact that technology has on health and how it can be used to affect health. We have developed programs to reduce HIV transmission, increase smoking cessation, and provide supportive resources for youth experiencing cyberbullying and people with depression. CiPHR is a non-profit, public health research incubator founded under the previous name, Internet Solutions for Kids, Inc. (ISK). Our vision is to promote positive human development through the creation and implementation of innovative and unique technology-based research and health education programs. Public health is ever evolving and so are we.

### About the Digital Trust Foundation

The Digital Trust Foundation funds projects that promote online privacy, safety, and security. Established through a class action lawsuit settlement, the foundation has committed approximately \$6.7 million in grants in 2014 and 2015. The Digital Trust Foundation is no longer granting and is not accepting new applications.



## Introduction

Digital tools can strengthen romantic relationships by making people feel more connected to each other and facilitating communication that may be difficult in-person.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, many romantic partners use digital tools to handle day-to-day logistics, share passwords, access each other's financial records and other sensitive documents, and to start challenging conversations. However, these same digital tools that foster intimacy can be used by romantic partners to hurt, frighten, and control each other, both during and after a relationship.<sup>3</sup> As with other forms of harassment, intimate partner digital abuse can mirror traditional forms of abuse while also being enacted in ways that can be shaped and specifically enabled by new technological platforms. And just as traditional forms of emotional or psychological domestic abuse can have a lasting impact on its victims, digital harassing behaviors perpetrated by a romantic partner can feel violating, oppressive, and threatening.

There has been increasing public attention paid to various types of online harassment and abuse. While many instances of harassment are enacted by strangers or unknown actors, others are perpetrated by current or former romantic partners. The role that technology plays in intimate partner abuse has not been well examined. The research that does exist on the prevalence of digital abuse by romantic partners has focused almost exclusively on the experiences of young people. National surveys find that between 26-56% of young adults 25 years of age and younger in dating relationships have experienced some form of digital abuse victimization.<sup>4</sup> Less data exist on the prevalence of digital domestic abuse among older age groups, or among the overall U.S. population.

### The scope of this report

This report is the third report in a series of three reports describing the findings from the Data & Society/CiPHR Cyberabuse Survey. Here, we examine digital domestic abuse experiences of U.S. internet users ages 15 and older who have ever been in a romantic relationship. In addition to being the first nationally representative study to examine intimate partner digital abuse across the age span, this study also provides important context by asking victims about the digital tools and tactics that their romantic partners have used to hurt them online. We also ask victims how they reacted to their experience and what protective strategies they may have used.

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2. A. Lenhart and M. Duggan. "Couples, the Internet and Social Media." Pew Research Center, February 11, 2014. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/02/11/couples-the-internet-and-social-media/>.

3. Ibid; P. Picard, "Research Topline: Tech Abuse in Teen Relationships Study," ed. Inc. Liz Clairborn (Northbrook, IL: Teenage Research Unlimited, 2007); R.N. Dick et al., "Cyber Dating Abuse among Teens Using School-Based Health Centers," *Pediatrics* 134, no. e1560 (2014); C.B. Draucker and D.S. Martsof, "The Role of Electronic Communication Technology in Adolescent Dating Violence," *Journal of Child & Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing* 23, no. 3 (2010).

4. T. Tompson, J. Benz, and J. Agiesta. "The digital abuse study: Experiences of teens and young adults." Chicago, IL: Associated Press-NORC Center/MTV (2013); J. M. Zweig et al., "The rate of cyber dating abuse among teens and how it relates to other forms of teen dating violence," *Journal of youth and adolescence* 42 (2013); S. Cutbush et al., "Electronic Dating Aggression among Middle School Students: Demographic Correlates and Associations with Other Types of Violence," in American Public Health Association (San Francisco, CA2012).

In our study, 93% of respondents ages 15 and older have ever been in a romantic relationship: About 69% are currently in a romantic partnership, and 24% are not currently involved but have had a romantic partner in the past. This equates to 2,810 of the 3,002 respondents in the study. In Part 1 of this report, we examine who among these 2,810 individuals – those who were ever in a romantic relationship – has been digitally abused by romantic partners. Parts 2 and 3 of this report focus, respectively, on emotional reactions and harms, as well as protective actions taken as a result of digital abuse experienced online.

We asked about intimate partner digital abuse in this survey in several ways:

1. Respondents were asked about 7 different digital harassment experiences that could have been perpetrated by anyone. We asked whether someone: 1) Monitored their online or phone activity without their permission; 2) tried to embarrass them on purpose online; 3) called them offensive names; 4) stalked them online – that is, repeatedly contacted online in a way that made them feel afraid or unsafe; 5) physically threatened them online; 6) sexually harassed them online; and 7) harassed them online over a long period of time. For each experience, respondents who said that it described something that had happened to them were then asked who the perpetrator was. Response options included: Romantic partner, someone else, I don't know, and more than one person. People who indicated it was a romantic partner were deemed to have experienced intimate partner digital abuse.
2. Respondents were asked whether they had been emotionally or psychologically abused online by a romantic partner.<sup>5</sup> Those who said this had happened to them were noted as having experienced intimate partner digital abuse.
3. Later in the survey, respondents were asked about three additional harassment experiences – whether someone: 1) threatened to post nearly nude or nude photos or videos of them online to harm or embarrass them; 2) posted nearly nude or nude photos or videos of them online without their permission; 3) exposed sensitive personal information online that was damaging to them personally, professionally or financially. Again, for each experience, respondents who said that it described something that had happened to them were then asked who the perpetrator was. Response options included: Romantic partner, someone else, I don't know, and more than one person. People who indicated it was a romantic partner were deemed to have experienced intimate partner digital abuse.

To understand the impact that these experiences had on respondents, questions later in the survey asked about their emotional reactions, harms experienced, and protective actions taken. Pilot testing suggested that not all people who had experienced the digital harassment described in #1 and #2 above viewed themselves as victims. As such, a follow up question for people who had experienced any of these eight questions was included directly after the initial questions to determine whether these respondents would describe their experience as 'digital abuse and harassment.' Those who said yes – they would describe them as digital abuse and harassment – along with those who had experienced any of the digital harassments described in #3, were asked the questions about potential impact.

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5. Because the perpetrator was included in the question, a follow-up about who the perpetrator was, was not included.

## About this survey

The data for this study were collected through a nationally representative telephone survey, conducted on cell phones and landlines, interviewing 3,002 American internet users ages 15 and older. The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI) and funded by the Digital Trust Foundation. Survey design and data analysis were executed by staff at the Data & Society Research Institute and the Center for Innovative Public Health Research. Interviews were administered in English and Spanish by Princeton Data Source from May 17 to July 31, 2016. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is  $\pm 2.0$  percentage points. For more detail, please see the separate Methods section available at <http://www.datasociety.net/pubs/oh/methods.pdf>.

## A note on terms used in this report

Throughout the report, the term “respondents” is used to refer to internet-using Americans ages 15 and older who have ever had a romantic relationship. All findings and analyses in this report are based upon people who have ever had a romantic partner; people who have not had a romantic partner are not included in this report.

Unless otherwise specified, the term “victims” refers to respondents who experienced some form of online abuse and who said that their digital abuse experiences constituted “harassment or abuse,” whether this abuse was perpetrated by a romantic partner or by someone else.

Based upon the way respondents’ perpetrators were categorized, “victims of intimate partner digital abuse” reflects those who said that at least one of their digital abuse experiences was perpetrated by a romantic partner. They could have had other digital abuse experiences that were perpetrated by non-romantic partners as well, whereas “victims of non-romantic partners” exclusively reported non-romantic partner perpetrators.

“Intimate partner digital abuse” and “digital domestic abuse” are used interchangeably to refer to digital abuses perpetrated by a current or former romantic partner.

The terms “LGB” or “sexual minorities” refer to respondents who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or “other” when asked their sexual identity. The survey did not include a question about gender identity, so this report cannot examine experiences of transgender individuals specifically.

## Part 1: Prevalence of intimate partner digital abuse

To better understand the prevalence of digital domestic abuse within the context of other types of harassment and abuse perpetrated online, we asked respondents about ten different experiences that could reflect a range of online harassment and abuses one might have. These included whether someone has ever:

- Monitored their online or phone activity without their permission
- Tried to embarrass them on purpose online
- Called them offensive names
- Stalked them online—that is, repeatedly contacted online in a way that made them feel afraid or unsafe
- Threatened to post nearly nude or nude photos or videos of them online to harm or embarrass them
- Physically threatened them online
- Sexually harassed them online
- Posted nearly nude or nude photos or videos of them online without their permission
- Exposed sensitive personal information online that was damaging to them personally, professionally or financially
- Harassed them online over a long period of time

For each experience, we asked a follow-up question about who the perpetrator was. Response options included: a current or former romantic partner, someone else, more than one person, or “don’t know.”<sup>6</sup>

### 12% of respondents have experienced intimate partner digital abuse at some point in their lives

One in eight (12%) respondents who have ever been in a romantic relationship have experienced at least one of the 10 forms of online harassment above at the hands of a current or former romantic partner. More than twice as many people, 26%, have been targeted by someone else, however. It also bears noting that 14% of digitally abused individuals reported not knowing who their perpetrator was and 2% were victimized by more than one person.

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6. “More than one person” was the lowest endorsed option and is not reported in detail here because of its small sample size. Respondents who said that the perpetrator was “someone else” were asked an open-ended follow-up question about who the perpetrator was, although those findings are not included in this analysis. For more information, please see “Online Harassment, Digital Abuse, and Cyberstalking in America” (2016), available at <https://datasociety.net/output/online-harassment-digital-abuse-cyberstalking/>.

## 9% of respondents who have ever been in a romantic relationship report being hurt emotionally or psychologically by a romantic partner

In addition to the 10 general questions, survey respondents were asked a specific question about whether they had ever been emotionally or psychologically abused by a romantic partner online. Nine percent of respondents ages 15 and older who have ever been in a relationship —approximately one in 11—have experienced this at least once in their lives.

## More people who are younger; lower SES; LGB; or divorced/separated or never married were victims of intimate partner domestic violence than their older, higher SES, non-LGB, and married or partnered peers

Almost three times as many younger people (22%) compared to those who were 30 years or older (8%) were digitally harassed by a current or former romantic partner.

More respondents with household incomes less than \$30,000 (18%), and those who were not college graduates (14%) experienced digital domestic abuse compared to higher income (11%) and more well-educated (8%) individuals, as did individuals who identified as LGB (38%) compared to heterosexuals (10%).

Relationship status was also related to perpetrator status: A higher proportion of divorced/separated (19%) and never married (18%) adults were digitally abused by a current or former romantic partner than those who were married/living with their partner (7%).

## 12% of respondents have experienced at least one form of digital harassment or abuse by a current or former romantic partner

% of American internet users who have been in a relationship who experienced at least one form of digital harassment or abuse by a current or former romantic partner

<b>Total</b>		<b>12%</b>
<b>Sex</b>		
a	Men	12
b	Women	12
<b>Age</b>		
a	15-29	22 <sup>b</sup>
b	30+	8
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>		
a	White (non-Hispanic)	11
b	Black (non-Hispanic)	16
c	Hispanic	10
<b>Education (among ages 18+)</b>		
a	High school graduate or less	15 <sup>bc</sup>
b	Some college	12 <sup>c</sup>
c	College graduate	8
<b>Household income (among ages 18+)</b>		
a	Less than \$30,000	18 <sup>b</sup>
b	\$30,000 or more	11
<b>Sexual identity</b>		
a	LGB	38 <sup>b</sup>
b	Heterosexual	10
<b>Marital status**</b>		
a	Divorced/separated	19 <sup>c</sup>
b	Never married	18
c	Married/living with partner	7

Source: Data & Society/CiPHR Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016 (n=3,002 U.S. internet users ages 15 and older, including n=2,810 who have ever had a romantic relationship).

Columns marked with a superscript letter (a, b, or c) indicate a statistically significant difference at the 95% level between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. The superscript is added to the higher of the two numbers. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each subgroup.

Being hurt emotionally or psychologically by a romantic partner is not in the table because it was asked in a different way (see The Scope of this Report above for details).

\*\*Those who are widowed are not included here due to sample size.

Similar differences by demographic characteristics were noted for those who said they have been emotionally or psychologically harmed online by their current or former romantic partner.

## Digital monitoring and purposeful embarrassment are the two most commonly reported digital abuses perpetrated by current or former romantic partners

Among respondents, being monitored (6%) or purposefully embarrassed (4%) online were the two most commonly reported digital domestic abuse experiences perpetrated by a current or former romantic partner. On the other hand, having nude or nearly nude photos posted without one’s permission (1%), being sexually harassed (1%), or physically threatened (1%) are among the least common experiences perpetrated by romantic partners among survey respondents.

### Respondents’ experiences with digital harassment or abuse, by perpetrator type

Among respondents 15 and older, the % who experienced the following forms of digital harassment or abuse by each type of perpetrator

	Current or former romantic partner	Someone else	Don’t know who it was	Has not happened to me
Monitored their online or phone activity without their permission	6	6	2	86
Tried to embarrass them on purpose online	4	14	4	77
Called them offensive names online	3	13	7	75
Threatened to post nearly nude or nude photos or videos of them online to harm or embarrass them	2	1	*	97
Stalked them online	2	3	2	92
Physically threatened them online	1	6	4	89
Exposed other sensitive personal information that was personally, professionally or financially damaging	1	3	1	95
Sexually harassed them online	1	3	4	92
Harassed them online over a long period of time	1	2	2	95
Posted nearly nude or nude photos or videos of them online without their permission	1	1	*	98

Source: Data & Society/CiPHR Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016 (n=3,002 U.S. internet users ages 15 and older, including n=2,810 who have ever had a romantic relationship).

Data are not presented for those who reported “more than one person” because of sample size.

\*n<10

## **Among respondents, younger adults, people living in lower income households, LGB individuals, and people who were divorced/separated or never married were more likely than their peers to experience intimate partner digital abuse**

Across the 10 types of digital harassment asked about, those under 30 years of age were consistently more likely to say they had been targeted in a digital domestic abuse incident than adults 30 years of age and older. The same was true for people living in households with incomes less than \$30,000 a year compared with those earning more, and for LGB versus heterosexual respondents. Trends also consistently showed people who were divorced/separated or never married were more likely than people who were married/living with their partner to experience almost all of the 10 intimate partner digital harassment actions examined. Similar patterns were noted for those who were psychologically or emotionally harmed by a romantic partner (data not shown in the table).

## Digital intimate partner abuse summary table (part 1 of 2)

% among all internet users who have ever been in a romantic relationship (n=2,810)

		Monitored their online or phone activity without their permission	Tried to embarrass them on purpose online	Called them offensive names online	Threatened to post nearly nude or nude photos or videos of them online to harm or embarrass them	Stalked them online
<b>Total</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Sex</b>						
a	Men (all ages 15+)	7	5	4	1	2
b	Women (all ages 15+)	5	4	3	2	3
<b>Age</b>						
a	29 years and younger	9 <sup>b</sup>	9 <sup>b</sup>	7 <sup>b</sup>	5 <sup>b</sup>	5 <sup>b</sup>
b	30 years and older	5	3	2	1	2
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>						
a	White	6	4	3	2	3
b	Black	8	6	6	*	*
c	Hispanic	4	3	4	*	*
<b>Household income (among ages 18+)</b>						
a	< \$30,000	9 <sup>b</sup>	8 <sup>b</sup>	5 <sup>b</sup>	4 <sup>b</sup>	4 <sup>b</sup>
b	\$30,000 or more	5	4	3	2	2
<b>Education (among ages 18+)</b>						
a	High school graduate or less	7	6 <sup>c</sup>	6 <sup>bc</sup>	3	3
b	Some college	6	4	3 <sup>c</sup>	2	3
c	College graduate	4	3	1	1	2
<b>Sexual identity</b>						
a	LGB	13 <sup>b</sup>	16 <sup>b</sup>	11 <sup>b</sup>	11 <sup>b</sup>	10 <sup>b</sup>
b	Heterosexual	5	4	3	1	2
<b>Relationship Status**</b>						
a	Divorced/separated	11 <sup>bc</sup>	6 <sup>c</sup>	6 <sup>c</sup>	*	4
b	Never been married	7 <sup>c</sup>	7 <sup>c</sup>	5 <sup>c</sup>	4 <sup>c</sup>	3
c	Married/living with partner	4	3	2	1	2

Columns marked with a superscript letter (a, b, or c) indicate a statistically significant difference at the 95% level between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. The superscript is added to the higher of the two numbers. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each subgroup.

Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older, including n=2,810 who have ever had a romantic relationship).

\* n<10 ; \*\* Those who are widowed are not included here due to sample size.

## Digital intimate partner abuse summary table (part 2 of 2)

% among all internet users who have ever been in a romantic relationship (n=2,810)

		Physically threatened them online	Exposed sensitive personal information online that was damaging to them	Sexually harassed them online	Harassed them online over a long period of time	Posted nearly nude or nude photos or videos of them online without their permission
<b>Total</b>		1	1	1	1	1
<b>Sex</b>						
a	Men (all ages 15+)	1	1	1	1	*
b	Women (all ages 15+)	1	1	2	2	2
<b>Age</b>						
a	29 years and younger	3 <sup>b</sup>	2	3 <sup>b</sup>	3 <sup>b</sup>	3
b	30 years and older	1	1	1	1	*
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>						
a	White	1	2	1	1	1
b	Black	*	0	*	*	*
c	Hispanic	2	0	3 <sup>a</sup>	*	*
<b>Household income (among ages 18+)</b>						
a	< \$30,000	2	2	3 <sup>b</sup>	3 <sup>b</sup>	*
b	\$30,000 or more	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Education (among ages 18+)</b>						
a	High school graduate or less	2	2	2	2	*
b	Some college	*	*	2	2	*
c	College graduate	*	*	*	*	*
<b>Sexual identity</b>						
a	LGB	*	*	8 <sup>b</sup>	*	*
b	Heterosexual	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Relationship Status**</b>						
a	Divorced/separated	*	*	*	4 <sup>c</sup>	*
b	Never been married	2	*	2 <sup>c</sup>	2 <sup>c</sup>	2
c	Married/living with partner	1	1	1	1	*

Columns marked with a superscript letter (a, b, or c) indicate a statistically significant difference at the 95% level between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. The superscript is added to the higher of the two numbers. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each subgroup

Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older, including n=2,810 who have ever had a romantic relationship).

\* n<10 ; \*\* Those who are widowed are not included here due to sample size.

## Among victims, digital abuse at the hands of a current or former romantic partner is not as common as digital abuse from other people

To understand how the rates of digital domestic abuse fit within the larger context of digital harassment and abuse experiences, we examined who the perpetrators were for each type of digital abuse asked about.

Someone other than a romantic partner is the most commonly cited perpetrator of digital harassment experiences that could have been perpetrated by anyone (see chart below). For example, among those who were called an offensive name, 13% said the perpetrator was a current or former romantic partner, whereas 54% said it was someone else and 29% said they did not know who it was.

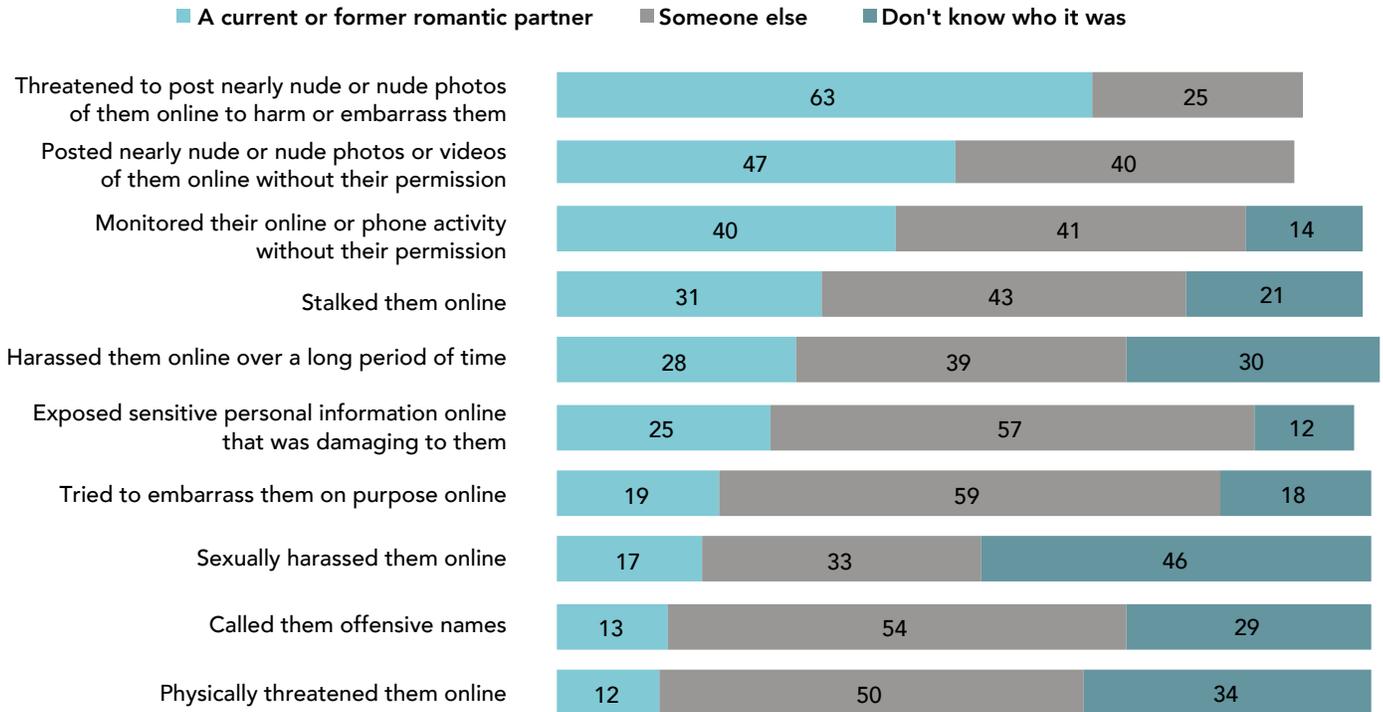
Among those who have experienced threats of or experienced actual nonconsensual sharing of explicit images (also called “revenge porn,”) a large percentage report that it is perpetrated by romantic partners. In this study, 63% of people were threatened with and 47% had nonconsensual pornography actually posted by romantic partners, compared to 25% of those experiencing threats and 40% of those who had content posted who report that it was done by others with whom they had not been romantically involved. This is perhaps not surprising considering that these images may have been created when romantic partners take pictures of one another or themselves to share with one another. For more information on nonconsensual pornography, see the report “Nonconsensual Image Sharing: One in 25 Americans Has Been A Victim of ‘Revenge Porn’” available at [https://datasociety.net/pubs/oh/Nonconsensual\\_Image\\_Sharing\\_2016.pdf](https://datasociety.net/pubs/oh/Nonconsensual_Image_Sharing_2016.pdf).

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7. A. Lenhart et al. “Nonconsensual Image Sharing: One in 25 Americans Has Been A Victim of ‘Revenge Porn’” Data & Society Research Institute (2016). <https://datasociety.net/output/nonconsensual-image-sharing/>.

### How often are current or former partners the perpetrators among those who have been victimized?

% among victims of each type of online harassment who reported a current or former romantic partner perpetrated it compared to others



Source: Data & Society/CiPHR Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (n=3,002 U.S. internet users ages 15 and older, including n=2,810 who have ever had a romantic relationship.)

Data are not presented for those who reported “more than one person” because of sample size.

n<10 for those who responded “don’t know who it was” for both threatened to post and actually posted nearly nude or nude photos or videos of them online to harm or embarrass them and were therefore not included.

### Among victims, equal percentages of men and women experienced intimate partner digital abuse

As shown in the table on page 11, overall, both 12% of males and 12% females report intimate partner digital abuse. As shown on the following page, men and women also report each of the 10 types of digital domestic abuse at rates similar to each other. Likewise, 8% of women and 8% of men said that they had been emotionally or psychologically harmed by a romantic partner online.



## No differences were noted between women and men in intimate partner digital abuse among those who have experienced it

% among victims of each type of online harassment who reported a current or former romantic partner as the perpetrator



Source: Data & Society/CiPHR Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (n=3,002 U.S. internet users ages 15 and older, including n=2,810 who have ever had a romantic relationship.)

Data are not presented for those who reported “posted nearly nude or nude photos or videos of them online to harm or embarrass them” because of sample size. None of the data presented in this chart is statistically significantly different between men and women.

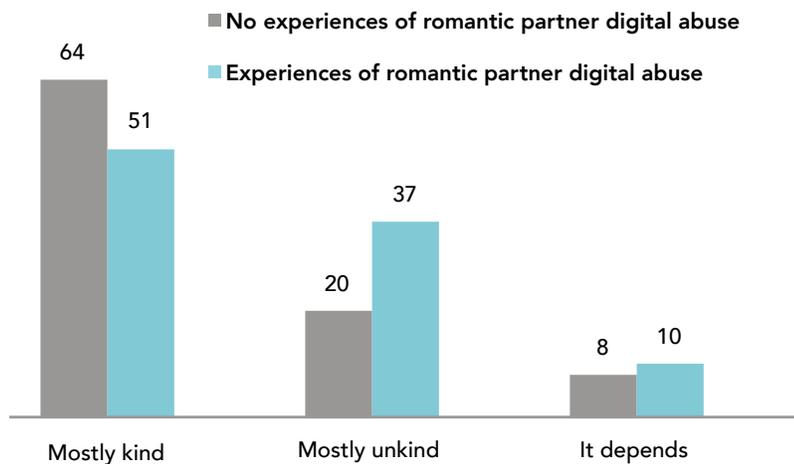
## Part 2: The emotional reactions and harms experienced by victims of intimate partner digital abuse

### More than one third of people who were digitally harassed by a romantic partner feel that people are “mostly unkind” to one another online

Our earlier report (available at [https://www.datasociety.net/pubs/oh/Online\\_Harassment\\_2016.pdf](https://www.datasociety.net/pubs/oh/Online_Harassment_2016.pdf)) on digital harassment suggests that experiencing digital abuse could potentially play a role in how individuals think about how people generally behave on the internet, and our analysis in this report suggests similar findings for experiencing intimate partner digital abuse. Respondents were asked “overall, in your experience, are people mostly kind or mostly unkind to one another online?” People who were targets of digital domestic abuse believe that most people online behave poorly: More than one in three (37%) people who reported that their romantic partner harassed them online also agreed that in general, people are mostly unkind online. This is compared to 20% of all other respondents, including those who have not been digitally abused and those who have been digitally abused by a non-romantic partner.

### More people who were digitally harassed by a romantic partner online said that people are “mostly unkind” online compared to all other respondents

*Among internet users who have ever had a romantic partner, the % in each group who say that, in their experience, people are mostly kind or mostly unkind to one another online*



Source: Data & Society/CiPHR Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016 (n=3,200 U.S. internet users ages 15 and older, including n=2,810 who had ever had a romantic relationship).

## Emotional reactions of victims of digital harassment

The 11 experiences described in Part 1 (i.e., the 10 that could have been perpetrated by anyone and the additional emotional/psychological abuse experience that we asked specifically in relation to romantic partner perpetrators) reflect a broad range of experiences. Some may be unmemorable or mildly annoying, whereas others could result in personal, social, or professional harm.

To give structure to the repercussions that some people experienced as a result of their digital harassment, we asked those who said 'yes' to any of these 11 experiences a series of follow-up questions to understand their emotional reactions and harms they may have experienced. Because not all people who had these experiences agreed that it amounted to "harassment or abuse," questions about emotional reactions and harms were asked only of those who agreed that "harassment or abuse" described their experience. However, those who had been threatened with or experienced "revenge porn," and who had sensitive information exposed about themselves online were assumed to agree that it amounted to "harassment or abuse;" they were not asked directly.

It should be noted that, based upon the way respondents' perpetrators were categorized, victims of digital domestic abuse are those who said that at least one of their digital abuse experiences was perpetrated by a romantic partner. They could have had other digital abuse experiences that were perpetrated by non-romantic partners as well, whereas victims of non-romantic partners exclusively reported non-romantic partner perpetrators.

The question wording for our emotional reactions question focused on a victim's most recent experience with harassment or abuse.

### Among victims of digital harassment, more people who were ever targeted by a romantic partner were annoyed, angry, worried, or scared by their most recent abusive experience than those who were targeted by someone else

Victims were asked how they felt about their most recent digital abuse and were given multiple options from which to choose: annoyed, angry, worried, scared, or not bothered. Individuals could select as many as they felt applied to their experience.

More victims who have ever had an experience of digital domestic abuse, whether in the context of their most recent harassment experience or at another time, report a negative emotional reaction to their most recent experience of harassment compared to those who have been digitally harassed by other types of perpetrators.<sup>8</sup> For example, 43% of victims who were ever targeted by a romantic partner were worried by their most recent abusive experience compared to 29% of other victims.

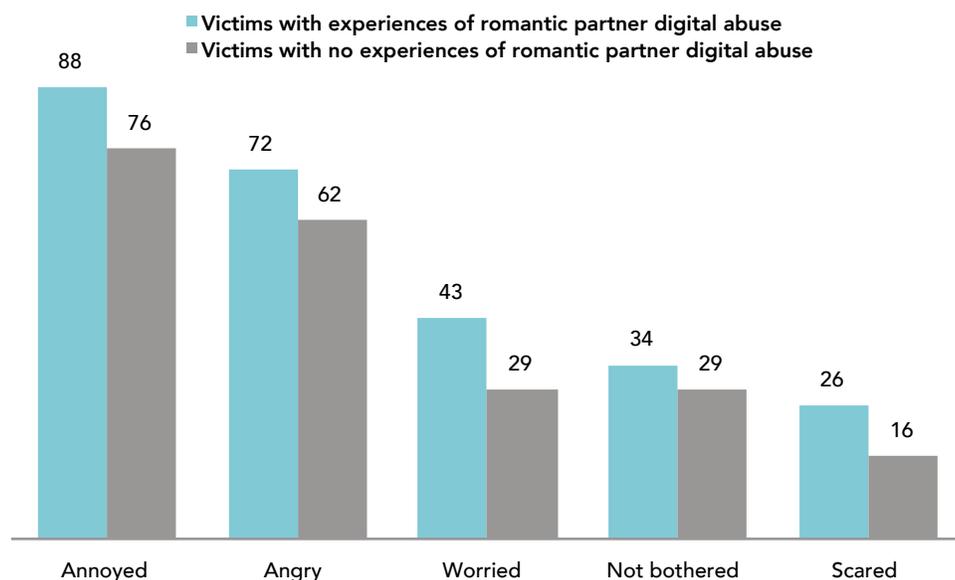
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<sup>8</sup> More victims with a history of intimate partner abuse say they were "not bothered" by the harassment than other victims. However, because those asked this question were able to choose multiple responses, most of those who said they were "not bothered" by the harassment said they experienced another emotion (e.g. annoyed, angry) as well. Meanwhile, more victims of online harassment who did not have a history of intimate partner abuse say only that they were "not bothered" by their experience than those with a history of intimate partner abuse.

This analysis can only show a correlation between a history of intimate partner digital abuse and negative emotional responses to recent online harassment; it cannot say conclusively that digital abuse from a romantic partner specifically caused the emotional response. Because of how the questions were asked, if a respondent was a victim of online harassment from both a romantic partner and another kind of perpetrator, we don't know which kind of perpetrator they were victimized by most recently. But we can see that more victims who have a history of intimate partner digital abuse at any point in their lives are upset by their recent experiences than victims of other perpetrators, regardless of who was the perpetrator in that most recent moment.

### More victims who have ever been digitally harassed by a current or former romantic partner are bothered by their most recent online harassment experience than victims who have been abused by other types of perpetrators

The % of victims who felt the following ways as a result of harassment or abuse online



Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older, including n=634 victims of online harassment who had ever had a romantic relationship). The rate of endorsement for each of the five emotional reactions significantly differed by whether the victim was a victim of romantic partner digital abuse or not.

### Harms experienced by victims of digital harassment

Victims of online harassment and abuse were also asked whether, as far as they were aware, they have ever experienced specific forms of harm as a result of their online abuse. Possible harms we asked about ranged from experiencing trouble in a relationship or friendship to having difficulty finding a job or losing an educational opportunity.



## Among victims of digital harassment, more people who have ever been targeted by a romantic partner said they have been harmed by their online harassment experiences than those targeted by other types of perpetrators

Overall, 77% of victims who had a history of intimate partner digital abuse experienced at least one of the harms asked about, compared with 23% of victims who were digitally abused by someone other than a romantic partner, although we do not know for those in the former group if the digital abuse that precipitated these harms was perpetrated by a romantic partner or by someone else. The largest difference can be seen in harms to interpersonal relationships: 41% of victims with a history of digital domestic abuse have had problems in their relationships with their friends and families as a result of online abuse, compared to 9% of online harassment victims targeted by other types of perpetrators. Additionally, at least three times as many victims with a history of digital domestic abuse reported their reputation had been damaged, they felt less connected to friends and family, and had evidence of online harassment or abuse appear in searches for their name as a result of their abuse compared to victims of other perpetrators. The exception to this trend was job or educational opportunity: similar percentages of victims of digital domestic abuse and those who were digitally abused by non-romantic partners said they experienced difficulty in finding a job or experienced the loss of an educational opportunity.

Among victims of intimate partner digital abuse, harms were similarly reported by people of different sexes, ages, race/ethnicities, incomes, education, sexual identities, or marital status.

### Harms resulting from online harassment for victims who were targeted by romantic partners and those who were targeted by other perpetrators

Among victims, the % who say they have experienced the following things as a result of online harassment or abuse



Source: Data & Society/CiPHR Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016 (n=3,200 U.S. internet users ages 15 and older, including n=634 victims of online harassment who had ever had a romantic relationship.)

\* n<10 for victims with no history of intimate partner violence who have had evidence of online harassment or abuse appear in searches for their name and had difficulty finding a job or lost an educational opportunity

## Part 3: Protective strategies taken as a result of digital harassment or abuse

### 77% of victims of intimate partner digital abuse have used at least one protective strategy

Overall, 65% of victims of digital harassment took steps to protect themselves from or in reaction to the abuse they experienced. Again, although we do not know if the help-seeking was part of the intimate partner digital abuse experience specifically, we see that more people who were targeted by romantic partners at some point in their lives (77%) used a protective strategy than those targeted by other people (48%).

### Actions taken as result of digital harassment or abuse among victims who were targeted by romantic partners and those who were targeted by other perpetrators

% who say they have done the following things to protect themselves from online harassment



Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older, including n=634 victims of online harassment who had ever had a romantic relationship.)

\*n<10 for victims with no history of intimate partner digital abuse who stopped using their cell phone or got help from a domestic violence center, hotline, or website.

In almost all cases, more than twice as many people who were victims of romantic partners as victims of other perpetrators experienced each of the harms asked about. For example, 25% of victims of romantic partners have stopped using social media compared to 10% of victims of other perpetrators as a result of their digital abuse experiences.



Among those who have been victims of digital domestic abuse, no differences were noted by demographic characteristics in five of the nine potential actions one could take that we asked about. The exceptions were: More women (41%) than men (25%) flagged content, as did people 29 years old or younger (44%) compared to older individuals (24%), and LGB (59%) versus heterosexual individuals (29%). Nearly three times as many women have gotten a restraining or protective order as men. More victims of intimate partner digital abuse with a family income below \$30,000 have gotten a restraining or protective order in response their online harassment experiences compared to higher income individuals. Finally, more women (43%) than men (21%) asked a friend or family member for help, as did LGB (48%) compared to heterosexual individuals (29%).

### **More victims of digital abuse who have ever been targeted online by a romantic partner have gotten a restraining order or protection order compared to victims who have been targeted by non-romantic partners**

Among those who have experienced online harassment, about one in nine (11%) have gotten a restraining or protection order in response. Although it is unclear what particular online incident motivated the restraining or protective order, 16% of those who have ever experienced digital domestic abuse have gotten a restraining or protective order compared to 5% of those who were harassed by other types of perpetrators. Fully 82% of those who have ever gotten a restraining order have a history of digital domestic abuse.

### **Among victims of online harassment, 1 in 20 people who have ever been targeted by intimate partner digital abuse reached out for help from a domestic violence center, hotline, or website**

Domestic violence organizations can be a source of assistance for those struggling with online harassment and abuse, especially those whose online abuser is a current or former romantic partner. Some 5% of all online harassment victims have gotten help from a domestic violence center, hotline, or website to protect themselves from further abuse.

Among victims with a history of digital domestic abuse, more college graduates (15%) sought help from a domestic violence center, hotline, or website than their counterparts who were of lower levels of education (7%). However, rates of seeking assistance were similar by income and among age groups.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>. Comparisons by race, sex, marital status, and sexual identity were not possible due to small sample size.

## Resources

Below is a list of resources for those looking for additional information or assistance in handling intimate partner digital abuse, online harassment, or cyberstalking:

National Network to End Domestic Violence Safety Net Project [<http://nnedv.org/projects/safetynet.html>]

The National Domestic Violence Hotline [<http://www.thehotline.org/>]

GLBT National Help Center [<http://www.glbthotline.org>]

Anti-violence Project [<http://www.avp.org/>]

FORGE [<http://forge-forward.org/>]

The Network la Red [<http://tnlr.org/en/>]

Without My Consent [<http://www.withoutmyconsent.org/>]

Heartmob [<https://iheartmob.org/>]

CrashOverride Network [<http://www.crashoverridenetwork.com/>]

Stalking Resource Center [<http://victimsofcrime.org/our-programs/stalking-resource-center>]

GLBTQ Domestic Violence Project [<http://www.glbtdv.org/>]

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