Understanding Cyber Violence in Intimate Partner Relationships: A Qualitative Study

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INTRODUCTION: Traditional forms of intimate partner violence (IPV) such as physical and psychological violence have been linked to various negative health consequences such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety and chronic diseases. Among women, IPV has resulted in significant financial losses in the United States. However, an area of IPV that has not seen much attention in the public health field is cyber violence among intimate partners. The growing prominence of mobile devices, social media, and other communication technology, has opened up new avenues for the perpetration of IPV. No longer are perpetrators’ physical presence necessary. Cyber violence can be committed at any hour of the day.

AIM: The purpose of this study is to explore and better understand cyber violence in the context of intimate partner relationships. The objectives were: (1) to identify types of cyber violence tactics used by perpetrators, (2) to understand victims’ perception of the cyber violence, (3) to identify help-seeking behavior, (4) to examine the effects of cyber violence on victims’ professional lives, social lives and mental health, and (5) to identify the occurrence of victims reciprocating cyber violence towards an intimate partner.

METHODS: Seven semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted among women who had experienced cyber violence from an intimate partner. Participants were recruited through social media (Facebook and Twitter), flyers posted around Georgia State University campus, flyers passed out at local businesses, and emails. Informed consent was obtained prior to each interview. Interviews were coded using the Nvivo qualitative data analysis software. Stark’s theory of Coercive Control and Johnson’s typology of Intimate Partner Violence were used to interpret and understand acts of cyber violence.
RESULTS: The abusive tactics used by the partners of participants in this study varied in method, onset, and intention. Although typically used to understand traditional forms of IPV, acts of cyber violence can be categorized using Johnson’s typology of IPV. Some acts of cyber violence were coupled with controlling behavior while other acts of violence were situational or separation-instigated violence. Victims in this study also reported perpetrating cyber violence against an intimate partner. However, the acts of violence committed by the women in this study lacked elements of coercive control. All participants held negative perceptions of the cyber violence they experienced, but only two sought professional assistance specifically for the cyber abuse. Other participants reached out to friends and family. One participant who reached out to police received no help from law enforcement. Last, participants expressed feelings of social isolation, depression, stress, and anxiety as a result of technology-facilitated abuse.

CONCLUSION: The findings illustrate a need to improve and encourage help-seeking behavior among victims of cyber violence. Many states have laws concerning cyber harassment and “revenge porn,” however efforts to educate the public on the various avenues to access assistance is needed. Also, steps should be taken to ensure crimes related to cyber violence are taken seriously by law enforcement and properly addressed. The current research reveals that victims of cyber IPV are potentially at risk for poor health outcomes. Future research should examine whether cyber IPV is uniquely associated with various mental disorders and chronic diseases. If cyber IPV is linked to various adverse health consequences then victims are at risk for poor health outcomes even when they physically separate themselves from their partner.
UNDERSTANDING CYBER VIOLENCE IN INTIMATE PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

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Fiana O. Thacker
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence is a serious health problem in the United States and globally. In the United States, 35.6 percent of women and 28.5 percent of men have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime. More than a third of female victims of partner violence experienced multiple forms of rape, stalking, or physical violence. Among male victims, 92.1 percent experienced physical violence alone, and 6.3 percent experienced physical violence and stalking. Close to half of all women and men in the United States has experienced psychological aggression in their lifetime (Black et al., 2011).

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is defined as physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression perpetrated by a current or past intimate partner. An intimate partner is a person with whom one has a personal relationship such as a current or past spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, dating partner, or sexual partner (“Definitions|Intimate Partner Violence|Violence Prevention|Injury Center|CDC,” n.d.).

Traditional forms of IPV such as physical and psychological violence have been linked to various negative health consequences such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety and chronic diseases (I. Arias & Pape, 1999; Breiding, Black, & Ryan, 2008; Coker et al., 2002; Lawrence, Yoon, Langer, & Ro, 2009; Mechanic, Weaver, & Resick, 2008). Among women, IPV has resulted in significant financial losses in the United States (Ileana Arias et al., 2003). However, an area of IPV that has not seen much attention in the public health field is cyber violence among intimate partners. The growing prominence of mobile devices, social media, and other communication technology, has opened up new avenues for the perpetration of IPV.
No longer are perpetrators’ physical presence necessary. Cyber violence can be committed at any hour of the day. Little is understood about Cyber violence in intimate partner relationships and its potential health consequence. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore and better understand cyber violence in the context of intimate partner relationships. The proposed study will address the following questions: (1) what are victims' perceptions of the intimate partner cyber violence? (2) What are participants' reasons for seeking or not seeking help? (3) What tactics do perpetrators of cyber violence use against intimate partners? (4) How does the experience of intimate partner cyber violence affect victims' professional (i.e. employment and academic achievement) and social lives (i.e. mental health and social interact within their community)? (5) In what ways do victims of cyber violence from a partner reciprocate this behavior?
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Economic and Occupational Consequences

Among women in the United States, the financial cost of IPV is substantial. The estimated total health cost of IPV each year, including medical and mental health services, is approximately 4.1 billion dollars. The estimated value of the loss of productivity from employment and household chores amounts to about 858.6 million dollars. Loss of productivity at work represents 84.6 percent of the total cost or 727.8 million dollars. Loss of productivity from household chores is 130.8 million dollars. More than 13.5 million days of productivity at home and work are lost as a result of IPV.

Swanberg and Logon (2005) offer some insight on how IPV impedes on women’s work productivity. They found that perpetrators used tactics before, during, and after work to interfere with women’s jobs. Before work tactics included restraining women from going to work, beating them so severely that they could not or did not want to go to work, not allowing the victim to sleep the night before, neglecting to bring home the car, or cutting up work clothes. Actions taken by perpetrators at the victims’ place of employment included showing up at the participant’s jobs, harassing phone calls to the victim or the victim’s supervisor, or stalking the participant while at work. After work beatings often occurred if the perpetrator did not like something the respondent did at work. Perpetrators tactics reduced women’s job performance by causing excessive absences and tardiness. Perpetrators’ behavior also resulted in women’s resignation or termination from their place of employment. In most cases, when participants disclosed to someone at work about the domestic violence, coworkers or
supervisors were supportive. Informal and formal work support resulted in short-term job retention, but about half of the participants who received workplace support had to resign from their job due to safety, stress, or being forced to quit (J. E. Swanberg & Logan, 2005). In a later study, Swanberg and colleagues found that disclosure and workplace support were associated with retention of employment among women experiencing IPV (J. Swanberg, Macke, & Logan, 2007).

Similarly, Borchers and others (2016) found that women who experienced IPV had little difficulty attaining employment, but they had great difficulty maintaining employment due to the intertwining of work and violence. Respondents revealed four common ways in which work and IPV were entangled, and the perpetrator exerted his control: controlling the women's appearance, sabotaging her work, interfering with work, and controlling finances (Borchers et al., 2016). Loss of wages due to absenteeism or unemployment can potentially affect women's ability to cover the cost of housing, food, and other necessities, which may indirectly affect their mental and physical health.

2.2. Health Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence Victimization

Research has revealed detrimental health consequences of intimate partner violence including physical injuries, disability, symptoms of depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and various chronic diseases. Bonomi and colleagues (2006) simultaneously examined the relationship between women’s health and IPV proximity (recent or remote exposure), type, and duration. Women who had experienced recent IPV had lower Short Form-36 (SF-36) scores, which was used to measure women’s general health, vitality, mental health,
emotional functioning, and social functioning in the past four weeks. Recently (within the past five years) physically and/or sexually abused women were 4.0 times more likely to report severe depressive symptoms and 2.6 more likely to report minor depressive symptoms than women with no experience of IPV. Recently physically and/or sexually abused women were almost three times more likely to report fair or poor health and more than one additional symptom (Bonomi et al., 2006). Similarly, Coker and peers observed that lifetime experience of physical (physical or sexual) IPV and the power and control form of psychological IPV were significantly associated with reported current poor health in women and men. Physical and psychological IPV were also significantly associated with depressive symptoms (Coker et al., 2002).

Comparing victims of current and past IPV, Domenech Del Rio and Sirvent Garcia Del (2016) also found that IPV was associated with poor health symptoms. The authors examined systems of anxiety, sadness because of feelings of worthlessness, wanting to cry for no reason, mood swings, irritability, insomnia, and permanent fatigue, lack of sexual desire, and bad or very bad health state. Past and current IPV increased the risk of suffering from all the health symptoms; however, women experiencing current IPV were significantly more likely to report all the symptoms of poor health than women who had experienced IPV in the past but not within the last 12 months. The likelihood of these symptoms was higher among women who experienced past or current physical or sexual IPV than women who report emotional or economic IPV without physical or sexual abuse (Domenech Del Rio & Sirvent Garcia Del Valle, 2016).
Associations between IPV victimization and chronic diseases have been observed in both female and male victims. Using data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS), researchers examined the association of IPV and health outcomes for both men and women. Women’s lifetime IPV victimization was significantly associated with high cholesterol, heart attack, heart disease, stroke, use of disability equipment, joint disease, high blood pressure, current asthma, and activity limitations. Men’s lifetime IPV victimization was associated with the use of disability equipment, joint disease, current asthma, and activity limitations. Unlike women, exposure to IPV in men was not associated with high cholesterol, heart attack, heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure (Breiding et al., 2008).

The Coker (Coker et al., 2002) study similarly observed associations between IPV victimization and chronic disease. Physical IPV was associated with chronic disease for men and women. A history of chronic mental illness was associated with physical IPV in women and an abuse of power and control in men (Coker et al., 2002).

When examining associations between psychological aggression and mental disorders such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety, psychological aggression as shown to be uniquely correlated to symptoms of these disorders over and beyond physical and sexual abuse (I. Arias & Pape, 1999; Lawrence et al., 2009; Mechanic et al., 2008). Following Midwestern newlyweds over their first three years of marriage, changes in psychological victimization were associated with depressive symptoms in both wives and husbands. As psychological victimization increased, symptoms of depression and anxiety increased in both sexes. Changes in physical victimization were not associated with changes in depressive symptoms in either husbands or wives. However, increases in physical victimization were associated with increases in anxiety
symptoms in both husband and wives. After controlling for physical victimization, psychological victimization continued to be associated with symptoms of depression and anxiety in both wives and husbands. However, physical victimization was no longer associated with symptoms of anxiety after controlling for psychological victimization (Lawrence et al., 2009).

In a study, which sampled women in Atlanta residing in battered women’s shelters, psychological abuse was a significant predictor of symptoms of PTSD and intentions to end the relationship, which indicated that greater levels of psychological abuse were associated with greater PTSD symptomatology and a greater will to leave the abusive partner. Even after controlling for physical abuse there was still a strong association psychological abuse and PTSD symptomatology and intention to end the relationship (I. Arias & Pape, 1999).

Comparing physical and sexual aggression, physical injury, and psychological abuse and stalking among female victims of IPV, Mechanic and colleagues (2008) found that psychological abuse and stalking were uniquely and significantly associated with PTSD and depression. When psychological abuse and stalking were controlled for there was no significant association between physical and sexual aggression and PTSD or depression. Minor physical injury but not severe injury was a unique and significant predictor of PTSD (Mechanic et al., 2008).

2.3. Intimate Partner Violence Victimization and Health Behavior

In addition to impacting victims’ mental and physical health, IPV victimization is also associated with poor health behaviors. In the Bonomi et al. (2006) study, compared to women with no IPV, women with any IPV were more likely to be current or former smokers, more likely
to participate in risky behaviors and more like to drink heavily or binge drink in the last year (Bonomi et al., 2006).

Again, Breiding and others compared outcomes in women and men. Women’s lifetime IPV victimization was significantly associated with HIV risk factors, current smoking, and heavy/binge drinking. Women with a history of IPV were less likely to have had a checkup with a doctor in the past year and less likely to consume the recommended daily servings of vegetables. Men’s lifetime IPV victimization was also associated with HIV risk factors, current smoking, and heavy/binge drinking, but it was inversely associated with having a checkup with a doctor in the past year. The experience of IPV among men was not associated with not meeting the recommend daily serving of vegetables like it was in women. Men who experienced IPV were more likely to engage in one healthy behavior, which was meeting activity requirements (Breiding et al., 2008).

Looking at the different types of IPV separately Coker and colleagues (2002) found that heavy alcohol drinking and “therapeutic” drug use was associated with both physical and psychological abuse. For men, all forms of physical and psychological IPV were associated with recreational drug use. Abuse of power and control were significantly associated with recreational drug use among women. Physical abuse was not associated with recreational drug use among women (Coker et al., 2002).

2.4. Help-Seeking Behavior

Considering the detrimental health consequence of IPV victimization, understanding help-seeking patterns and influences on help-seeking behavior among victims of IPV is of the
utmost importance for informed policy and prevention initiatives. Ansara and Hindin (2010) examined how different forms of IPV are differentially associated with formal and informal help-seeking. Women in the intermediate (87.1%) and the severe (87.2%) violence classes were more likely than women in the physical aggression (73.5%) class to report talking to an informal source. Significantly fewer men in the physical aggression (47.8%) class reported reaching out to an informal source compared to the moderate violence (79.5%) class. Women in the physical aggression class were more likely to report an informal source than men in this class. For formal sources of support, women in the physical aggression class were least likely to contact or use services while women in the severe class were most likely to do so. Women in intermediate classes fell in the middle in regard to contact and use of services. Just over 62 percent of men in the moderate violence class reported contacting formal sources compared to 21.1% of men in the physical aggression class. Women in the physical aggression class were twice as likely than men in this group to report a formal source. Women in the intermediate aggression class were just as likely as men in the moderate violence class to report a formal source (Ansara & Hindin, 2010).

Using data collected from a national survey conducted in Canada, researchers examined and compared the rate of help-seeking between minority women and white women. After controlling for age, marital status, household income, number of young children at home, immigration status, household language, and severity of IPV, race was not significantly associated with help-seeking. The strongest predictor of help-seeking was the severity of IPV, which was measured by the number of incidents and fear. Income and age were also strong predictors of help-seeking (Hyman, Forte, Du Mont, Romans, & Cohen, 2009)
2.5. Intimate Partner Stalking

Stalking involves repeated unwanted contact, threats, harassment, and/or surveillance, directed towards an individual that incites fear (Logan & Walker, 2009; Woodlock, 2016). Among adults in the United States, 4.5% have been stalked in their lifetime. Women have been found to experience a higher prevalence of stalking than men. A national survey revealed that 7% of women have been victims of stalking compared to 2% of men (Basile, Swahn, Chen, & Saltzman, 2006). Nearly, 80% of female victims know their stalker. Intimate partner stalking is the most common form of stalking affecting women (Logan & Walker, 2009).

Intimate partner stalking is different from non-partner stalking and poses a greater public health risk. Logan and Walker argue that the distinction between intimate partner stalking and non-partner stalking is the relationship history between the victim and the perpetrator. Victims who have a current or prior relationship with their stalker often experienced psychological, physical, or sexual abuse within that relationship. The level of fear induced is dependent on the severity of the abuse within the relationship. As a result of the stalker's intimate history and familiarity with the victim, perpetrators can use a greater variety of tactics to perpetrate stalking behavior against their victim. Additionally, partner stalking is associated with greater risk of threats and violence, and greater psychological distress (Logan & Walker, 2009).
2.6. Theory of Coercive Control & Johnson’s Typologies of Intimate Partner Violence

The term coercive control was coined by Evan Stark (2007), who argues that domestic violence is more than just the physical act of violence. The act of violence is one of several strategies used to entrap a partner in personal life. The tactical categories of coercive control include violence, intimidation, isolation, and control. Stark acknowledges that women are perpetrators of coercive control, but argues men use controlling tactics much more frequently (Stark, 2007). He explains, “… it is the social endowment men inherit from sexual inequality, not the motives or frequency of these acts, that allows them (but rarely women) to shape discrete acts into patterns of dominance that entrap partners and make them subordinate (Stark, 2007, p. 199).”

In an attempt to resolve a decades long debate on whether there is gender symmetry in perpetrating violence Michael Johnson (2006) argued there were four types of intimate partner violence. The feminist perceptive argue that in heterosexual relationship, violence was largely perpetrated by men. On the other hand, family violence researchers found that women and men were equally likely to use violence. Johnson attributes these polarizing arguments to sampling bias. The two groups have different sampling strategies and therefore tap into different types of intimate partner violence (Johnson, 2006).

The three main types of intimate partner violence are Intimate Terrorism (also known as Coercive Controlling Violence), Situational Couple Violence, and Violent Resistance. These different types of IPV are defined by the presence or absence of control in the relationship. Similar to Stark’s argument, understanding the role coercive control plays is key to unearthing the nature of the IPV. The paring of a violent and controlling individual with a partner who is
either violent or nonviolent and non-controlling is a pattern of Intimate Terrorism. The major forms of control that constitute Intimate Terrorism include: intimidation; emotional abuse; isolation; minimizing; denying and blaming; use of children; asserting male privilege, economic abuse; and coercion and threats. Situational Couple Violence involves one partner who is violent and non-controlling and a partner who is violent or nonviolent and non-controlling. This type of IPV is the most common form of physical aggression between cohabitating couples, and is equally perpetuated by men and women. Usually Situational Couple Violence results when arguments between partners escalate occasionally into physical violence. These occasional acts of violence may be attributed to poor management of conflict and/or anger by one or both partners. The third type of IPV, Violent Resistance, involves an individual who is violent and non-controlling, but in a relationship with one who is violent and controlling. This form of violence is an immediate reaction to an assault, usually as a means to protect oneself or others from harm (Johnson, 2006; Kelly & Johnson, 2008).

In his 2006 article, Johnson fourth type of IPV was Mutual Violent Control. This form of IPV is rare and takes place when a violent and controlling individual is partnered with another violent and controlling person (Johnson, 2006). Later in 2008, Johnson and Kelly left out Mutual Violent Control and instead included Separation-Instigated Violence. With this form of IPV, there was no prior history of violence in the relationship, and violence was instigated by separation or divorce. This form of violence does not involve controlling behavior, but rather it is triggered by traumatic experiences during separation (Kelly & Johnson, 2008).
2.7. Cyber Violence in Intimate Partner Relationships

Technology has enhanced our ability to communicate and share information with others; however, it has also provided vast opportunities for the perpetration of violence online. Cyber violence is aggression perpetrated online or through messaging applications with the intent to harm another person. Cyber violence may include, but is not limited to insults, surveillance, unwanted messages, threats, or publicly posting humiliating information or photographs online. Little research has been done on technology-facilitated intimate partner violence. Most of the research on this topic has examined cyber dating abuse among adolescent and undergraduate students. Among this young population, cyber-dating abuse was associated with other forms of violence. In a sample of 18 to 30-year-olds Cyber dating abuse was associated with offline dating violence and cyber-bullying. Those who were involved in offline violence were more likely to engage in online abuse (Borrajo, Gámez-Guadix, Pereda, & Calvete, 2015). Among middle school and high school students in New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, half of the victims of sexual cyber dating abuse and non-sexual cyber dating abuse were also victims of physical violence. Almost all victims of cyber dating abuse experienced psychological dating abuse. More than half of sexual cyber dating abuse victims also experienced sexual coercion, compared to 8% of non-sexual cyber dating abuse victims (Zweig, Dank, Yahner, & Lachman, 2013).

The overall prevalence of cyber dating violence varied among different studies in regard to victimization and perpetration. Among adolescent students in the Zweig et al. (2013) study, twenty-six percent of respondents reported being victims of cyber dating abuse in the past year. Wolford-Clevenger and colleagues (2016) reported the prevalence of cyber abuse
victimization among undergraduate students at forty percent (Wolford-Clevenger et al., 2016).

Examining perpetration rate of online control and direct aggression online, Borrajo et al. (2015) found the prevalence of the control factor was between 70% and 82%. The prevalence of direct aggression was between 10% and 14%. In a similar but separate study, Borrajo and others (2015) determined that more than eighty percent of young people were involved in control behaviors towards their partner, and twenty percent were involved in some form of aggressive behavior (Borrajo, Gámez-Guadix, & Calvete, 2015). High prevalence of online controlling behavior among young people may result from the fact that monitoring where a partner is or whom they are with are interpreted as acceptable expressions of concern or love. As a result, these behaviors are normalized and repeated (Borrajo, Gámez-Guadix, Pereda, et al., 2015).

Gender differences in cyber violence victimization were mixed. Contrary to much of the literature on traditional forms of intimate partner violence, men were shown to be victims of cyber dating violence at rates equal to and greater than female victimization. Wolford-Clevenger et al. (2016) found no gender differences in cyber dating victimization among college students. In a study examining electronic victimization and anticipated distress in dating relationships and friendships, males received more electronic victimization, but females reported more anticipated distress from electronic victimization (Bennett, Guran, Ramos, & Margolin, 2011). In another undergraduate sample, more female students reported being the victims of monitoring and controlling behavior, but female students were found to engage more in monitoring and controlling behavior than male students (Burke, Wallen, Vail-Smith, & Knox, 2011).
Two qualitative studies provide some explanation for why and how cyber violence among young people is used. In a focus group conducted among college students, participants revealed that Internet technology was used as a way to monitor, isolate, control, and track an intimate partner. Online aggression was viewed as a quick and easy. With the numerous electronic communication options available intimate partners found this as a convenient and quick way to perpetuate violence. Another theme gathered from the focus groups was how private issue and arguments between intimate partners became public with the use of social media websites. These sites are used to harass and embarrass their partners. Students revealed that couples might post private or insulting comments about their partners because they know many people will see the post, which was viewed as a way to hurt the partner more (Melander, 2010). The main weakness in this study however, was participants in the focus group were not speaking from personal experience with cyber violence, but rather detailing the experiences of their peers.

Another study on technology-facilitated stalking by Woodlock (2016), found that perpetrators of technology-based stalking aimed to convey their omnipresence in the victim’s life. Technology was also used to isolate the victims from their support systems through direct or indirect harassment of friends and family. Perpetrators also used Technology as a way to punish or humiliate their victims, such as threatening to post sexualized content or images of the women on social media.

Research on traditional forms of IPV has revealed associations with various negative health effects such as bodily injury, poorer health, chronic diseases, and poor mental health. Victims of IPV have poorer health behaviors. Studies in this field have also shown that women
are disproportionately victims of traditional forms of IPV. However, this is not necessarily the case in regard to cyber violence victimization, with some studies reporting no gender difference in victimization, or greater victimization among males. Our understanding of cyber violence in intimate partner relationships is limited in regard to health, help-seeking behavior, and the reciprocation of cyber violence. We do know that cyber abuse associated with other forms of violence such as cyber bullying and physical IPV. Through this research, the aim is to gain more insight into these areas of cyber violence and intimate partner relationships by (1) identifying types of cyber violence tactics used by perpetrators, (2) examining victims’ perception of the cyber violence, (3) identifying help seeking behavior, (4) examining the effects of cyber violence on victims’ professional lives, social lives and mental health, and (5) identifying the occurrence of victims reciprocating cyber violence towards an intimate partner.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

Criteria for inclusion in this study required, participants be at least 18 years of age or older and have experienced cyber victimization from an intimate partner within that last five years. Participants also had to speak English. A convenience sample was used. Participants were recruited through social media (Facebook and Twitter), flyers posted around Georgia State University campus, flyers passed out at local businesses, and emails. Seven women participated in this study. Considering the population is hard to access, seven participants is an acceptable sample size for the current qualitative research. In-depth interviews provide rich data on the local level. While quantitative questioning is more concerned with attaining a large enough sample size to claim to have a representation of a whole population, qualitative interview is more "an opportunity to delve and explore precisely those subjective meanings that positivists seek to strip away in their search for standardization (O’Reilly, 2005: 114).”

3.2. Procedures

Prior to individuals’ participation in the study, informed consent was obtained. The day of the interview the student principal investigator reviewed the consent form with the participant before beginning the interview. Participants in the study were asked to complete a pre-interview demographic questionnaire, followed by a semi-structured interview using prewritten open-ended questions. Participants were asked about their online activity, about
the abusive tactics used by their partners online, their perceptions of the violence, their help-seeking behavior, and how cyber violence affected their professional, social, mental well-being. Participants were also asked if physical or psychological violence accorded offline. Finally, they were asked if they had perpetrated cyber violence against an intimate partner. An audio recorder was used to record each interview. The length of the interviews ranged between twelve and thirty-four minutes. Interviews were conducted in a location agreed upon by the participant and the student. Some interviews were conducted in person while others were done via video chat. Only the audio from the video chats were recorded. Initially participants were not going to be compensated monetarily. However, after conducting the first interview the decision was made to offer participants a twenty-dollar VISA gift card for their time. Names in the current paper were changed to protect the identities of the participants.

3.3. Analyses

Interviews were coded using the Nvivo qualitative data analysis software. After the coding process themes and patterns were drawn from the data. Stark’s theory of Coercive Control and Johnson’s typology of Intimate Partner Violence were used to interpret and understand acts of cyber violence.
## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

**Table 4.1. Participant Profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Other Information</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Ali</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Current undergraduate engineering student</td>
<td>Originally from Malaysia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jazmin</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Undergraduate (2nd year)</td>
<td>Has one child with partner who perpetrated violence against her</td>
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<tr>
<td>Livia</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Some college</td>
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<td>Nora</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Some college (3 years)</td>
<td>Has one child with partner who perpetrated violence against her</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Current undergraduate Anthropology student (3rd year)</td>
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<td>Stacey</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Has an Associate’s Degree Current Bachelor’s student</td>
<td>Originally from Nigeria</td>
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<td>Verona</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Has a Bachelor’s Degree Current graduate student</td>
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<td>Emerging Themes</td>
<td>Participant Quotes</td>
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<td><strong>Tactics</strong></td>
<td>Cyber violence done privately</td>
<td>“He hacked into my Google and then like he changed settings and changed my password.” – Ali</td>
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<td>Cyber violence done publicly</td>
<td>“So, he got on Twitter and he started this hashtag ... saying like um ‘don’t lie about that because then you’ll be like (name omitted). Hashtag fake, fake rape (e.g. #fakerape).” – Rose</td>
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<td><strong>Perceptions of Cyber Violence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Immature. For Sure. Yeah, I mean I thought it very immature of him.” – Ali</td>
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<td>“Fearful of him? ... Ah yeah.” – Livia</td>
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<td><strong>Help Seeking Behavior</strong></td>
<td>Sought Professional Assistance</td>
<td>“Um they (referring to the police) asked me why it took a year for me to reach out to them. And I told them that was fucking irrelevant, but that the real issue was that here is a person who like refuses to leave me alone and like how do I go about getting a restraining order.” – Verona</td>
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<td>“... when I talked to my mom, I tell my mom, my friend this my friend that. Um my friend is doing this, but I’m telling my mom my story, but saying it’s my friend’s issue to see what my mom would say” – Stacey</td>
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<td><strong>Social and Mental Health Implications</strong></td>
<td>Social Isolation</td>
<td>“I kinda think that like if the one person that was on my side in that situation suddenly switched sides it made me look worse. So socially that just like perpetuated everybody else’s neglect towards me after that situation so.” – Rose</td>
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<td>“It made, it kinda burnt bridges with my family members. Like I was really close to my aunt and he kinda messed up the relationship with my aunt.” – Jazmin</td>
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<td>Depression and Anxiety</td>
<td>“Your adrenaline is kind of always there in a fight or flight mode because you kinda have to prepare yourself for that.” – Livia</td>
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<td>“Oh, I was half way suicidal.” – Nora</td>
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<td><strong>Offline Violence</strong></td>
<td>All but one participant experienced some form of psychological and/or physical aggression offline</td>
<td>“what he normally do, he use verbal to hurt me. Like he tells me how I’m ugly, um stuff like that.” – Stacey</td>
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<td>“... I was just coming home and he decided to put his hands on me, and I had to leave and call the police. “ – Livia</td>
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<td><strong>Reciprocated Violence</strong></td>
<td>All but one participant monitored an intimate partner’s online activity</td>
<td>“So, so I went, I, yes, I did. I looked through. Came to find out yes, he is actually gay.” – Stacey</td>
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<td>“I accidently stumbled upon a conversation he was having in his Facebook messenger with another woman ... before I told him that I knew about the girl and that I had access to his Facebook I totally just like kept it open and monitored it for like a couple of weeks.” – Verona</td>
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4.1. Cyber Abuse Tactic from Partners

Tactics used by perpetrators against participants varied, but two themes emerged: private cyber violence and public cyber violence. Private cyber violence were actions taken online by perpetrators that were not made visible to the public such as a private email or a private message sent through a social media platform or application. By contrast, public cyber violence were abusive comments and images initially shared online with others outside of the relationship. Some participants experienced one or the other, while others experienced both private and public cyber abuse from their partners.

Private Cyber Violence

Participants discussed incidents in which their partner sent them threats either through Short Message Service (SMS) or other text messaging applications. Stacey recalled one former boyfriend sending her visual warnings. She said, “he use to like send me like gun pictures.” In passing, Stacey also mentioned that this boyfriend would send messages threatening to kill her and himself. In addition, he would monitor her phone and messages.

While at work, Livia would receive emails and Facebook messages from her partner. When asked about the tactics her former boyfriend would use she said:

Well, there would be times say if I was at work, he could jump on Facebook or contact me through email and be demanding where I’m at. He would say if I didn’t come home at a certain time he would kick my ass. He would threaten to kill himself if I didn’t show up in a certain amount of time. Um, sometimes he would contact my friends and um go off on them trying to find out where I’m at even though I would let him know I was at work. So, it was always a constant fear thing with this guy.

For both Stacey and Livia threats of physical harm were used to intimidate them. Livia also explained that her partner purchased her cellular phone and used that as leverage against her.
Livia stated: “So uh he had my phone because he use to work at Metro. And um he’s the one who got my phone and stuff. And he always threaten to turn it off.” In this situation threats to limit access to cyber technology and communication were used.

Cyber security was also an issue that came up during the interviews. Before ending their relationship, Ali’s ex-boyfriend hacked into her Facebook account. He read a private conversation Ali was having with a friend that expressed her feelings about her relationship with her partner. She felt they were drifting apart. Ali’s boyfriend was upset about what he read in the conversation. This prompted him to hack into her Google account and change the password to the account. Ali recalled:

He hacked into my Google and then like he changed settings and changed my password. I could not ... so I have an android and my android is hooked to my Google account. So, everything on my phone is hooked on to my Google account. So, I couldn’t assess anything at all. And I was in Germany. And I was like I have no Internet access and I have to deal with this. So, it wasn’t fun.

Later in the interview Ali mentioned that her credit cards, schoolwork, and research were all saved to her Google Drive. She now saves her documents in more than one location and she does not share her passwords with her current partner.

Creating multiple social media accounts and using multiple phone numbers was another tactic perpetrators used to harass intimate partners when victims were avoiding their partners. After they ended their relationship of two years, Verona said her ex-boyfriend continued to contact her. She explained, “… they contacted me everyday, after we broke up, for a year. And when I block them, you know or sent a message saying I don’t want to talk to you anymore like this is over we are done, he would create new accounts and then reach out to me that way.”
Similarly, Stacey, who experienced cyber violence from a second boyfriend after they broke up, said:

...til today like I’ll block him off of my phone, block him on Facebook, he will create another one. Like, like and he would call me with other people’s number. And he would send me like his dick pictures and stuff like that. It’s horrible…”

Before breaking up with this most recent boyfriend she discovered he was involved in prostitution. Since they have broken up he has expressed his desire to have her join his prostitution “business.”

Jazmin’s ex-boyfriends did not need to create new social media accounts when Jazmin blocked his phone number and Facebook account. She explained:

But I’ll block him and he’ll go on like his cousin’s page because I was friends with his family because you know we have a child together. So, I’m friends with a bunch of his family, so he’ll go on their pages. And I’ll block his phone number and he’ll call from different numbers. So, I’ll change my phone number, but then like you know I’ll feel like I want him to see his child. You know I don’t want to take nobody child away from them so he’ll end up getting my phone number and the cycle starts all over again.

The ease of creating multiple on social media and logging into a friend or family member’s social media account at times makes it difficult for victims to escape online harassment from a partner.

Public Cyber Violence

Public forms of abuse online were also mentioned among participants. Some online posts made by perpetrators were more direct while others were passive aggressive. In addition to hacking into her Google account, Ali’s former partner turned to social media as well:

He was kind of like posting, ‘oh who wants to go to Hawaii with me. Who wants to do this with me because I’m free now and I can do whatever stuff I want to do now,’ kind of like passive aggressive. He’s a very passive aggressive person.
Although she believes he was not being truthful, Ali’s ex-boyfriend claimed he had been planning a trip to Hawaii for them. Regardless of the truthfulness of his statements, the behavior was viewed as indirect hostility.

Other forms of public harassment online from partners were more direct. Rose had been causally dating a guy for a short time when she was raped at a party. The guy who raped her was a friend of a friend and liked by others in her social circle. When Rose spoke up about the rape many of her friends ostracized her and claimed she was lying. The person she was dating at the time was one of the few friends who were on her side and believed she was being truthful about the rape. However, Rose broke up with him shortly after the rape. Her relationship with her boyfriend, who was mentally ill, was too much for her to handle after the experience with the rape and the backlash from her peers. This upset her boyfriend at the time and he took to Twitter for revenge:

So, he got on Twitter and he started this hashtag, hashtag called uh don’t get, don’t uh, faked raped or whatever and started saying like um ‘don’t lie about that because then you’ll be like (name). Hashtag fake, fake rape (e.g. #fakerape).’ Like and started this whole thing. Like to support the claim of the people who were supporting the other guy who had done what he did.

Rose’s name was included in the tweet and her former partner continued to tweet the “fake rape” hashtag with her name for a couple of weeks. A hashtag is a type of metadata tag used on social networking platforms that allows users to easily search or browse messages or posts of a specific theme or content. Any person searching “#fakerape” would find all public posts made by users using that hashtag.
Nora’s former partner used cyber abuse during their relationship and after the relationship ended. When asked what her ex-boyfriend would post about her online she recalled the following:

Oh like ‘this ratchet ghetto b [sic] [recte bitch] is taking me to court for child support like I don’t take care of my kid.’ And I’m like, but you don’t take care of your child. I have her twenty-four-seven. And I go to work and I go to school. Um one time on Instagram, I cut off all my hair again, I posted a picture of me. He was like, was like ‘I always knew that you were gay. You’re looking like a man. Once again that’s why I left your dusty black a [sic] [recte ass] the last time.

While Nora and her partner were still together he would post negative comments about her natural hair:

So, I’m natural. My hair is covered up right now because it’s not done. Um he hated when I didn’t wear my hair pressed out. And he would like send really snide comments saying like ‘I would post my Women Crush Wednesday, but she ain’t comb my [sic] [recte her] hair’ or something, something rude. ‘And her afro’s tacky so I’ma post this shorty instead’.

Women Crush Wednesday is a popular hashtag on social media in which users post about women they admire or find attractive. Nora’s former partner used the popular hashtag as an opportunity to publicly insult her. The post not only criticized her appearance, but also displayed a photograph of another woman he felt was more suitable for Women Crush Wednesday.

Sometimes harassment online did not directly target intimate partners, but rather the target was the victim’s family or friends. This tactic was used to create conflict in the partners other relationships.

He went on online and he wrote on my aunt ..., this was on Facebook, he wrote on my auntie’s wall that I didn’t, that I told him that she didn’t know who her baby daddy was. But the thing was I didn’t know anything about my auntie not knowing who her, who fathered her child. I didn’t know anything. He was just pulling stuff out the air, you know, trying to hurt people, because he didn’t know. Like I didn’t know ‘til he put it on
her wall and you know she came to me and said something about it, that, that was going on. But he’ll try anything he could to hurt everybody else or to get me to hurt people so that I could I guess try to talk to him or try to you know feel bad and, or try to, you know it was like a control tactic in a way.

4.2. Perceptions and Help Seeking Behavior

All the participants had negative perceptions of their partners’ abusive behavior online. Five of the seven women described being fearful of their partner or fearful of the consequences of their partner’s behavior. Ali felt that her former partner’s actions were immature:

Immature. For Sure. Yeah, I mean I thought it very immature of him. I mean everyone should have the right to talk about their relationship if they want to. And I feel like a partner is not just, is not everything, is not your whole life. You know just because you have someone does not mean that he is your best friend, or your, he’s not everything you know. You have your best friend as well and you have like your family, you have other people you love and you have stuff in your life going on. So, partners are only a part of your life. So, if you want to talk to other people about something that troubles you and you don’t feel comfortable talking to your partner about it I think it should be fine. And he shouldn’t like react in that way. And he should have trusted me enough to actually ask me you know, if I felt like the relationship was going south or whatever you know. He should have asked me and I would have been honest with him. I say that now, but who knows. But the thing is trust you know, trust is really important.

Ali may not have been fearful of physical repercussions, but she feared she would not gain back access to her personal information and documents which she needed for, school, work and, research.

Livia experienced physical aggression from her former partner in addition to cyber abuse. However, Livia talks about her fears of being without a home:

Fearful of him? (interviewer responses) Ah yeah. That kind, and you know I grew up in foster care. I also grew up um not really having a home and he was always threatening to kick me on the streets. Kick me, kick, put all my stuff out. He did have a bit of control on me. Um so my, my perception of him was this guy not playing around. And at this time, I don’t have the money to move anywhere else. And I just um, I was fearful, I don’t, first of all nobody likes to get hit for no reason.
Livia not only feared physical repercussions, but she feared she would be without a home.

Growing up in the foster care system and lacking a stable home as a child resulted in some current anxiety concerning her living situation.

When asked if she was ever fearful of her former partner, Jazmin said she was, but explained the dilemma she faced with having a child with her ex-boyfriend:

Yeah, at times I was ’cause it was like, we have, we have a child together so it was like, it wasn’t like a situation to where I just couldn’t [sic] [recte could] leave him alone or just completely just get him out of my life. It was like, okay, I know we have a child together. We have to communicate. I have to talk to him. So, it’ll be on the lines of, I’ll try to, I guess kinda made it work for the child in a way. I kinda try to keep the communication open for the child, but it was just a toxic situation period so I just really had to get away from it.

Since Jazmin and her former partner had a child together she found it difficult to completely cut ties with him. Eventual however, the abusive behavior from her partner was too much for her to bare.

When asked if she was fearful of her ex-boyfriends, Nora, who also has a child with her former partner explained, “Yeah, because we literally got into a fist fight one time because I told him I was tired of the disrespect and he’s gonna have to stay or leave."

After several months of constant contact via social media and SMS from her ex-boyfriend, Verona was greatly concerned:

Yeah, actually. At first for like the first couple of months I was like, huh you know he’s so crazy. Like you know, if I don’t engage too much like he’ll eventually get tired or bored or hopefully find someone else and like move on. But then, I think honestly it took me like up until like maybe around like the eighth, ninth month when I was like I think he might be a little obsessed. And I would like, he knows where I live and so I would like find myself kinda like stepping out of the door and then like looking around and being like you know, he totally use to do that in our relationship like he would just have his car parked you know outside of my apartment and I’ll be like. So, I was like I totally see him doing something like that. Like when we broke up even, um you know, he like threaten
to come over and like beg for me back. So, I was always kinda like looking over my shoulder.

The obsessive behavior from Verona’s ex-boyfriend made her question what he was capable of doing. She felt he could potentially wait for her outside of her apartment. The consistent unwanted contact had her overly conscious of her surroundings when she left home.

Initially Stacey did not see her first partner’s jealous and controlling behavior as a problem, but rather as a sign of his love for her. However, as time progressed she viewed his actions much differently and felt the relationship was unhealthy.

Rose did not fear her former partner. Rose’s ex-boyfriend suffered from bipolar disorder. Rose believed his actions resulted from him being emotionally unstable as well as being hurt by the breakup of their relationship:

Again, I think that he was just completely unstable and um I think he wanted to hurt me back. It was retaliation, it’s all it was. Um and he knew exactly how to do that. And it did hurt. So much so that I moved out of downtown and didn’t go back to school for four years.

While Rose attributes part of her former partner’s abuse to his mental disorder, she does not justify his behavior.

All participants interviewed held negative perceptions of the cyber violence they experienced, however, their willingness to seek help varied. Some sought professional help from law enforcement, mental health professionals, and staff from a social media company, while others reached out to friends and family.

Stacey has had two partners that were abusive. She believes that her relationship with her first abusive boyfriend would not have lasted as long as it did if she had told her family
about his actions sooner. Stacey would solicit advice from her mother by pretending she was asking on behalf of a friend:

One time I be, when I talked to my mom, I tell my mom, my friend this my friend that. Um my friend is doing this, but I’m telling my mom my story, but saying it’s my friend’s issue to see what my mom would say. And then my mom would like give me advice. So, mom would be like that’s so unhealthy. Like she needs to leave him the hell alone (laughs). But that’s how my mom talks. Like she needs to leave him the hell alone. She be like, nuh-uh, she said no man should be doing that ‘cause he don’t pay her phone bill blah, blah, blah, blah.

Stacey eventually told her mother and sister about the physical abuse she experienced from her boyfriend, but when her family members called the police she refused to press charges against him. During another physical altercation between Stacey and her boyfriend at her apartment, Stacey’s roommate called the police. The boyfriend left before the police arrived. The police asked Stacey to come into the station the next day to file for a restraining order, but she never did:

They wanted me to go take out a restraining order on him, but then I went, but I didn’t have the heart for it. So, I, I literally went, and then went back home. I’m like okay. But then after that I say you know what, I got problems. So, I went to the school counselor. Yeah, and from there um the lady she keep telling me, you know, how it’s not love and you know she was using scriptures ‘cause I’m a Christian and then she would just you know, she would really instill in me like positive affirmations and stuff.

For Stacey, cyber abuse was coupled with physical abuse offline. While she did not pursue help from law enforcement, Stacey did break up with her boyfriend and sought care for her mental health.

When Stacey broke up with her most recent partner (different partner from mentioned above), she reached out to her mother again when he would not stop pursuing her through social media, SMS, and phone calls. Stacey explained, “I told my mom, I did tell my mom that [partners name] still be calling me. My mom say um, um when you pick up if it’s him cut it off.”
Since this was a former partner who was involved in prostitution, Stacey was asked during the interview if she had sought help from the police:

I know it sounds like excuse, but I don’t really mess with police like that anymore like, I feel like they done me dirty myself. So, it’s like, I don’t know, and that’s the major I’m in. So now it’s like the system is so corrupted it’s like I don’t even like fooling with the system.

This statement reveals that a distrust of law enforcement has discouraged Stacey from seeking help from an abusive ex-boyfriend who is also a pimp and a panderer.

After Rose’s ex-boyfriend started the negative hashtag about her she reached out for help from the social media company Twitter. Rose stated, “I ended up having to contact Twitter and get them to take it all down. I like took screenshots for it, of it.” Getting the tweets removed was not an instant process. Rose explained:

It took a while for Twitter to actually like get back to me on it. Like I had to um, I had to electronically submit complaints and like harassment. I mean they had buttons for all of that, but um, yeah but it took a while for it to come down and then eventually it was just gone.

Rose also sought counseling from a therapist:

I was already, I was already contemplating going to therapy for the rape basically. And the guy who I dated right before I was raped, I date him for a year and like I said you know he was really violent. He um, he was about twenty-one, so he was in the early stages of his um illness and you know he sought treatment after. But yeah, just because that whole year it was just like, that, and I was like attacked, and then I was you know raped, and then that guy did that bashing, and I was just like okay cool. I need counseling for real or I’m going to be like screwed up for life. So, I went to a holistic therapist. Um she was great. Um and she kinda walked me through unfreezing memories of like why I was attracted to these people in the first place and what made me stay through certain things.

Rose’s decision to see a therapist was based on multiple factors such the rape she experienced and a past abusive relationships with a guy who had dissociative identity disorder. The Twitter
incident was the final straw rather than the main contributing factor for her choice to seek counseling.

After about a year of online abuse from her former partner Verona sought professional assistants from the police. However, when asked what the police did to help her she said:

Nothing. Um they asked me why it took a year for me to reach out to them. And I told them that was fucking irrelevant, but that the real issue was that here is a person who like refuses to leave me alone and like how do I go about getting a restraining order. (Interviewer: That was their only response?) They said they would have someone call me and follow up and no one ever did and I just, he eventually stopped so.

Although Verona sought help from the police to end the harassment from her former partner, she did not receive the help that she needed. Instead she was questioned for not coming to them sooner.

Ali reached out to her dad when her Google account was hacked into by her former partner:

I talked to him and said you should stop doing this. And I told my dad and my dad was like you should just report him to the FBI. You know it is a federal crime to, right ... So, yeah, he um, so my dad told him you know if you don’t stop this we’re going to report you to the police and all that stuff. And eventually he stopped it and gave me back my password.

Ali’s father was actively supportive in helping her regain access to her Google. Also, if her former partner had not returned her account when he did she and her father were willing to report to law enforcement.

Although Jazmin had a child with her ex-boyfriend her family encouraged her to cut ties with him:

Well, I in, I didn’t seek assistance of, in the terms of, not like legally or you know, not like regular people. You know but your family they intervene. That was kinda my assistance ... They kinda just stepped in and was like no you’re not ‘bout to keep dealing with him like you know, they, I was young and you know when you’re young you, kinda just be
doing stuff. Like you don’t really know, you’re kinda just out and that’s kinda what it was. I just needed somebody in my ear telling me no you deserve better type thing and that’s what they kinda put in me. And I kinda took heed to it. It took a minute, but I caught own and left it alone completely.

Jazmin mentioned that her family intervened. She may not have necessarily asked for their help, but she was eventually willing to heed their advice.

After Livia and her boyfriend broke up, they continued to live in the same apartment. Her ex-boyfriend persisted with monitoring and harassing her online until there was a physical altercation in which Livia had to call the police. Further into the interview when Livia was asked if she sought assistance she said she did not:

No, because I cared about him and I loved him. I only talked to like close friends about it. Um, I don’t know, I, I, because of the fact that I grew up in foster care, I didn’t, I don’t, uh they kinda force you to go through therapy and [audio unintelligible] so I always kinda like veered away from therapists and stuff like that. So, I never seek help. I always just wanted to talk to like my close friends and family. Well my family was my mom.

Livia talked to close friends about the abuse she experienced. Not until after she broke up and the abuse continued did she call the police.

When asked if she sought assistance for the online abuse Nora said, “No, because I feel like after a while it’s just something you learn to just deal with. I’m like alright he’s, he’s, he’s in his mood again. Let’s see, let’s see how long this mood lasts.” However, later in the interview Nora does reveal that she talks to her mother to vent about the abuse.

4.3. Consequences of Cyber Violence on Professional and Social Life and Mental health
The ways in which participants professional and social lives and mental health were affected by cyber violence varied. Participants discussed feeling stressed, anxious, and isolated from friends and family. The cyber violence was also a distraction from their school and work.

For Ali, the consequences from her former partner’s cyber violence were short-lived. Since the hacking of her account happened during her summer vacation, the incident did not affect her school or work. After the hacking incident, Ali’s ex-boyfriend began writing passive aggressive Facebook post such as “Oh yeah, who wants to go to Hawaii with me now.” Although she does not believe he was being truthful, he claimed he had been planning a trip to Hawaii for the two of them. The passive aggressive Facebook posts did not affect Ali socially because they had been a long-distance relationship and did not share the same friends.

When asked how her former partner’s abusive comments affected her social life, Rose thought his remarks validated the opinions of the people who were against her:

I don’t know. I like try to think about what other people thought. You know like did they think that, that it was more true because the guy who was on my side, the only person who was on my side originally other than like my best girlfriends um had switched over. Like had I said something and did that just validate everyone who originally didn’t believe me in the situation.

Rose elaborated further:

... I kinda think that like if the one person that was on my side in that situation suddenly switched sides it made me look worse. So socially that just like perpetuated everybody else’s neglect towards me after that situation so. It was a great example of who are your real friends.

Rose’s professional life was also affected. After the rape, Rose did not return to school for the spring semester. There were peers in her social circle who believed she was lying about the rape before her ex-boyfriend posted the fake rape hashtag about her on Twitter. However, the hashtag exacerbated the situation:
And as far as school goes I um, that was in 2013. That was the spring semester of 2013 when that happened. I enrolled for fall of 2013 and I never showed up for the first day of class. So I, you know, returned my loans and withdrew from all my classes because I got up that morning to come on to campus and I was like, can’t do it. I just couldn’t see their faces like ‘cause everyone thought I was lying so. I was like, you know, I’m going give it some time. Try to figure something else out for now.

Social alienation which was aggravated by Rose’s former partner’s comments on social media also influenced her decision to leave college.

For Jazmin, the online abuse from her former partner affected multiple aspects of her life. Jazmin talks about the friction that emerged between her and her family:

It made, it kinda burnt bridges with my family members. Like I was really close to my aunt and he kinda messed up the relationship with my aunt. Like I really, like we, we were really cool, like we were really close. Like she helped with the baby and everything and you know when he went and tried to, I guess sabotage our relationship it kinda put a strain on us talking because she was like you know ‘you’re messing with him and he’s disrespecting me, and you know I’m there for you.’ So, it kinda put a strain on a lot of my relationships. So, it was like kinda, I think it was kinda like an isolation thing. Like he just wanted to get everybody away from me so I could just fully depend on him, and that’s kinda what happened.

Jazmin also adds that her relationships with her mother, stepfather, and her best friend’s mother were also hurt by her former partners abuse online. Beside causing conflicts in her relationships with friends and family, the abuse was a distraction while she was in school:

I’d I’s say, it got in the way of my school ‘cause I be in, it wasn’t, like I’d be in class and I’ll get text messages too, ‘cause it wasn’t just social media I’d get text messages. You know you’re in school and you getting all these text messages from people like oh you know such and such they’re sending me this and they’re sending me that. It’s a distraction. It was like really a big distraction in school I’d say.

When discussing her mental health mentioned feeling confused and stressed:

I, I was very confused and I’ll say I was stressed. It was stressing and it was very depressing. Um it was, I was at a critical time in my life where I needed people and it was like everyone around me was getting pushed away because of somebody that was just toxic that I didn’t know how to get rid of, pretty much.
Again, Jazmin described feeling isolated from the people in her life by her former partner, which was causing her to feel stressed.

Similar to Jazmin, Stacey also talked about the online abuse from her former partners causing a distraction from her studies:

I feel like when you’re going through it with like someone you care for and then they like, you’re at school and they calling or they’re texting you crazy stuff, it distracts you. Like, it just, it have you, like you here but you’re not here kinda thing. Like your mind is all over the place. Like okay what’s next. Like what’s the next move. What are they capable of, you know stuff like that. I feel like it’s just distracting and it creates stress.

At the end of her statement Stacey also brings up how the online abuse creates stress as well.

For Verona, there was some anxiety when leaving her home. She took precautions before going out and would inform people in her network when she received messages from her former partner:

I mean like again, I would go out at night, sometime like on the weekends, and I live alone, um and he knows where I stay, and so I definitely would find myself like looking over my shoulder, kinda like looking around. You know, making sure I had my key in my hand. Um, I also kinda like started sending out text blasts of like some the times when he would text me. You know if it had been like, after about a year it became more, less frequent, but whenever he would reach out I would kinda let everyone know. Like ‘he reached out again, this date, this time, this form, here’s a screenshot and if a bitch turns up dead or whatever it was him.’

Verona’s anxiety which resulted from her former partner’s online abuse influenced the change in her behavior when she went out. When Verona was asked about her emotional wellbeing she expressed her frustration with the experience and the double standards women face in general:

I mean it was scary because I feel like I was under more distress because I had already suffered pretty traumatic events like before that he knew about. And um I just found myself being like really fucking frustrated at times. You know because I’d be like, um I fucking hate like sic gender men. Like I just, I think for me, um I just started having like less respect for like men in general because, I was like, I just felt like at that point I
couldn’t win. Like if I go out and I’m sexually liberated and I do what I want, then I’m at risk for violence. But then here, I quote-on-quote did it right, and I was in a relationship, a long-term relationship, and uh broke it off with him before I decided to do other things and I’m still like paying the price... Then I guess to rap that up, I feel like I became like more cynical. And um, like bitter. I became more bitter.

Verona voiced feelings of distress, frustration, cynicism, and bitterness.

Livia’s former partner would often contact her while she was at work. He would use various methods to reach her through social media, emails, phone call and even her friends. His actions were a source of anxiety for Livia while at her place of employment:

He was always threatening where I’m at on the phone, calling me during work hours and I’m just sitting here like, ‘I can’t answer because I’m at work. What do you want me to do like.’ So, so it kinda affected it a little bit. I was always kinda like nervous and anxious of what he was going to do when I got back home or yeah. There was always a fight.

Livia also discussed how the abuse affected her social life:

Well, that kinda sucked because we had the same friends. Um and sometimes like, some of the friends would know what we’re going through and sometimes they sided with me and sometimes they sided with him even if he was wrong. So that kinda, that kinda sucked a lot. Um, but I had my, I had my own close friends that I knew before him that would obviously understand where I’m coming from.

While discussing her mental wellbeing, Livia again states that she continually felt anxious. She experienced a constant worry:

Yeah, it was stressful. It was definitely stressful you know. You, it’s like an anxious thing for me. Not really anxiety or panic, but more like an anxious thing like, ‘oh, god is this going to be another fight or am I gonna have, am I gonna to feel pain. Am I gonna get hit.’ You know it was definitely stressful. Your adrenaline is kind of always there in a fight or flight mode because you kinda have to prepare yourself for that. Um, it’s definitely stressful. It’s not a good environment, environment for anyone to be in.

For Livia, cyber violence and physical violence were used concurrently by her former partner. Threats over social media or text could be actualized, which left Livia in constant “fight or flight mode.”
When Nora experienced abuse online from her ex-boyfriend, she was not her social self and wanted to be alone:

I don’t want to talk to nobody. Like when I get upset like I just, I’m a very, I’m a very talkative person and so it’s like when that stuff happens it’s like I just don’t want to be around nobody. I’ll just (audio unintelligible) … If I’m, if I’m around family, I’ll probably just take my daughter and like go upstairs in a room …

The online abuse also put a strain on Nora’s relationships with friends and family:

My Friends and relatives, they’re the kind of people who say ‘yo like just, just let me go fight him.’ And I’m like no. That’s my child’s father. And they’re like ‘you’re sure?’ I’m like yeah, don’t put your hands on him. And they, they were tired of seeing me defending him and not wanting him to get thrashed … So, like, they would like get upset and like, ‘Well I don’t want to see you moping around if you don’t want nobody to handle this situation.’

Nora’s friends and family members knew Nora was being hurt by her ex-boyfriend and wanted to take care of the problem. Their desire to solve the issue with violence may not be the best solution, but her friends and family were annoyed and felt Nora was protecting a person who did not deserve her protection. However, the online abuse was not only causing a strain on Nora’s relationships, but her mental health as well:

Oh, I was half way suicidal. Legit. Like, I felt like how could somebody I helped, I helped create a life with be so disrespectful and bad mouth me when I know that I did right by him and my child. It’s like it makes you think that you made the wrong choice (audio unintelligible) … Before I had her like I literally wanted to die. Then after I had her I like literally (audio unintelligible) … And now it’s like, sometimes I’m like I just don’t want to be here. Like I get really depressed (audio unintelligible) … then I talk to my mom about it and vent to her. It’s like it’s not a good feeling. It like it makes you want to commit homicide or commit suicide.

Nora mentions of suicide reveal signs of depression as a result of the abuse she experienced from her former partner.
4.4. Psychological and Physical Aggression offline

All the women who participated except for Rose, had experienced psychological or physical aggression from their partner offline in addition to cyber violence.

Ali discussed how her ex-boyfriend would down play her field of study, implying that engineers were lacking intellectually and socially:

Other than that, he’s also very condescending. I understand he’s very smart and he looks down on, ‘cause I’m an engineer, he looks down on engineering. He’s likes, ‘Oh,’ he does finance, so he’s like, ‘Oh, engineers they don’t really know how to be sociable, and they, it kinda like there’s a rule, there’s no logic behind it, there are only formulas,’ which isn’t true, you know. It takes a lot of logic to be an engineer. So, I was like, ‘well it’s not true, uh stuff, but.’ I feel like at the time I was kinda just like going with it and I was just trying to please him. So, it kinda impacted me that way where it made me very insecure about myself and not confident, just very dependent on him. Not sure if it was actually like something that he wanted to do.

Her ex-boyfriend’s comments had a negative effect on Ali’s self-esteem. She felt it made her more dependent on the former partner, but she was unsure if that was his intention.

In passing Nora mentioned there had been some psychological and physical aggression offline. When asked directly about psychological and physical violence offline abuse Nora stated that “Offline, yeah. He, he was worst offline than he was online.”

Stacey experience abuse offline from two boyfriends. Early in the interview while discussing help seeking behavior, Stacey revealed that her first partner would use physical violence against her saying, “What happened was, I finally, finally told my mom and my sister about what, like how [name omitted] like when he drink, like he constantly hit me and stuff like that.” Stacey’s second partner was psychologically abusive rather than physically aggressive.
Stacey explained, “what he normally do, he use verbal to hurt me. Like he tells me how I’m ugly, um stuff like that.”

When asked if there was psychological or physical aggression in her relationship with her former partner Jazmin said the following:

Mmhm, it was a bunch of all that. The verbal, it was cussing like you know, it, it was just, and now it like I’ll look back on it like why was I letting him talk to me crazy like this. Like he use to, it was very like verbal abusive. Like he use, he didn’t care what he said to me, how he said it, or who he said it around. Like it was, he just, he was just disrespectful, like he was totally disrespectful. He just never cared about nothing that came out of his mouth. And now it’s, it’s crazy I just look back like ‘you really, you really let him tell you this stuff and you didn’t think to leave sooner,’ you know. And then even when I, ‘cause I stayed with him for, my son was probably like one or two, or about to be two, I stayed with him. And it was like all the time I decided to go to my mom’s house, like I could just want to go to my mom’s house for a weekend, he would want to jump on me. Like he would want to fight. He would, ‘cause I, just because I didn’t want to be with him, I wanted to go with my family. He would really want to fight because I wanted to go see my mom. And I thought about it, ‘why are you trying to isolate me to yourself?’ Like you know, like that’s my mom, that’s my family. He didn’t want me around nobody. He just wanted me with him twenty-four-seven.

Jazmin experienced physical aggression as well as multiple forms of psychological violence.

Jazmin’s partner attempted to isolate her from her family with online and offline tactics.

Livia also experienced physical abuse from her former partner. The incident Livia details results in her seeking help from the police:

Well just … ‘cause he wasn’t only uh cyberly I guess abusive, he was physically as well. Um, but yeah, it was until I had to call the police like one day. I decided to go out by myself because we’re not together and I don’t have to, you know, answer to you. That’s what my thinking was, but, I was just coming home and he decided to put his hands on me, and I had to leave and call the police.

Although they were no longer a couple, Livia’s former partner still attempted to assert power over her through physical aggression.
When asked if psychological or physical violence took place offline Verona said, “Not during the period that he was doing like I guess the cyber stalking. It happened like during the relationship... Yeah, it was kinda like bidirectional, but huh, things got physically heated sometimes.” Here, Verona admits to also using physical aggression against her partner, however, she does not mention who initiated the violence.

4.5. Reciprocation of Cyber Violence

At the end of each interview participants were asked two questions concerning reciprocated cyber violence. First, participants were asked if they had every monitored a partner’s online activity. Second, participants were asked if they had ever “… threatened, insulted, or posted intimate or private information or pictures of a partner online as a way to hurt or humiliate them.” All the participants except for Ali admitted to monitoring a partner’s online activity. However, none had ever posted malicious content online as a way to hurt or humiliate a partner.

When asked if she had ever monitored a partner’s online activity, Rose recalled a time she went through her current boyfriend’s text messages:

Have I snooped? (Interviewer responses) Of course I’ve snooped. Oh yeah, I’ve snooped before. You know, I, after that, I never did before that and then when I started dating um [name omitted] I, yeah, no, I want to say I would go and see um, no I looked at his text messages a couple of times when we first started dating. And I’m not good at covering my tracks. I’m not a good snoop so he found out. He was not happy. But I wasn’t wrong to look so um. Yeah, I looked at his text messages ‘cause he had kind of, of a crazy ex-girlfriend and you know, she would show up on our porch up until like a year into our relationship... I snooped through his text messages. And that’s it.
Rose did not necessarily think she was wrong for looking through her boyfriend’s text messages since they were coming from an ex-girlfriend who had been harassing them. Rose further explained that she had not monitored previous partners’ text messages or online activity:

Then again, to be honest I never really cared about anybody that much before him. Like I dated people, but I was always the one in the relationship that was less interested. Um and then for the very first time I felt like I was more interested than he was um when we first started dating and so yeah um. Yeah, I don’t know. Again, it just went with trust. I, it was a really, it was difficult. I could not trust a single thing he said to me and I didn’t know why. I mean he’s to this day the most trustworthy person I know. Um, so yeah but, just after that year I was like yeah not having it.

Rose believed that she monitored her boyfriend’s text messages because she felt that she cared about him more than he cared about her. She attributes the “snooping” to her lack of trust which she believed was influenced by her experience with the rape and her former partner’s negative comments on social media.

Stacey also openly confesses to monitoring a former partner’s online activity. This boyfriend was not one of the two who were abusive, but one she had some suspicions about. Stacey explained:

One of the guys I dated, yeah, I did that. But I did that because um, I had a gay boyfriend, a gay best friend, and the way he was acting around my gay best friend was kind of weird. I’m like okay you’re supposed to be my boyfriend but, and he said ‘Oh, I don’t like gay people,’ like uh. But then from nowhere he said, ‘As long as they don’t try me, you know, blah, blah, blah.’ And he started like, he hang around him. So, to me it’s like you don’t like gay people but the way you act around him. So, from there I, I would, that’s why I looked through his um, you know. So, so I went, I, yes, I did. I looked through. Came to find out yes, he is actually gay. So, and I was glad I did, but apart from that um not really. Like I have to have a reason to do that.

Similar to Rose, Stacey believes the suspicions she had about her boyfriend and the confirmation of those thoughts justified her actions.
Jazmin was the only participant who monitored a partner’s online activity, but believed doing so was wrong:

Honestly, I did that before that’s why I’m like if you trust somebody you shouldn’t have to babysit them and their social media and their text messages. Like you shouldn’t have to do that. That’s where I’m at now, like I, I don’t do that no more, but back then after everything I went through with him and his trust issues I believe it kind of gave me some type of trust issues. So, my relationship after that I was like really on the look for everything, but then I just sat and I, I guess I grew up and I’m like you don’t have to do all that. Somebody actually cared they wouldn’t take you through all that.

Although Jazmin believed that monitoring a partner’s activity online is unnecessary, she felt that her previous partner’s abuse towards her influenced her behavior in her next relationship.

With Verona and her ex-boyfriend, a violation of trust triggered Verona to routinely go through her partner’s phone. However, unlike other participants she directly asked her partner to hand over is phone:

There was a couple of times, there was one time when we first started dating and I saw that he had received a text from some girl and I was just like, ‘oh, who was that?’ And I found out, you know, it was the girl that he was like talking to as he was talking to me. And then that became really heated. And so for a while I would like randomly just be like ‘give me your phone.’ And I would look through his text messages and be like ‘Who’s that bitch? Who’s that bitch? Who’s that bitch?’ Um, and then that died down and things were fine. And then he happened to check my Facebook, no, he happened to check his Facebook on my phone and forgot to log out, and I accidently stumbled upon a conversation he was having in his Facebook messenger with another woman, who he later told me was someone that he use to sleep around with before he met me. And so, I um, before I told him that I knew about the girl and that I had access to his Facebook I totally just like kept it open and monitored it for like a couple of weeks.

After some time passes Verona stopped the random checks of her former partners phone.

However, during a later period in their relationship when she was not seeking to monitor her partner’s activities online she accidently sees a conversation revealing infidelity. This accidental discovery prompts a couple of weeks of intentional monitoring.
Nora mentioned monitoring her former partner’s online activity during the relationship, but she did not specify her methods; such as monitoring her partner’s activity from her own accounts versus logging into her partner’s accounts. Interestingly, Nora was able to gain information about her ex-boyfriend’s online activity without monitoring it herself:

When, when he and I was together yes. After we broke up like he has a thing were it’s like, he says I’m such a bad person so that he blocked me from everything and I’m like okay like I don’t care. But people will still come and tell me things. ... (audio unintelligible) they’ll call me and text me or they’ll screenshot me like ‘Yo, wasn’t like wasn’t you and him like supposed to be doing something with your kid and then and then he cancels ... (audio unintelligible)?’, and I’m like yeah. ‘Oh, well he’s in Cancun. Oh, well he’s on a, on a cruise. Oh, well he’s doing yeah.’ And it’s like, okay, it’s like now I don’t have to monitor because for some reason my friends still, my, our uh friends, ‘cause they’re his friends too, still follow him, and they’ll like just tell me everything. And then, I got a text from him a couple of, no I got a phone call from him a couple of days ago saying, ‘You got uh people out here watching me on Instagram and Facebook.’ and I’m like no. I’m like, the same way people tell you what I post and, and what I do on my Instagram or my Snapchat, or my uh Facebook, same way, it’s the same way that people come to me and say, ‘oh, well I saw him doing this or I saw him doing that.’ And it’s like ... I don’t solicit it, but I also don’t tell them like no don’t tell me because when it’s all said and done you know what you don’t do and you know what you lie about.

Although her ex-boyfriend had blocked Nora from seeing his social media accounts, her friends were informing her what he was saying and doing online. She never asked her friends to provide her with this information, but she did not refuse the information.

Before Livia was asked if she had ever monitored a partner online activity, the topic came up while she was explaining how she had to change all of her account passwords. As Livia was preparing to leave her former partner, he was leaving hints that he had information on her that he could use in a malicious manner. This prompted Livia to search through her ex-boyfriend’s phone:

I saw, I had went in his phone. There’s a phone he had and I went in it and I saw he had pictures of my social security and my birth certificate and all this stuff and I deleted it all
out of his phone. And this, yeah this was towards the end of me getting ready to get the
hell out of his life. And something made me go through his phone, I don’t know, I just
went through his phone. I’m not really the one to do that, but I just went through his
phone and I found out he had like all of my stuff. My personal stuff. So, I don’t even
know how the hell he got all that stuff, but he had my Facebook password, my um ...
The objectives of this research were: (1) to identify types of cyber violence tactics used by perpetrators, (2) to understand victims’ perception of the cyber violence, (3) to identify help seeking behavior, (4) to examine the effects of cyber violence on victims’ professional lives, social lives and mental health, and (5) to identify the occurrence of victims reciprocating cyber violence towards an intimate partner.

5.1. Johnson’s Typologies of IPV, Coercive Control, & Cyber Violence

The abusive tactics used by the partners of participants in this study varied in method, onset, and intention. Although typically used to understand traditional forms of IPV, acts of cyber violence can be categorized using Johnson’s typology of IPV. Nora, Livia, and Jazmin’s experienced Intimate Terrorism from their former partners. For example, Nora’s former partner did not like the way she wore her hair, so he posted negative comments and images to publicly shame her for her choice. Similarly, Livia’s partner tried to control her whereabouts with constant messages with threats of physical injury. He would even message her friends to confirm her location. Jazmin’s partner attempted to isolate her from her family and friends by instigating conflicts online. Although the methods varied, each illustration of IPV was similar in its use of some form of coercive control. In Nora’s case, emotional abuse was used. Livia’s partner used intimidation and threats, while Jazmin’s partner attempted to use Isolation.

Rose’s former partner’s actions after she ended their relationship is a good example of Separation-Instigated Violence. Rose confirmed there was no prior abuse in their relationship.
before his “fake rape” hashtag on Twitter. Her former partner was hurt by the sudden breakup and lashed out on Twitter.

Each interview ended with two questions about reciprocated violence. Participants were asked if they had ever monitored a partner’s online activity. Participants were also asked if they had threatened, insulted, or posted intimate/private information or pictures of a partner online as a way to hurt or humiliate them. The purpose of these questions was to determine whether victims of cyber violence were also perpetrators, and if they were, why and how. Six of the seven women interviewed admitted to monitoring their partner’s online activities, but none of the women used cyber technology as a way to threaten, humiliate or hurt a partner. Stark and Johnson’s argue that coercive control is largely perpetrated by men. In this study, none of the women appeared to monitor their partner’s online activity as a way to control them. The actions of Stacey, Rose, and Verona resemble what Johnson’s describes as Situational Couple Violence, which involves a violent and non-controlling individual who is with a partner who is nonviolent or violent and non-controlling. Stacey suspected that her boyfriend at the time might be gay. In order to confirm her suspicions, she went through his Facebook messenger without his knowledge when he left the account logged in and unattended. Rose’s past experiences with violence left her feeling insecure. She also admitted she cared more about her current partner than she did previous partners. Rose’s trust issues led her to read through her boyfriend’s text messages when he left his phone unattended. When Verona discovered that her former partner had been communicating with a woman he had a previous sexual relationship with, she demanded to see the messages in his phone. On another occasion, Verona unintentionally gained access to his Facebook Messenger after he logged into his
account on her phone and forgot to sign-out. She learned her partner was cheating on her with another woman. Rather than tell him immediately what she had discovered, she monitored his account for a couple of weeks. While participants’ actions in each of these scenarios may not have been the best way to resolve the conflicts they faced, their intentions were not rooted in controlling behavior.

Another form of non-controlling violence is Violent Resistance. Shortly before leaving her former boyfriend, Livia’s partner was leaving hints that he had information on her that he could use for malicious intentions. In an attempt to prevent potential harm to herself, Livia searched his phone. She discovered he had personal information of hers such as the password to her Facebook account, and pictures of her social security card and birth certificate. Livia deleted all her private information from his phone.

5.2. Help-seeking and Cyber Violence

Previous research on IPV has shown that the severity of the IPV is the strongest predictor of help seeking behavior (Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Hyman, Forte, Du Mont, Romans, & Cohen, 2009). While that conclusion cannot be drawn from this current research, themes which could be explored in future quantitative research did emerge. All participants had negative perceptions of the cyber violence they experienced. Some even described feeling fearful. However, only two of the participants sought formal help on their own in an attempt to end the cyber violence. The two participants who actively sought out help received very different responses to their request for assistance. Rose sought help directly from Twitter and reported the inappropriate tweets and hashtag. After a couple of weeks, the tweets were taken down.
On the other hand, when Verona went to the police to report the harassment she had been receiving from her former partner for about a year, her local law enforcement dismissed her. Rather than showing concern they asked Verona why, it took her so long to report the issue. Verona was told that someone would follow-up with her, but no one from the police department ever contacted her after her initially visit with them. This kind of response from law enforcement could discourage victims of cyber abuse from seeking help. Law enforcement’s response in Verona’s case gives the impression that cyber violence is not a serious concern. There is already a distrust for law enforcement among minority groups, particularly with Black Americans. Stacey, who is African, expresses this sentiment when she said, “... I don't really mess with police like that anymore like, I feel like they done me dirty myself.” Although Hyman and colleagues found no association between race and help-seeking behavior after controlling for other factors, this question should be revisited. Specifically, it would be interesting to look at what resources are sought.

All participants talked to friends and family about the violence. Family and friends can be useful in encouraging victims to seek further help or getting them to leave an abusive partner. On two occasions the police were called by Stacey’s family and a friend. Each time Stacey refused help from the police, but the final call to law enforcement did influence her decision to leave her boyfriend and seek counseling. Similarly, Jazmin’s family and friends encouraged her to cut off all communication with her former partner. Ali’s father was able get her former partner to return access to her Google account by threatening legal repercussions. These examples reveal that family and friends can be critical sources for removing victims from harmful circumstances.
Besides a distrust for law enforcement, participants gave other reasons for not seeking formal assistance. Stacey and Livia both expressed that they still cared about their partner despite the abuse they experienced from them. Jazmin and Nora both had children with their abusive partners. Although they did not state that having a child with their former partner was their reason for not seeking formal help, it did make them reluctant to cut all ties with that partner. The women did not want to keep their children away from their father.

Although the women in this study held negative perceptions of the cyber abuse they received from their partners, societal perceptions may vary. Local law enforcement’s response to Verona as well as some tactics used by perpetrators brings one to question whether cyber abuse is viewed as a serious or harmful form of violence. Typically, IPV that takes place offline is intentionally kept private or unseen. Perpetrators do not want to be exposed and victims, may fear reaching out for help. In the Cyber world, this is not always the case. Cyber abuse tactics used by perpetrators in this research were done in private, while some attracts were specifically made to be public. Perpetrators may be less fearful of potential repercussion for cyber violence due to a sense of anonymity found online. However, in this current study perpetrators did not attempt to hide their identity making public abusive post. Cyber harassment is not unique to abusive partners. Cyber violence is quite common in other areas of society. The issue may be that the public has normalized this behavior. As a result, the severity of online violence is not understood.
5.3. Public Health Implications and Recommendations

Previous research on physical, physiological, and stalking IPV have revealed serious public health implications. IPV has been associated with depression, anxiety, PTSD, and other mental health issues (Arias & Pape, 1999; Bonomi et al., 2006; Coker et al., 2002; Domenech Del Rio & Sirvent Garcia Del Valle, 2016; Lawrence, Yoon, Langer, & Ro, 2009; Mechanic, Weaver, & Resick, 2008). Furthermore, physical IPV is associated with chronic diseases such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke and other chronic conditions (Breiding, Black, & Ryan, 2008; Coker et al., 2002).

Similarly, participants in this study expressed feelings of social isolation, depression, stress, and anxiety. Rose was already feeling ostracized from members in her social group after calling out her rapist. Her former partner’s claims that she had made false rape allegation only make her situation worse. Rose felt that his comments on Twitter validated the people in her friend group who did not want to believe her. On the first day of the Fall semester she withdrew from all her classes and returned all her student loans because she could not face her peers. The whole situation appeared to be a source of anxiety and stress for Rose. Other participants were candid about feeling anxious and stress. Jazmin explained that some of her relationships with her family and friends were damaged as a result of her ex-boyfriend’s actions online. She was feeling stressed and depressed and her friends and family were being pushed away during a time she needed them the most. Verona mentioned going through a previous traumatic event. She did not go into detail, but her ex-boyfriend friend’s constant harassment created another source of anxiety for her. Livia described her situation as being in constant
fight or flight mode. However, the most severe response came from Nora, who said, “I was half way suicidal.”

Future research should examine the severity of depression and anxiety among victims of cyber IPV and determine whether cyber IPV is uniquely associated with various mental disorders and chronic diseases. Most of the participants in the current study also experienced abuse offline, which is in line with the literature (Borrajo, Gámez-Guadix, Pereda, & Calvete, 2015; Zweig, Dank, Yahner, & Lachman, 2013). In some cases, cyber technology was one of many avenues perpetrators used to terrorize an intimate partner. The cyber world was a way to assert control over a partner even when they were not present. Similar to Woodlock’s (2016) conclusion, perpetrators of cyber abuse aimed to express their omnipresence in victims’ lives. For Stacey, Livia, and Nora, cyber abuse was an extension to the abuse they experienced in person. If cyber IPV is uniquely associated with various adverse health consequences than victims are at risk for poor health outcomes even when they physically separate themselves from their partner.

There are potential opportunities for intervention. Participation in this study was opened to people eighteen years of age or older, however every volunteer was under the age of thirty. The ideal target group for intervention would be middle and high school students, and college undergraduates. Education focused prevention programs should emphasize the legal and health consequences of cyber violence. Discussions on healthy dating behavior should also take place. Furthermore, compiling a list of resource and educating young people on how and where to seek help in the event they are victims of cyber violence could encourage help-seeking. Many states have laws concerning cyber harassment and “revenge porn,” however
efforts to educate the public about these laws is needed. Also, steps should be taken to ensure crimes related to cyber violence are taken seriously by law enforcement and properly addressed.

5.4. Limitations

Due to the nature of qualitative research, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to a larger population. However, the research does provide some rich insight on the topic of cyber IPV, which is difficult to obtain from quantitative research. Such insights include participants opinions about the violence they experience and the motives behind the actions of victims and perpetrators. Intimate partner violence is a sensitive topic in which victims may have a difficult time discussing their stories. As a result, this could have limited the number of participants willing to take part in this study. Qualitative research is also subject to the biases of the researcher. The interviewers tone, body language, socioeconomic status, race, gender, or age could have potentially influenced participants responses. Finally, the researcher’s personal experience with intimate partner violence could have biased the results.
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APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

What is your age?

What is your gender?

☐ Female
☐ Male
☐ Other _________________________

What is your race/ethnicity?

☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
☐ Asian
☐ Black or African American
☐ Latino or Hispanic
☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
☐ White
☐ Other __________________________

What is your highest level of education?

☐ Did Not Complete High School
☐ High School Diploma or GED
☐ Some College
☐ Associate’s Degree
☐ Bachelor’s Degree
☐ Master’s Degree
☐ Advanced Graduate Work or Ph.D.
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How often do you use electronic device such as smart phones, tablets, computers, and social networking websites? How do you use these devices and websites?

What tactics or forms of cyber violence has your current or former partner(s) used against you?

What was your perception of this behavior?

Did you ever seek assistance? Why or Why not?

How does/did cyber violence affect your professional life (such as work or school)?

How does/did cyber violence affect your social life?

How does/did cyber violence affect your mental health?

Does/did psychological or physical aggression from your partner occur offline as well?

Have you ever monitored a partner’s online activities such as their text messages, Facebook profile/messages, emails, or other social media accounts? If so, how, and for what reason?

Have you ever threatened, insulted, or posted intimate/private information or pictures of a partner online as a way to hurt or humiliate them? If so, how and for what reason?