USING PHOTOVOICE TO COMMUNICATE ABUSE: A CO-CULTURAL
THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION FACTORS RELATED TO
DIGITAL DATING ABUSE

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all women who, so courageously, have shared their stories of abuse with the desire that others might benefit from their experiences and, ultimately, live safer and happier lives. Their "lived experiences" are both unique and universal, contributing to our knowledge and understanding of various forms of intimate partner abuse and informing our resolve and actions to overcome this detrimental communication phenomenon.

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ABSTRACT

USING PHOTOVOICE TO COMMUNICATE ABUSE: A CO-CULTURAL THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION FACTORS RELATED TO DIGITAL DATING ABUSE

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2006), 5.3 million intimate partner abuse (IPA) incidents occur in the United States every year, resulting in approximately two million injuries and 1,300 deaths among women. Exposure to interpersonal abuse in dating relationships often begins in early adolescence and continues into adulthood. The National Council on Crime and Delinquency (2008) reports that approximately one in three adolescent girls (16 to 19 years) in the United States experience physical, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner. Additionally, the increased use of information and communication technologies, such as the Internet and cell phones, continues to become a prominent part of social life among teens and young adults. The rapid rate at which technology is developing has led to an emergent shift from face-to-face forms of IPA to digital forms of IPA. For example, according to the Family Violence Prevention Fund (2009), approximately one in three

teens reported the experience of receiving text messages from a partner, up to 30 times in one hour, with questions regarding where they were, what they were doing, and/or who they were with. Given the prevalence of the growing phenomenon, this analysis will focus on co-cultural communication enacted by young women in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships. Using a co-cultural theoretical frame of analysis, this study seeks to better understand communication practices of young women interacting as co-cultural group members within dominant societal structures. In particular, photovoice is used as a qualitative method to identify the co-cultural communication orientations and responses to acts of digital dating abuse in heterosexual romantic relationships. Data analysis revealed 15 salient themes with regard to women's lived experiences of digital dating abuse and the co-cultural strategies used to manage such abuse. These accounts provide insight into the diverse communicative strategies and standpoints of the digitally abused women who participated in this study, and have implications for women, social science research, medical practice, educators/advocates, and society at large.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

"I just got out of a relationship where my [boyfriend] would constantly send me texts and if I didn't respond within a couple of seconds, he'd call me and insult me over the phone, accusing me of being 'too busy' for him."

"My cousin and I are really close and we tell each other everything. Lately, she's been telling me about how her boyfriend gets mad whenever she talks to another guy. She even had to delete all her guy friends on Facebook so he wouldn't freak out! I know he makes her feel special but it creeps me out."

Developing over the last thirty years, health communication has emerged as an exciting and important field of study concerned with the powerful roles performed by human and mediated communication in health care delivery and health promotion (Kreps, Query, & Bonaguro, 2008). As Kreps et al. (2008) state, health communication is an applied behavioral science research area that examines the pragmatic influences of human communication on health, the promotion of public health, and health care delivery. Inquiry concerning health communication is often problem-based, focusing on identifying, examining, and solving health care and health promotion issues (Kreps, 2001). It occurs across a vast spectrum and ranges in topics from provider-patient interaction, social and communal issues, health organizations, to media and health promotion (Siriko, 2005). Unlike its early, often atheoretical and limited provider-patient focus (Thompson, 1984), the volume and breadth of health communication is now quite extensive (Kreps et al., 2008).

Although the study of health communication continues to unfold throughout the 21st century, the United States is experiencing several health challenges (Flint, Query, & Parrish, 2005). These challenges range from physicians' limited time constraints with patients due in part to exorbitant numbers of new clients, spiraling numbers of underinsured individuals (Nation's Health, 2005; Rowland, 2004), increases in lack of health literacy among minorities (IOM, 2001; Kickbusch, 2001; Schwartzberg, VanGeest, & Wang, 2005), rising cases of AIDS (WHO, 2003), to a staggering rise in intimate partner abuse (Williamson & Silverman, 2001).

Intimate partner abuse (IPA) is a communication-based threat to the physical or mental health of victims. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011) define IPA as "physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse [which] can occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy." IPA includes behaviors that range from a single occurrence to chronic abuse, with varying levels of severity. Among those 18 years of age and older, approximately 5.3 million incidents of IPA occur among women and 3.2 million among men in the United States each year (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). In addition, a national study found that 29% of women and 22% of men reported experiencing physical, sexual, or psychological IPA at some point in their lifetime (Coker et al., 2002).

The effects of IPA are widespread and affect all members of society either directly or indirectly, making it a significant health concern. From a societal perspective, IPA results in costs exceeding $8.3 billion each year. These costs include items such as medical and mental health care, lost wages and productivity, among others. At the

individual level, those victimized by IPA may experience a wide range of severe consequences, including broken bones, sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy difficulties, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, suicide, anxiety, and social isolation. Moreover, individuals who have a history of IPA victimization are more likely to experience adverse health consequences in the future, such as increased engagement in risky sexual behaviors, substance use, and eating disorders. Given the severity and magnitude of the consequences of IPA, society as a whole has a vested interest in understanding and alleviating this problem; doing so requires consideration from a communication perspective.

According to scholars, theorizing from the margins contributes to understanding of communication processes because "the oppressed can see with the greatest clarity, not only their own position but… indeed the shape of social systems as a whole" (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 8). Following this line of theorizing from the margins, which has deeply enriched communication theory and research (Buzzanell, 1994), co-cultural theory guides the present study. As Orbe (1998) states, "the unique contribution of the ongoing research termed co-cultural theory is that it explores the common patterns of communication both across and within these different marginalized groups" (p. 3). The present study contributes to this line of research by examining the everyday communication experiences of young women in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships in order to identify the co-cultural practices marginalized group members identify as being most effective to their health and wellbeing.

With regard to the study of health communication, one area where the challenges of IPA are becoming increasingly evident, especially among young women, is the intersection of digital communication technology and IPA in heterosexual romantic relationships. According to the Family Violence Prevention Fund (2009), IPA through the use of a digital device affects nearly one in four teens, who admit to being harassed by email or text messaging by their intimate partner. Specifically, respondents reported that their partner called and text messaged their cell phone to "check up on them" more than 50 times per day, and/or shared or threatened to share private or embarrassing pictures or videos of them online. Additionally, almost 60% of the respondents who reported experiencing digital forms of IPA said it occurred while they were in college.

Consistent with IPA, the harmful effects of digital abuse by an intimate partner can also be extended to one's health. A recent study indicated that there is an association between digital abuse by an intimate partner and mental health (MTV & Associated Press, 2009). Similar to the health effects of IPA, young people who have been the target of digital abuse by an intimate partner are twice as likely to report having received treatment from a mental health professional, and are nearly three times more likely to have considered dropping out of school. Digital abuse by an intimate partner can also be linked to risk of suicide. For example, 8% of victims and 12% of sexters have considered ending their own life compared to only 3% of people who had not been victimized and were not involved in sexting.

Although IPA can happen to anyone (e.g., men, women, heterosexual couples, same-sex couples), some group members experience higher risks of IPA exposure than

others. A vast body of research indicates that heterosexual women are more often victims of IPA and intimate partner homicide than are men (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Research indicates that over 75% of female rape or physical assault victims were assaulted by a current or former intimate partner. Conversely, intimate partner assaults composed less than 20% of the corresponding male victims. Additionally, women are significantly more likely than men to be injured during an assault; 39% of women and 25% of men were injured during their most recent assault (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Many researchers and practitioners maintain that this is because men are motivated by the desire to have power and control over their partners (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998; Johnson, 2001; Wood, 2006). This struggle over power and control is deeply enmeshed in dominant gendered roles in Western society (Wood, 2006). That is, masculinity has been constructed in a way that is strongly associated with dominance and abuse (Katz, 2003; Lloyd, 1999). As such, this study is concerned with those experiences as perceived by young women; men's experiences were not examined.

Moreover, research demonstrates that IPA often occurs early in adolescence, as young as 15 years of age (Holt & Espelage, 2005; Williams & Martinez, 1999). Other research has found evidence to support the proposition that females aged 16 to 24 constitute the group at greatest risk for IPA victimization (Sampson, 2007); the majority being representative of the college population. With regard to this age group, Williams and Martinez (1999) reported estimates between 15% and 28% of college students report at least one episode of IPA within their dating relationships; Kreiter et al. (1999) reported

a higher rate of IPA among a White, college-aged population. Thus, this study examines the lived experiences of young, college-aged women; other age groups were not examined.

Given the prevalence of the growing phenomenon among young women, this study focuses on digital forms of IPA in heterosexual romantic relationships. Using a co-cultural theoretical frame of analysis, this study seeks to better understand the communication practices of young women interacting as co-cultural group members within dominant societal structures and how the enacted practices impact their health and wellbeing.

Intimate Partner Abuse (IPA)

As previously stated, exposure to IPA in dating relationships often begins in early adolescence and continues into adulthood. The National Council on Crime and Delinquency (2008) reports that approximately one in three adolescent girls (16 to 19 years) in the United States experience physical, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner. Abuse includes hurtful acts to gain power and control over one's partner (Hopson, 2009). More specifically, physical abuse includes direct physical contact or force; and using hands or objects to injure a partner (Lutzker, 2006). Emotional abuse includes psychological manipulation and intimidation; and using mental duress, threats, put downs, and other forms of coercion to control a partner (Follingstad et al., 1990). Verbal abuse includes hurtful language, swearing, name-calling and put downs; and yelling to control a partner. In addition, sexual abuse can include unwanted touching

and/or language of a sexual nature, and forced sexual images and/or activity against a partner's will (Abraham, 2000).

Abuse towards a romantic partner is often referred to as "domestic violence/abuse," "family violence/abuse," "spousal violence/abuse," "battering," or "intimate partner violence/abuse." Terms such as "domestic" and "family" can include child abuse in addition to partner abuse, and terms such as "spousal" exclude victims who are not married to their abusive partners. Additionally, terms such as "battering" and "violence" indicate that all abuse is physically or sexually violent. The term "intimate partner abuse" refers to any type of physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual abuse that is inflicted by a current, or former, intimate partner, cohabiting partner, or spouse. This term is used here because it eliminates child abuse from the definition, excludes the condition of marriage, and includes forms of abuse that are not necessarily violent (e.g., coercive or controlling behaviors). Furthermore, IPA is not limited to abuse against current partners; it can refer to abuse against current or former intimate partners. As such, this study seeks to understand young women's past experiences of digital IPA in heterosexual romantic relationships.

IPA has deeply enmeshed historical, social, and legal roots in American society. Until recently, the United States legal system did not view men's abuse against women as a violation of law. Instead, society viewed women as men's property; few laws existed to prevent abuse against women. This hierarchy of men controlling women was considered to be "natural" (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). In medieval times, husbands had the right to physically chastise or even kill their wives (Erez, 2002). Although English common law

prohibited the murder of wives, it gave men the right to beat their wives with a stick that was smaller than the diameter of their thumb—giving rise to the common phrase "rule of thumb" (Erez, 2002; Walker, 1986). Even as late as 1962, the right of men to physically chastise women was upheld in the United States court system, specifically in the case of *Joyner vs. Joyner* where the court acknowledged that a husband had the right to use force to compel his wife to behave (Erez, 2002).

Abuse among intimate partners and within families was largely ignored in the early 1900s, however, the women's movement of the 1970s transformed the issue of abuse in relationships from a private issue to a public problem, and led to the appearance of the first shelters for abused women (Erez, 2002). During this time, researchers and legal entities began to recognize IPA as a major social problem. By the 1980s, there were efforts to reform the criminal justice system and a state-by-state movement towards prosecution of IPA and treatment programs for abusers (Erez, 2002). In 1994 Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act, granting protection, resources, and funding to programs for victims of IPA across the United States (Erwin, Gershon, Tiburzi, & Lin, 2005). The year 2009 marked the 15-year anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act, yet IPA is still commonplace in many intimate relationships and households in America today.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2006), 5.3 million intimate partner abuse incidents occur in the United States every year, resulting in approximately two million injuries and 1,300 deaths among women. IPA can have both physical and mental health consequences. Physical health effects can include headaches,

back pain, abdominal pain, fibromyalgia, gastrointestinal disorders, limited mobility, and poor overall health (WHO, 2011). In some cases, both fatal and non-fatal injuries can result. However, not all women have the same risk of injury; instead injuries vary on severity of abuse. Among women who experience a more mild form of IPA, only one in four experience injuries (Johnson, 2008). In couples experiencing more severe types of abuse, three out of four women experience injuries (Black & Breiding, 2008; Campbell, 2002; Pallitto, Campbell, & O'Campo, 2005; Sarkar, 2008). Many researchers indicate that victims may not have the means to seek treatment and may leave severe abuse untreated. This can lead to long-term health problems. For example, severely abused women often report untreated loss of consciousness due to abuse. This can lead to neurological damage, hearing damage, sight damage, and concentration problems (Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997). One can assume that exposure to IPA for a longer duration would lead to greater injurious effects over time, but researchers should use longitudinal research to test this assumption.

In addition to physical injuries, women who have experienced IPA are also at risk for a wide range of mental health problems (Campbell, 2002; Heru, 2007; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002; Weinbaum et al., 2001). Specifically, women who are the recipients of IPA report increased stress, emotional distress, depressive and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, suicidal ideation or suicide attempts, frequent serious or chronic illness, decreased relationship satisfaction, increased attempts to leave a partner, and lower levels of perceived power (Dutton, Goodman, & Bennett, 1999; Dutton & Painter, 1993; Kaslow et al., 1998, Marshall, 1996; O'Leary, 1999). Moreover, psychological

forms of IPA may have more intense and long-lasting health repercussions than physical

forms of IPA (Dobash & Dobash, 1981; Okun, 1986; Walker, 1984; O'Leary & Maiuro,

2001; Tolman & Bhosley, 1991). In a recent study, psychological IPA was positively

related to illegal drug use, negative health perceptions, and cognitive impairment among

college women, when controlling for physical IPA (Straight, Harper, & Arias, 2003).

Figure 1 summarizes the various ways IPA affects women's health (see Heise, Ellsberg,

& Gottemoeller, 1999).

Figure 1. Health outcomes of violence against women.
Taken from Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottemoeller (1999)

The previous overview highlights the importance of identifying and studying IPA,

particularly in the early phases of a relationship (e.g., dating or cohabitating) when

patterns of interaction are being established and before frequent exposure to this type of

abuse induces long-lasting harmful outcomes.

Digital Technologies as a Communication Channel for IPA

Over the last two decades, there has been a dramatic rise in the use of new

communication technologies among younger generations. Today, the increased use of

these technologies, such as cellular phones and the Internet, continues to become a

prominent part of social life among teens and young adults. According to statistics

gathered by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2008), 71% of teens own cell

phones; 38% of teens send text messages daily; 26% of teens send messages via social

networks; and 24% of teens instant message on a daily basis. Similarly, in 2005, 90% of

American college students owned a cell phone or other mobile device and were found to

be "much more likely than other online Americans to use instant messaging" (Pew

Internet and American Life Project, 2008). With such availability to technology, abusive

relational partners have greater power and opportunity to cause emotional damage to their

partners. As a result, IPA is now perpetrated using digital channels.

The rapid rate at which technology is developing has led to an emergent shift

from face-to-face forms of IPA to digital forms of IPA. Approximately one in three teens

report the experience of receiving text messages from a partner, up to 30 times in one

hour, with questions regarding where they were, what they were doing, and/or who they

were with (Family Violence Prevention Fund, 2009). Additionally, a study conducted by

MTV and the Associated Press (2009) reported that 50% of teens and young adults (14 to

24 years) experience digitally abusive behavior and 12% had a boyfriend or girlfriend

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call them names, put them down, or say hurtful things to them on the Internet or cell phone. Due to the fact that today's youth is the first generation to grow up in a society where technologies such as text messaging and the Internet are commonplace (Berson, Berson, & Ferron, 2002), it is crucial to examine emerging and potentially harmful technological issues such as digital IPA.

Digital IPA, or digital dating abuse as it is more commonly referred to in the literature, occurs "when someone repeatedly controls, pressures, or threatens someone they are seeing or dating, through their phone or online" (Family Violence Prevention Fund, 2009). For example, many teens experience unwanted and repeated phone calls, text messages, or instant messages. According to Liz Claiborne Inc.'s Tech Abuse in Teen Relationships Study, one in four teens in a romantic relationship have been called names, harassed, or put down by their partner through cell phones and text messaging (Picard, 2007). Other examples of digital dating abuse include breaking into email or social networking accounts, and pressure to share private or embarrassing pictures or videos. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2008) found one in five teen girls (17 to 19 years) and one in ten younger teen girls (13 to 16 years) engaged in sexting (i.e., electronically sending or posting nude or semi-nude photos or videos of oneself). Even more teen girls (37%) sent or posted sexually suggestive text messages, emails, or instant messages. More than half of teen girls (51%) said pressure from a guy is a reason girls send sexy messages or images.

Digital dating abuse has recently been compared to cyberbullying, as the "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text" (Patchin & Hinduja,

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2006). According to the Cyberbullying Research Center (2010), cyberbullying and digital

dating abuse share many of the same qualities. First, both types of abuse naturally employ

technology—email, cell phones, instant messaging, or the Internet. Second, cyberbullying

is largely perpetrated by and among known peers, as is aggression in romantic

relationships (where teens typically select dating partners among their peer group). Third,

both lead to specific negative emotional, psychological, physical, and behavioral

outcomes. And finally, both may have similar contributing factors such as personal

insecurities and a need to demonstrate control. With regard to differences, cyberbullying

tends to occur between individuals who do not like or who do not want to be around each

other, whereas digital dating abuse transpires between two people who are attracted to

each other on some level.

Digital dating abuse involves using technological devices to harm a dating

partner. Teens can be excessively bold, sarcastic, and malicious to significant others

when communicating online, as is the case with cyberbullying. In other cases,

perpetrators may attempt to gain power and control via access to partners' computers or

cell phones; and privacy may be violated when perpetrators use technology to check on,

monitor, and even stalk their partners. Moreover, textual, audio, picture, or video content

stored on electronic devices may be used to blackmail, extort, or otherwise manipulate a

partner into saying or doing something against their will. To be sure, this content can be

shared with a very large audience—a classroom of students, the entire student body, a

neighborhood, the town, the entire world—with ease and speed either through the

forwarding of a text or multimedia message, or through its uploading to social

networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, or Twitter. Digital media's viral nature, then, can greatly intensify the amount of victimization a partner suffers, knowing that the embarrassing or harmful content is being viewed and shared—perhaps repeatedly—by an incredible amount of people. The situation can become worse after realizing that it is sometimes difficult to work with Internet Service Providers and Content Service Providers to get the content removed in a timely manner.

Motivations for teenage digital dating abuse include anger and a felt need to demonstrate power. As Hinduja and Patchin (2011) state, "an adolescent can quickly send a scathing or harassing email or instant message to a [partner] solely based on negative emotions, without taking the time to calm down and react rationally to a feeling or situation, and without considering the implications of the textual content" (p. 2). Power can be readily exerted in a dating scenario because the victim's past and present experiences with the abuser provide a unique relational dependency and history that make it difficult to resist or get away from online mistreatment or harm. Further, technological devices allow abusers to feel constantly connected to (and within reach of) their dating partner, who often feels that there is no escape from the torment. This is enhanced by the fact that teens constantly have their cell phone with them day and night, and use it as their lifeline to maintain and grow relationships. Given the damaging effects digital dating abuse has on victims, it clearly merits our attention, inquiry, and response.

Abuse and Gender-Linked Power

The underlying issues in abuse are power and control, thus, it is not surprising that the majority of abusers have been men whose socially assigned, gendered-related values

encourage their use of power and control over others in society. While men, in lesser numbers, have been abused in personal relationships; it is likely that men have experienced abuse differently than women, because men and women have been socialized to experience culture differently (Marshall, 1993). A major contributing factor to such experiential differences, including and particularly the one of abuse, has been the power disparity between men and women in society. Specifically, women have been made to constantly be aware of a social subordination, based on their sex, an awareness not shared by men (Hopson, 2009; Marshall, 1993).

One way this power disparity has been acted out is through gender-linked styles of power, styles that provide insight into the issue of abuse. For example, the "power over" style is used more often by men, and the "power to" style is commonly used among women (Yoder & Kahn, 1992). "Power to" implies empowerment and personal authority. That is, power is seen as a way to develop one's own strengths as well as those of others. It is an unlimited commodity and, therefore, competing for the largest share is not a central focus. The more masculine style of "power over" depends on domination and control of others.

Accordingly, Barnett and LaViolette (1993) identified four cultural standards that have encouraged abuse in Western society: (1) men's greater authority in our culture, (2) male aggressiveness, (3) the wife/mother role which is culturally preferred for women, and (4) men's dominance in the legal system. These standards represent the longtime, socially dominant, patriarchal power base of competition—winners and losers. Men have been able to more easily use the "power over" way of control because those who have the

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power are free to expect compliance. A history in which men expect compliance and expect to win has contributed to an environment in which "winners" abuse and "losers" suffer the abuse. It has been this dominance of men over women that has set the stage for abusive acts such as raping, battering, and controlling (Yoder & Kahn, 1992).

While such abusive acts have had long-lasting effects on women, it is interesting to note that even women who have not experienced abuse in their personal lives take on the fear of those who have and live with its accompanying discomfort. For example, Barnette and LaViolette (1993) described this discomfort as a "chronic, low-level fear of being victimized" (p. 52). Koss and Mukai (1993) addressed a more specific fear that they believe unites all women in America. "Contemporary women in the United States live their lives under the threat of sexual violation and this fear constitutes a special burden not shared by men" (p. 477). Bingham (1991) described the state as one in which women "are constantly threatened by an oppressive and intimidating system of sexual terrorism" (p. 93).

As such, women take varying steps to protect themselves from this fearful burden. Koss and Mukai (1993) found that more than half of urban women under the age of 35 respond to this fear by isolating themselves and avoiding activities after dark. Conversely, 90% of men in the same category stated they did not take specific actions to protect themselves from crime. Given the climate of gendered-linked power in abusive relationships, it is imperative that women develop communicative strategies to survive and cope in these environments.

Co-Cultural Communication and Gender-Linked Power

Within any society in which asymmetrical power relationships are maintained, a muted group framework exists (S. Ardener, 1975, 1978). Groups that function at the top of the social hierarchy (e.g., European American, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle- and upper-class) largely determine the dominant communication system of the entire society (E. Ardener, 1978). This process forces other persons who are not dominant group members (e.g., women, people of color, homosexuals, people with disabilities) to function within a communication system that is not necessarily representative of their experiences. In this respect, subordinate groups are made inarticulate because the language that they use is derived from the dominant group's perception of reality (S. Ardener, 1975). Those experiences unique to subordinate group members often cannot be effectively expressed within the confinements of the dominant communication system. Thus, nondominant groups, such as women, are often "muted" (Kramarae, 1981, p. 1).

Co-cultural theorizing (Orbe, 1996, 1998, 2005) works to identify the language strategies used by muted groups to overcome their mutedness and "reinforce, manage, alter, and overcome a societal position that renders them outside the centers of power" (Orbe, 2005, p. 65). According to Orbe (1998), co-cultural theory examines how muted group members use specific verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to surmount attempts to make them inarticulate. Specifically, co-cultural theory seeks to explore how different marginalized groups manage "discursive closure" (Deetz, 1992, p. 187). de Certeau (1984) uses the word tactics to describe the nondominant communication behaviors; he reserves the use of "strategies" to refer to the practices of those with power.

Nevertheless, the following excerpt indicates that, to a certain extent, "power" can be enacted on a variety of levels:

> Innumerable ways of playing and foiling the other's game… characterize the subtle, stubborn, resistant activity of groups [that], since they lack their own space, have to get along in a network of already established forces and representations. People have to make do with what they have. (de Certeau, 1984, p. 11)

Co-cultural inquiry is significant in that it approaches the study of marginalized groups with an understanding that theses individuals must somehow operate with the "constraints imposed by their self-concepts, intentions, and an awareness of dominant group expectations" (Orbe, 1998, p. 31). As articulated by Stanback and Pearce (1981), research that links the communicative experiences of different marginalized groups is important for three reasons. First, exploring the various ways in which those without societal power devise communication strategies when communicating with those with power is a valuable point of examination for communication scholars. Second, an analysis of common strategies used by those marginalized by dominant society informs the development of human communication theory. Such a perspective provides a standpoint largely missing in existing theoretical frameworks. Finally, the characteristics associated with different strategies clarify the relationship within and among co-cultural group members—from the standpoint of those whose lived experiences reflect a marginalized position in the society. Thus, it is possible that young women, as co-cultural group members, muted with respect to their lived experiences of being involved in a

digitally abusive relationship, may try to combat abuse by using co-cultural

communication strategies. Understanding these strategies may ultimately be a step

toward preventing the formation and continuation of digital dating abuse in other

heterosexual romantic relationships.

Statement of the Problem

IPA is a detrimental social burden that has plagued women for centuries. Even

with the passage of the Violence Against Women Act, IPA is still common in many

intimate relationships today. IPA affects both men and women in negative ways.

However, research suggests that women's abuse is qualitatively different from men's

abuse, and that women are the primary victims of IPA. Moreover, research has shown

that IPA often occurs early in adolescence, as young as 15 years of age (Holt & Espelage,

2005; Williams & Martinez, 1999). Other research has found evidence to support the

proposition that females aged 16 to 24 constitute the group at greatest risk for IPA

victimization (Sampson, 2007); the majority being representative of the college

population.

IPA can lead to both physical and mental health problems for women. For

example, women who are the recipients of IPA report increased stress, emotional distress,

depressive and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, suicidal ideation or suicide

attempts, frequent serious or chronic illness, decreased relationship satisfaction, increased

attempts to leave a partner, and lower levels of perceived power (Dutton et al., 1999;

Dutton & Painter, 1993; Kaslow et al., 1998, Marshall, 1996; O'Leary, 1999). In

addition, psychological forms of IPA may have more intense and long-lasting health

repercussions than physical forms of IPA (Dobash & Dobash, 1981; Okun, 1986; Walker, 1984; O'Leary & Maiuro, 2001; Tolman & Bhosley, 1991). In a more recent study, psychological IPA was positively related to illegal drug use, negative health perceptions, and cognitive impairment among college women, when controlling for physical IPA (Straight et al., 2003).

One area in health communication where the challenges of IPA are becoming increasingly evident is the intersection of technology and IPA among young women in heterosexual dating relationships. According to the Family Violence Prevention Fund (2009), IPA through the use of digital technology affects nearly one in four teens, who admitted to being harassed by email or text messaging by their romantic partner. Specifically, respondents reported that their partner called and text messaged their cell phone to "check up on them" more than 50 times per day, and/or shared or threatened to share private or embarrassing pictures or videos of them.

Similar to IPA, the harmful effects of digital abuse by an intimate partner can also be extended to one's health. A recent study indicated that there is an association between digital abuse by an intimate partner and mental health (MTV & Associated Press, 2009). Specifically, young people who have been the target of digital abuse by an intimate partner are twice as likely to report having received treatment from a mental health professional, and are nearly three times more likely to have considered dropping out of school. Digital abuse by an intimate partner can also be linked to risk of suicide. For example, 8% of victims and 12% of sexters have considered ending their own life

compared to only 3% of people who had not been victimized and were not involved in sexting.

The underlying issues in abuse are power and control, thus, it is not surprising that the majority of abusers have been men whose socially assigned, gendered-related values encourage their use of power and control over others in society. Many indicate that this may be based on dominant societal structure in which communicative systems and institutions are created and named by men, leaving women "muted" within society. As such, muted (or co-cultural) group members are often faced with insurmountable communicative barriers they must be aware of as they navigate their way through society. According to Orbe (1998), members of co-cultural groups, such as women, have a variety of strategies or coping mechanisms they can use when communicating with the dominant group. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore and describe the co-cultural communicative strategies that young women in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships enact when communicating with their partner. Specifically, the study describes strategies they identify as being most effective to their health and wellbeing.

Rationale and Purpose of the Study

The principle intent of this investigation is to examine young women's lived experiences of digital dating abuse and explicate the co-cultural communicative strategies young women use in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships. The purpose is to understand which strategies digitally abused women identify as being most effective to their health and wellbeing in dominant culture. As Allen (2001) explained, identifying

strategies and skills assists in the process of emancipating women's communication. By identifying the positive, women are able to provide models to emulate (Allen, 2001).

This investigation builds on the growing body of literature on IPA and digital technology, and provides a context for understanding women's communicative strategies. According to Kramarae (1981), the role of women in a male-dominated society is often marginalized into one of a second-class citizen. As such, women have largely been excluded from theory and research (Allen, 1996; Kramarae, 1981). This study will address that long-standing exclusion by centering on the voices of women. Allen asserts (1996), that this position is unique for women; when researchers take this radical approach, they challenge traditional mainstream knowledge, ideas, and approaches, which provides them opportunities to create alternatives.

This exploratory study endeavors to achieve the goals of emancipatory communication research for women as outlined by Kramarae (1999). Specifically, Kramarae suggests three primary goals that researchers who are concerned with emancipating the communication of women should address. The goals are designed to center research on women's communicative lives. The first focuses on the status quo and involves the analysis of linguistic structures to discover whether they contribute to the domination of women and, if so, how they do their work of domination. Kramarae's second rhetorical option is the study of women's communication in order to develop new models for communication practices. Her third option is enactment, where the knowledge gained as result of the analysis and research produced in the first two options is put into practice in new linguistic modes.

This study will specifically respond to Kramarae's call by uncovering the communication strategies that young women in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships use on a daily basis. This study will also build on current communication research regarding IPA and digital technologies in an attempt to expose the domination and oppression in the everyday lives of abused women. As a result, the co-cultural communication strategies that women identify could be used as positive health models for other women in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships.

Theoretical Framework

Historically, women's experiences have been excluded from theory development. This exclusion has resulted in literature largely void of the experiences of "the other." According to Orbe (1998), "Since life perspectives emerge from one's daily life experiences, knowledge from the standpoint of marginalized group members cannot be fully grasped by those privileged by a dominant group position" (p. 29). As such, this study is grounded in digitally abused women's lived experiences and standpoints as outsiders, and allows for exploration into how they define their roles in the larger social structure in which they live. As Allen (2001) suggests, we must authorize theories that allow us to examine domination and oppression. Co-cultural theory, which combines muted group theory and standpoint theory, offers co-researchers an opportunity to give meaning to their own unique lived experiences.

As previously stated, co-cultural theory is grounded in the work of feminist scholars; namely, muted group theory (Kramarae, 1981) and standpoint theory (Hartsock, 1983) and speaks directly to the communication strategies that marginalized group

members use to survive in dominant structures. Standpoint theory acknowledges a person's social position and helps the researcher understand that a person's location in society has a major impact on how they respond to everyday realities they encounter. It is used to understand the position of any group usually left in the margins of mainstream scholarly work (e.g., women, people of color, homosexuals, people with disabilities). Muted group theory acknowledges that gender also has an impact on a person's social position. Together, these theories offer a framework that supports an understanding of the communication strategies of marginalized groups. They also function as a lens that provides meaning to the lived experiences of digitally abused women and other minority groups.

Orbe (1998) defines co-cultural theory as "unique in that it originates from the lived experiences of persons usually marginalized in traditional research and theory. The standpoint of co-cultural group members, reflecting their communicative experiences within dominant society, gives scholars a new perspective from which to consider communication processes" (p. 122). The fundamental concepts of co-cultural theory are situated in five epistemological premises. First, in society, a hierarchy exists that privileges certain groups of people. In the United States, these groups include European Americans, males, heterosexuals, the able-bodied, and the middle- and upper-class. Second, based on privilege, dominant group members occupy positions of power that they use—consciously or unconsciously—to create and maintain communication systems that reflect, reinforce, and promote their field of experiences. Third, directly or indirectly, these dominant communication systems slow the progress of persons whose lived

experiences are not reflected in the public communicative systems (i.e., marginalized group members). Fourth, and as a result, co-cultural group members will share a similar societal position that renders them marginalized and underrepresented within dominant structures. Fifth, to confront this oppression, co-cultural members strategically adopt certain communication behaviors when functioning in the confines of public communicative structures.

The premises underpinning the current study are derived from this co-cultural framework and assume the following: (1) although representing a widely diverse array of lived experiences, co-cultural group members will share a similar positioning that renders them marginalized within society, and (2) in order to negotiate oppressive dominant forces and achieve any measure of success, co-cultural group members will adopt certain communication orientations and practices in their everyday interactions (Orbe, 1998). As such, the primary practical application of co-cultural theory is its potential to foster dialogue between dominant and nondominant groups (Orbe & Groscurth, 2004). Knowledge and understanding of co-cultural practices may benefit dominant groups because the strategies ultimately give voice to what might be traditionally muted in dominant discourse.

Overview

In chapter two, a summary of literature identifying substantial contributions and relevant empirical data is presented. Specifically, literature on dating abuse, cyberbullying, digital dating abuse, and co-cultural communication is examined. Following the literature review, research questions are advanced. Chapter three describes

both the practical and theoretical underpinnings of photovoice as a method of inquiry for the present study. In chapter four, the methodology for the study is described, including specific method selections, recruitment of co-researchers, data collection and generation strategies, analysis, and interpretation procedures. In chapter five, the findings based on the descriptive stories of the co-researchers are presented. Finally, chapter six discusses the implications and recommendations based on the study's findings.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Building on the growing body of literature on intimate partner abuse (IPA) and digital technology, this study provides a context for understanding women's communicative strategies in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships. Specifically, this exploratory study endeavors to achieve the goals of emancipatory communication research for women as outlined by Kramarae (1999). This study will specifically respond to Kramarae's call by uncovering the communication strategies that young women in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships enact on a daily basis. In addition, this study will also build on current communication research regarding IPA and digital technologies in an attempt to expose the domination and oppression in the everyday lives of abused women. As a result, the co-cultural communication strategies that women identify may be used as positive health models for other women in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the pervasive and serious nature of IPA in dating relationships, then provides an overview of both the more traditional forms of dating abuse as well as the newer, digital dimensions of dating abuse, and finally, provides examples of research studies that seek to address this pressing social issue. The second half of the literature review provides a discussion of co-cultural theory's

philosophical and theoretical foundations, then provides a summary of the communication orientations and practices that, according to the theory, nondominant group members' employ in their communication with dominant group members, and finally provides examples of research studies that employ this framework to examine nondominant co-cultural group members' communication.

Dating Abuse

Over the past 30 years, research in the area of IPA in married relationships has increased dramatically (Briere & Runtz, 1988; O'Leary et al., 1989). However, IPA in dating relationships has been less well studied, and has become an area of scientific study only in the last 20 years (Clark, Beckett, Wells, & Dungee-Anderson, 1994; Riggs, O'Leary, & Breslin, 1990). Adolescent relationships deserve increased attention not only because they can present early warning signs for adult IPA (Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, & Silva, 1998) but because they are at higher risk of IPA than any other age group (Morse, 1995; O'Leary, 1999; Wolfe et al., 2003).

The systematic study of IPA in dating relationships began with Makepeace's (1981) study of physical abuse in a college dating population. Since then, research on pre-marital dating relationship abuse has grown steadily. The majority of the data available on IPA in dating relationships is related to physical abuse occurring as a function of conflict resolution (Jenkins & Aube, 2002) and to sexual abuse and coercion. There is relatively little data available on psychological and verbal abuse in dating relationships. Similarly, research on digital abuse is lacking among both married and dating couples. This study is an attempt to fill these gaps.

The first episode of IPA in dating relationships generally occurs by the age of 15 (Henton, Cate, Koval, Lloyd, & Christopher, 1983), a sobering reality considering that 25% of 12 year olds (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003) and 50% to 75% of 15 year olds (Feiring, 1999) are in dating relationships. In a national survey, Coker, Smith, McKeown, and King (2000) reported that 20% to 50% of young dating couples engage in some form of physical abuse, but severe acts of violence, defined as being hit, kicked, beaten, or attacked with a weapon occur less frequently among dating pairs. Community-based samples have consistently found that 20% to 47% of teenage and young adult couples experience at least one act of physical abuse (Keenan-Miller, Hammen, & Brennan, 2007). It is assumed that acts of IPA are more frequent among adult marital or cohabitating pairs, but according to Nightingale and Morrissette (1993), acts of physical abuse between adult marital and cohabitating pairs may only appear more frequent because they are more frequently reported than abuse between dating pairs. As a result, dating abuse has historically been considered less serious and therefore, less important.

As noted earlier, acts of dating abuse were first observed on college campuses in the 1930s (Makepeace, 1981) and it has only been within the past two decades such acts of dating abuse have captured the attention of researchers and practitioners alike. Between a high school student and collegiate population, Jackson (1999) reported approximately 12% of high school students and 36% of college students have encountered some form of physical, psychological, and/or sexual violence or abuse in their lifetime. Moreover, Straus (2004) reported college students experience extremely high rates of IPA, ranging from 20% to 50%. This study also found that 4% to 20% of

dating partners used severe forms of abuse such as use of a gun or knife, punching or hitting with a solid object, choking, repeatedly beating up their partner, or kicking their partner. However, only 2% of college students sought medical attention because of injuries inflicted by a partner. The scarcity of literature on dating abuse compared with the abundance of literature on domestic abuse may indicate that many incidents of dating abuse go unreported or undetected. As a result, others or the victims themselves do not take these acts of abuse or aggression between young dating partners seriously. According to Amar and Alexy (2005), the prevalence and total impact of this type of abuse is still currently unknown.

As previously stated, many incidents of dating abuse may go unreported. Consequently, only fatal acts of dating abuse have captured public attention and have been displayed in the media. However, Jackson (1999) reported incidents of non-fatal dating abuse are most commonly experienced among individuals 18 to 25 years of age. More recently, Amar and Gennaro (2005) reported that among a convenience sample of 863 college women, those 16 years of age tend to be at greatest risk for experiencing non-fatal acts of IPA by their male dating partner.

There is consensus among the dating abuse research that IPA occurs early in adolescence, as young as 15 years of age (Holt & Espelage, 2005). However, one study reported adolescents as young as 12 are victimized by dating partners (Williams & Martinez, 1999). Other research has found evidence to support the proposition that females aged 16 to 24 constitute the group at greatest risk for dating abuse victimization (Sampson, 2007); the majority being representative of the college population. With

regard to this age group, Williams and Martinez (1999) reported estimates between 15% and 28% of college students report at least one episode of dating abuse within their intimate relationships; Kreiter et al. (1999) reported a higher rate of dating assault among a White, college-aged population. Similarly, Pedersen and Thomas (1992) found prevalence rates of IPA among a college population to be approximately 23% to 35% of dating couples. Among a female college population, Sappington, Pharr, Tunstall, and Rickert (1997) found that 48% of the participants reported having experienced some form of physical abuse by their male partners, and 20% to 50% reported experiencing forcible attempts at sex which led to their screaming, fighting, crying, or pleading. Results from a number of other studies cited in Sappington et al. (1997) reported between 11% and 20% of college women being forced or threatened into having sex with their partner. Finally, a longitudinal study conducted by Smith, Ananiadou, and Cowie (2003), among a female college population, reported 88% of women experience at least one incident of physical or sexual IPA between their adolescent years and their fourth year of college.

Physical Effects of Dating Abuse

Victims of dating abuse often experience injuries in conjunction with physical or sexual abuse. Injuries are the primary mechanism through which most research examines the link between IPA and poor health outcomes. Findings indicate that women who are victims of IPA experience more injuries than women who are not exposed to IPA in dating relationships. Research has shown that abused women experience an average of one emergency room visit per year, compared to nonabused women who experience one emergency room visit in a lifetime.

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Physical health effects can include headaches, back pain, abdominal pain, fibromyalgia, gastrointestinal disorders, limited mobility, and poor overall health (WHO, 2011). In some cases, both fatal and non-fatal injuries can result. However, not all women have the same risk of injury; instead injuries vary on severity of abuse. Among women who experience a more mild form of IPA, only one in four experience injuries (Johnson, 2008). In couples experiencing more severe types of abuse, three out of four women experience injuries (Black & Breiding, 2008; Campbell, 2002; Pallitto et al., 2005; Sarkar, 2008). Many researchers indicate that victims may not have the means to seek treatment and may leave severe abuse untreated. This can lead to long-term health problems. For example, severely abused women often report untreated loss of consciousness due to abuse. This can lead to neurological damage, hearing damage, sight damage, and concentration problems (Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997). The high injury rates of females exposed to IPA compared to females not exposed to IPA demonstrates the importance of addressing IPA as a health concern in all types of romantic relationships.

Moreover, women who are victims of dating abuse also experience more injuries than men who are victims of dating abuse. Research indicates that only 21% of men who disclose victimization report at least one injury, while 40% of women report at least one injury (Arias & Pape, 1999). Another study of emergency room patients identified that IPA among married couples resulted in 16% of women being injured and only 2% of males. Similarly, abuse between boyfriends or girlfriends resulted in 21% of women being harmed and only 3% of males (Loxton, Schofield, Hussain, & Mishra, 2006).

These results indicate that a current intimate partner injured over 35% of female emergency room victims and fewer than 5% of male victims. Given the high rates of abuse towards women from current partners, it is possible that these numbers would be even higher for women if they included ex-partners.

Psychological Effects of Dating Abuse

In addition to poor physical health outcomes, dating abuse is also associated with poor psychological or mental health outcomes. However, only a limited number of research studies have examined the effects of IPA on emotional health. These findings indicate that women who are victims of IPA in dating relationships experience more emotional health effects (Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997), and use more mental health related services (Bensley, Van Eenwyk, & Wynkoop Simmons, 2003), than males who are victims of dating abuse and nonabused women. Research attributes these differences to a greater likelihood that women will be at continued risk of violence over the course of their lifetime compared to men (Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997).

Research findings also indicate that women exposed to dating abuse report lower quality of life, and higher levels of anxiety and depression than men and nonabused women (Kilmartin & Allison, 2007). This is an indication that IPA has harmful effects on emotional health and wellbeing. For example, women who have experienced IPA in their lifetime report significantly higher levels of emotional distress and fear than men (Campbell & Lewandowski, 1997) and nonabused women (Lipsky & Caetano, 2007). Additionally, these women also report significantly more suicide attempts, and suicidal thoughts than men and nonabused women (Lipsky & Caetano, 2007).

Depression and post-traumatic stress disorder are the most common emotional health side effects of IPA (Campbell, 2002). Women who have experienced IPA in romantic relationships are three times more likely to report being depressed than nonabused women (McCloskey et al., 2007). For instance, one study indicated that the mean prevalence of depression among female victims of dating abuse was 48%; this is much higher than rates ranging from 10% to 21% in the general population (Golding, 1999). Additionally, 37% of women who have experienced dating abuse reported having post-traumatic stress disorder (Lipsky & Caetano, 2007), and were also twice as likely as male victims to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (Rivara et al., 2007). Overall, research on dating abuse and emotional health indicates that psychological abuse can have a harmful effect on physical and emotional health (Ellsberg, Jansen, Heise, Watts, & Garcia-Moreno, 2008).

Dimensions of Dating Abuse

Previous research in the area of IPA has mainly focused on physical abuse between dating partners because it is the type of abuse most reported by victims, but this has undermined the significance of other forms of dating abuse that are equally as serious (Sears, Byers, & Price, 2007). Psychological abuse, a form of IPA, may not be considered as serious as physical abuse because there are no signs of visible injury. Sampson (2007), however, reported a strong link between the threat of bodily injury and actual bodily injury. In fact, many victims of IPA sustain more than one form of abuse. Parker, McFarlane, and Soeken (1993) surveyed 691 pregnant women, 214 of whom were teenagers, and found that psychological abuse often occurred concurrently with physical

abuse. Sexual abuse is considered one of the more hidden forms of IPA, but the least reported between male and female victims of dating abuse (Koss & Gaines, 1993). Stalking is considered an unusual form of psychological dating abuse because it is not considered abusive behavior early in courtship and therefore may go unreported (Williams & Frieze, 2005).

Physical dating abuse. Physical abuse has been defined to include acts such as restraining, pushing, hitting, kicking, choking, breaking bones, use of weapons, and murder (Leidig, 1992). Physical abuse may not be the most commonly experienced type of IPA, but it is the most frequently reported form of IPA by victims. Compared with physical abuse experienced by women in marital or cohabitating relationships, an act of physical abuse among victims of dating abuse has been considered less severe—usually involving behaviors such as pushing, grabbing, shoving, slapping, or throwing objects at one's partner (Katz et al., 2002). Often, those who observe acts of physical abuse among dating couples or even among the dating partners themselves may confuse them as "rough housing" or "teasing" (Katz et al., 2002).

As previously stated, acts of physical abuse between marital partners are more frequently reported than acts of physical abuse between dating pairs because often they are considered less serious, and therefore, less important (Nightingale & Morrissette, 1993). However, there is evidence of severe physical abuse occurring between dating partners. According to high school students surveyed by Cleveland, Herrera, and Stuewig (2003), between 9% and 57% of adolescents report experiencing at least one incident of physical aggression in their dating relationship and more than one-fifth of dating partners

among a university population report incidents of physical abuse by their partners, which includes reports made by males. However, Brendgen, Vitaro, Tremblay, and Wanner (2002) note that female victims of dating abuse sustain significantly more physical injuries from their partners than male victims.

Psychological dating abuse. Physical abuse is not the only type of abuse experienced by victims of IPA. A larger number of adolescent victims of dating abuse have reported experiencing more psychological abuse than physical abuse by their dating partners. Compared with adult victims of IPA in marital or cohabiting relationships, psychological abuse tends to be more common among dating partners (James, West, Deters, & Armijo, 2000; Sharpe & Taylor, 1999). Current research on dating abuse has indicated physical abuse is often accompanied by or preceded by acts of psychological or sexual abuse among dating partners (Amar & Gennaro, 2005). Further, among dating partners, psychological abuse has been the most common type of dating abuse experienced, but the least reported or researched (Amar & Gennaro, 2005). Amar and Gennaro (2005) found that among a sample of 863 college women who reported experiencing IPA, approximately 30% experienced physical abuse, 90% experienced psychological abuse, 20% experienced sexual abuse, and 8% experienced stalking by their dating partners.

Studies have reported contradictory results in the degree of harm experienced from psychological abuse by male and female victims of dating violence. In the early years of dating abuse research, Makepeace (1981) reported both male and females experienced emotional trauma as a result of abuse or violence in their dating

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relationships. However, Makepeace found that 30% of female victims who suffered physical injury from their dating partner also reported experiencing emotional abuse, compared to only 15% of males. More recently, Jenkins and Aube (2002) reported that psychological abuse has been found to be a precursor of physical acts of aggression, and in many cases, psychological acts of abuse or aggression cause more serious and long lasting effects than wounds from physical assault alone.

Sexual dating abuse. Sexual abuse has been defined as including acts such as sexual coercion, rape, forced sex with other parties, use of foreign objects, and mutilation (Hodges, 1993). Sexual abuse is considered to be one of the more hidden forms of IPA, but one of the least reported between male and female victims (Koss, 1985). According to Koss (1985), only 10% to 15% of college women reported their experiences of sexual victimization to authorities, and even less (13%) of the victims visited a rape crisis center for help. Such encounters were not reported to the authorities because the victims perceived the acts of sexual victimization to be private, personal matters that were too embarrassing to report, or did not perceive themselves to be victims of sexual coercion or rape (Koss, 1985). In addition, Koss (1985) found most victims of "hidden rape" were assaulted by a romantic partner rather than an acquaintance or total stranger.

A report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (1984) found "date" or "acquaintance" rape most frequently occurred among adolescents and young adult women aged 16 to 24 years old (Mills & Granoff, 1992). Similarly, Rickert et al. (2005) reported adolescent and young adult women are four times more likely to be sexually assaulted than any other age group, but often will not report their victimization because

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they are more likely to be assaulted by a dating partner as a consequence of their disclosure. Silverman, Svikis, Robles, Stitzer, and Bigelow (2001) discovered that approximately one in five female high school students report being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner. Sears et al. (2007) reported 10% to 13% of all perpetrators of IPA reported having been sexually abusive toward their dating partners. Dunn, Vail-Smith, and Knight (1999) found that date rape accounted for approximately 80% of all rapes on a college campus. Among a college population, Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski (1987) found approximately 28% of college-aged women reported having experienced at least one incident of sexual victimization since the age of 14 and almost 8% of college-aged men reported perpetrating such acts, with 57% of these rapes occurring while on dates.

Stalking in dating relationships. Williams and Frieze (2005) conceptualize stalking as a repeated and unwanted pursuit behavior characterized by such actions as spying, sending notes or gifts, unannounced visits, calls, or attempts to scare or harass the person being stalked. Among a probability sample of college women who reported being stalked by their male dating partner, Fisher, Cullen, and Turner (2002) reported a 13% stalking rate over a seven month period. Williams and Frieze (2005) found stalking to be a common college experience with prevalence rates ranging from 2% to 33%, with more women than men being victims.

Stalking is considered an unusual form of psychological abuse because it is not considered abusive behavior early in the dating relationship and therefore may go unreported (Williams & Frieze, 2005). Williams and Frieze (2005) noted that stalking

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may or may not be accompanied by the threat of serious harm, but may be accompanied by courtship behaviors such as approach, surveillance, intimidation, hurting the self, and mild verbal and physical aggression. Even though about 80% of stalking incidents occur within the context of a dating relationship, most are likely to occur after a relationship has ended (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). According to Griffin and Koss (2002), stalking is believed to be an attempt made by an individual to reestablish a connection with a former dating partner. Dye and Davis (2003) associated an insecure-anxious attachment style with the perpetration of IPA toward a dating partner; the angrier an individual was over the breakup of a relationship, the more likely they were to stalk their ex-partner.

Digital Dimensions of Dating Abuse

As stated earlier, previous research in the area of dating abuse has mainly focused on physical abuse between dating partners. Consequently, the seriousness of other forms of dating abuse such as psychological and digital dating abuse have been undermined. However, with digital technology playing such an important role in the lives of teens and young adults, it should not be a surprise that dating abuse has become digital. The same tactics of power and control that are generally the hallmark of abusive relationships extend to these new technologies. Teen abusers can easily monitor their dating partners by frequently checking on them through cell phone, text or instant messenger, or popular social media sites such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, or Twitter. According to Liz Claiborne Inc.'s Tech Abuse in Teen Relationships Study, one in three teens who have been in a relationship say they have been text messaged up to 30 times in one hour by a partner wanting to know where they are, what they are doing, and/or who they are with

(Picard, 2007). Between cell phone calls and frequent text messaging, an abuser can exert almost constant control over a partner both day and night.

The potential for dating abuse through technology goes beyond mere monitoring to harassment, threats, and intimidation. One in four teens in a relationship has experienced harassment, name-calling, or put downs from a current or former dating partner through cell phone or text messaging (Picard, 2007), and nearly one in five has been harassed or put down through a social networking site (Picard, 2007). An abuser can use his or her own webpage to post personal information or unwanted pictures about a dating partner. Teens who share their passwords with friends and dating partners risk having their own email accounts and webpages accessed and used by abusive dating partners. The speed of communication on the Internet allows this information to be shared among friends and classmates almost instantaneously, often before a teen even knows it has been posted.

Fear and intimidation through high-tech channels are just as real as any abuse in the non-digital world. In addition, high-tech abuse does not happen in a vacuum. For many teens, threats or harassment via cell phone or the Internet merely reinforce the threats and verbal abuse they have experienced in person. In fact, 17% of teens in a recent survey report that a boyfriend or girlfriend has made them afraid to not respond to a cell phone call, email, instant message, or text message because of what s/he might do (Picard, 2007).

According to Liz Claiborne Inc.'s Tech Abuse in Teen Relationships Study teens and young adults are talking about digital forms of dating abuse and believe it is a serious

problem for themselves and their peers (Picard, 2007). Approximately half of teens

believe that computers and cell phones make abuse more likely to occur in a teen dating

relationship (Picard, 2007) and make it easier to conceal abuse from parents (Picard,

2007). Unfortunately, parents, teachers, and adult service providers are frequently in the

dark about the abuse that occurs over cell phones and the Internet, as adolescents are

unlikely to report any abuse, including digital abuse, to parents or other adults. The

hidden nature of such abuse means that unless a teen reveals the abuse or an adult looks

into the teen's computer or cell phone, it can easily go undetected. For example, 67% of

parents were unaware that their teens had dating partners check up on them 30 times a

day on their cell phones, and 82% of parents did not know that their teens were emailed

or text messaged 30 times per hour (Picard, 2007). Monitoring via cell phone and text

message often continues throughout the night, when teens are alone and parents are

unaware of their activities. Nearly 25% of teens in a relationship communicated with

their partner by cell phone or text messaging hourly throughout the night (Picard, 2007).

As such, digital dimensions of dating abuse may be just as dangerous as other forms of

dating abuse.

    Definitions and unique aspects of cyber abuse. Although only a limited number

of researchers have examined digital abuse among intimate partners, many have

examined cyber abuse among adolescents and young adults in cyberbullying and

cyberstalking studies. Before reviewing the body of literature on cyberbullying and

cyberstalking, it is important to provide definitions of some of the key terms that are used

in cyber abuse research.

Broadly speaking, cyber abuse refers to the use of newer communication technologies such as social networking websites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Twitter) and text messaging to facilitate repeated harassing behaviors by an individual or group of individuals with the intention of harming others (Aricak, 2009; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Sheridan & Grant, 2007; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002). When these behaviors occur among adolescents, the term "cyberbullying" is generally used, whereas the phrases "cyberstalking" and "cyber harassment" are reserved for older populations such as young adults and adults. The terms "cyber," "online," "electronic," "digital," and "virtual" are often used in conjunction with activities that occur in cyberspace through computer-based and other newer forms of technology.

There are a variety of electronic modalities used by individuals to communicate with others. Social networking websites have been defined as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Users generally include personal information on these websites, such as current relationship status, employment history, and photos, which people both within and outside their online network can view. The list of people able to access this information is determined by the level of privacy that the individual has selected on his/her account. Many adolescents do not restrict access to the content that they post, including pictures. Recent reports show that 40% of teens make their online profile visible to anyone (Macgill, 2007) and 21% of teens do not restrict access to their photos (Lenhart, Madden,

Macgill, & Smith, 2007). This means, that anyone with an account can view their personal information. Among the most popular social networking websites are Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and Twitter. Instant messaging includes real-time communication through the Internet (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatson, 2008), while text messaging refers to messages that are sent between cell phone users (Kowalski et al., 2008; Thompson & Cupples, 2008).

Communication in cyberspace often lacks the physical and social cues that are present in face-to-face interactions (Dehue, Bolman, & Vollink, 2008; Denegri-Knott & Taylor, 2005; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). For example, the recipient of an electronic message cannot see the body language and facial expressions or even hear the tone of voice of the sender; they can only attempt to interpret the intended message from a known or unknown sender through a string of text, numbers, and symbols (Ellison, 2001). A person who sends a harassing or intimidating message online is not immediately confronted with the recipient's reactions and therefore does not know the consequences of the negative communication (e.g., crying) or even whether the message was interpreted correctly (Dehue et al., 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Slonje & Smith, 2008). Moreover, those who use technological forms of communication tend to be less inhibited in their online interactions with others and may type or text things that they would not customarily say in-person (Bocij, 2004; Chisholm, 2006; Li, 2006). Alternatively, those who feel threatened during in-person exchanges may feel empowered to strike back against a violent offender online, finding safety and security behind a computer screen (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008).

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There are other aspects of newer communication devices that may assist cyber offenders. With the advent of cell phones, personal computers, and other portable communication devices, people can be reached anywhere at any time which may intensify a victim's perceptions of vulnerability (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Furthermore, although some may regard technological exchanges as private conversations, these messages may also be dispensed very quickly to a wider audience as recipients can forward these messages to multiple technology users (Ellison, 2001; Slonje & Smith, 2008). Also, because there is a lack of formal, consistent policing that occurs online (Bocij, 2004), some argue that digital abuse occurs "simply because of the absence of a capable guardian" and that victims are often reluctant to report their victimization to the authorities (Graboski & Smith, 2001, p. 36). As previously stated, unless adolescents reveal the IPA or an adult looks into their computer or cell phone, it can easily go undetected. Hence, each of these features of technology may play a role in cyberbullying and cyberstalking.

Cyberbullying. Many teens and young adults use cell phones, email, social networking sites, and personal computers every day. A recent study found that 93% of teens use the Internet, 72% own a desktop computer, and 67% own cell phones (Lenhart et al., 2007); these numbers are increasing every year. Additionally, more than half of 12 to 17 year olds who use the Internet have their own profile on a social networking site such as Facebook or MySpace (Lenhart et al., 2007), and nearly half of teens visit a social networking site at least once a day (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). Teens are using the Internet in every area of their lives and most report that the Internet and other digital

devices make their lives easier (Macgill, 2007).The rapid rate at which technology is developing may indicate a developmental shift from face-to-face forms of bullying to what has now become known as "electronic bullying," "online social cruelty/aggression," or "cyberbullying" (Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

Much of what is known about various forms of cyber abuse comes from studies conducted on cyberbullying among adolescent peers. According to Juvonen and Gross (2008), cyberbullying refers to situations in which an individual or group insults or threatens someone using the Internet or other digital communication devices. Some examples of cyberbullying include threats sent through email or text messages and sharing or posting private information on the Internet without permission (Dehue et al., 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Instant messaging is the most common medium for cyber abuse among adolescents (Beran & Li, 2005; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Smith et al., 2008) and the perpetrators often include people the adolescent met online or schoolmates (Dehue et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2008).

Estimates regarding the percentage of adolescents that have been victimized online range from 9% to 72% (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006), depending on the type of sample used, timeframe examined, and definition of cyberbullying employed. As with other forms of adolescent victimization and perpetration, there are certain demographic factors associated with cyber abuse. Several studies have found that there are no significant gender differences in adolescent cyber abuse (Beran & Li, 2005; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2008; Williams & Guerra, 2007); however, others have

reported that these behaviors may vary by biological sex. For example, researchers have found that males are more likely to be cyberbullies than women (Dehue et al., 2008; Li, 2006) and women are more likely to be victims of online abuse than males (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007). In terms of race differences, Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) found that Whites were 46% more likely than non-Whites to engage in cyber abuse, while Hinduja and Patchin (2008) did not find race differences in cyber abuse among Internet users younger than 18 years of age. As such, the findings regarding the impact of gender and race are largely mixed.

Age and family income have been found to be associated with cyberbullying. Several researchers have uncovered that older adolescents are more likely to be online perpetrators (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007; Smith et al., 2008; Williams & Guerra, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004) and victims (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Ybarra et al., 2007), whereas other researchers did not report significant age differences (Beran & Li, 2005; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Slonje & Smith, 2008). Few studies examine the effect of household income on cyber abuse. Using data from the national Second Youth Internet Safety Survey, Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) found that those from high income households were more likely to report harassing others online than those with lower incomes, perhaps due to their greater access to a variety of forms of newer technology such as computers and cell phones with Internet access.

Researchers have also uncovered other correlates of cyberbullying including personal technology use and psychosocial factors. Not only is heavy Internet use associated with cyber abuse (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Smith et al., 2008; Ybarra &

Mitchell, 2007), but engaging in a wider variety of online activities also increases an adolescent's risk of being an online target or offender (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Engaging in cyberbullying has also been found to increase the risk of personal online victimization (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Wolak et al., 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004; Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2006) as well as behavioral problems such as physical and sexual victimization (Ybarra et al., 2006), delinquency (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004), and substance use (Mitchell, Ybarra, & Finkelhor, 2007; Ybarra et al., 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Furthermore, researchers have also reported that middle school adolescents involved with cyberbullying (perpetrators, victims, or both) have lower self-esteem than those who are not involved (Kowalski et al., 2008). As such, a variety of personal factors have an impact on cyberbullying experiences.

Studies have also been conducted in order to learn more about the connections between face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying (Kowalski et al., 2008). Findings have indicated associations between offline and online bullying behaviors (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007; Smith et al., 2008; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). For example, Hinduja and Patchin (2008) examined predictors of cyberbullying offending and victimization among their sample of Internet users aged 18 and younger. They found that offline bullying and victimization were independently associated with both being a cyberbully and a target of this behavior. Additionally, in their comparison study of traditional bullying and cyberbullying among adolescents, Juvonen and Gross (2008) found that online bullying experiences were associated with elevated levels of distress

much like traditional bullying encounters. Online aggression has also been found to be associated with depressive symptoms for both targets and offenders (Mitchell et al., 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Adolescents have reported a range of responses following their cyberbullying victimization, such as anger and frustration (Beran & Li, 2005; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006), and efforts to prevent future harassment such as staying offline and pretending to ignore the bully (Dehue et al., 2008; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Unlike traditional bully victims, those who are cyberbullied are less likely to inform others of their victimization (Dehue et al., 2008; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Smith et al., 2008) which may prolong these episodes and preclude victims from obtaining effective resources. Given the negative outcomes of cyberbullying, it is important to learn more about cyber abuse in general.

Cyberstalking. Cyberstalking refers to repeated computer-based threats and/or harassment that would cause a reasonable person to be concerned for his/her safety (Bocij, 2004; Finn, 2004; Southworth, Finn, Dawson, Fraser, & Tucker, 2007). Examples of cyberstalking include sending unsolicited or threatening email, posting hostile Internet messages, and obtaining personal information about the victim without their consent (Burgess & Baker, 2002; Deirmenjian, 1999; Ellison, 2001; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002). Much of what is known about cyberstalking, which is often interchangeably referred to as cyber or online harassment (Bocij, 2004; Ellison, 2001; Finn, 2004), comes from formal reports received by Working to Halt Online Abuse (Alexy, Burgess, Baker, & Smoyak, 2005; Reno, 1999; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002). Working to Halt Online Abuse (2008), one of the largest Internet safety organizations in the world, reports that they receive

approximately 50 to 75 formal reports of online harassment each week. Because of the heightened accessibility to new technology and the rise in formal reports, researchers speculate that the prevalence of cyberstalking is increasing (Alexy et al., 2005; Ellison, 2001; Finn, 2004; Reno, 1999).

Despite the growing interest in cyberstalking, few empirical studies have focused exclusively on this topic. Some of the first cyber harassment studies used data from larger projects that included only one or two items about this form of abuse (Fisher et al., 2002; Pathe & Mullen, 1997). For example, Langhinrichsen-Rohling and colleagues (2000) conducted a study on stalking using a sample of college students who had either initiated or experienced the termination of a meaningful romantic relationship. Respondents who terminated the relationship were asked how often their ex-partner sent them unwanted email or chat messages, whereas breakup sufferers were asked the frequency with which they sent these messages. None of the relationship dissolvers reported receiving these messages; however, 3% of the breakup sufferers indicated that they sent unwanted email or chat messages (Langhinrichsen-Rohlin, Palarea, Cohen, & Rohling, 2000). Even though these initial studies did not explicitly focus on cyberstalking and included limited measures, they provide evidence that these behaviors occur among older samples formerly in romantic relationships.

Spitzberg and Hoobler (2002) were the first to examine cyberstalking victimization among young adults within a social science framework in their three pilot studies of undergraduate students. The purpose of these initial analyses was to develop and empirically test measures of cyberstalking victimization that were suitable for older

populations. The study asked respondents to report, for example, whether anyone had ever undesirably and obsessively sent them sexually harassing messages and threatening written messages using a computer or other electronic means. Almost one-third of the participants (235 undergraduate students) reported experiencing some form of computer-based harassment, and of those who had more technology exposure (e.g., how frequently the respondent actively participated in chat room discussion) were at higher risk for experiencing unwanted cyber pursuit. Even though the researchers concluded that most of these cyber communications were "relatively harassing but benign" (Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002, p. 86), the results reveal that experiencing computer-based harassment is a relatively common experience among young adults.

Since Spitzberg and Hoobler's (2002) seminal article on cyberstalking, other researchers have conducted studies on cyberstalking victimization among other adult samples (Alexy et al., 2005; Aricak, 2009; Bocij, 2004; Finn, 2004; Holt & Bossler, 2009; Marcum, 2008, 2009; Sheridan & Grant, 2007). These studies have provided some preliminary information about the demographic characteristics and technology use patterns of cyberstalking victims. For example, Aricak (2009) found that females are more likely to be victims and males are more likely to be perpetrators of this form of abuse. No significant age and race differences have been found among different populations (Alexy et al., 2005; Finn, 2004). However, using official New York City Police Department records between January 1996 and August 2000, D'Ovidio and Doyle (2003) reported that over 75% of the victims and perpetrators were White and the average age of cyberstalking perpetrators was 24, whereas 32 was the average age for victims.

Engaging in more online activities such as shopping, using chat rooms, and socializing via Internet websites have also been found to be associated with sexual and non-sexual online harassment (Marcum, 2008, 2009). Because of the limited studies on the demographics and technology use of cyberstalking perpetrators and victims, more research needs to be conducted in this area.

      Digital dating abuse. Given the previous literature on dating abuse in general, and digital forms of dating abuse specifically, it is clear that teens and young adults are experiencing dating abuse through digital forms of technology. While little research has been conducted in the way of digital dating abuse, there have been a handful of studies that have aimed to explore the extent that teens are participating in this new trend. In December 2008, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and their research partners released a study called "Sex and Tech" that examined the role of technology in the sex lives of teens and young adults. The study revealed that 19% of teens (13 to 19 years) who participated in the survey said they had sent a sexually suggestive picture or video of themselves to someone via email, cell phone or by another mode, and 31% had received a nude or semi-nude picture from someone else. Cox Communications partnered with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and Harris Interactive in March 2009 to conduct a similar study. Results indicated that 9% of teens (13 to 18 years) had sent a sexually suggestive text message or email with nude or nearly-nude photos, 3% had forwarded one to a friend, and 17% had received a sexually suggestive text message or email with nude or nearly nude photos. MTV in partnership with the Associated Press has also released findings from online surveys on

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the topic. The MTV-AP poll conducted in September 2009, reported that one in ten young adults (14 to 24 years) have shared a naked image of themselves with someone else and 15% have had someone send them naked pictures or videos of themselves. Another 8% of young adults have had someone send them naked images of someone else they know personally. Most recently, the Cyberbullying Research Center (2010) collected data from 4,400 students (11 to 18 years) on digital abuse. Findings indicated that 8% of all students reported sending naked or semi-naked pictures via cell phone, and 13% of the teens reported that they had received similar images via text. This study reported no differences in gender when considering sending these images. However, males were much more likely to receive the images than females at 16% and 10%, respectively.

The MTV-AP poll also reported that almost a quarter of young people currently in a romantic relationship said that their boyfriend or girlfriend checks up with them multiple times per day, either online or on a cell phone, to see where they are, who they are with, or what they are doing. More than one in four young adults reported that their boyfriend or girlfriend has checked the text messages on their cell phone without permission. In addition, 12% of youth have had a boyfriend or girlfriend call them names, put them down, or say hurtful things to them on the Internet or cell phone. The study also reported other ways digital platforms are changing the dynamics of youth relationships and creating new forms of dating abuse. Specifically, more than one in ten young adults have had a boyfriend or girlfriend demand passwords, and roughly one in ten have also had a significant other demand that they "unfriend" former boyfriends or girlfriends on social networking sites.

Similarly, Melander (2010) qualitatively explored cyber aggression among current and former intimate partners among male and female undergraduate students at a mid-sized Midwestern university. The purpose of the study was to use focus group data to explore participant views on cyber aggression among college intimates. Five themes emerged, including: (1) controlling communication, (2) unfiltered communication, (3) violent resistance, (4) quick and easy violence, and (5) private becomes public. These thematic categories described the types of cyber abuse that may occur among romantic couples, the rationale for using electronic devices to convey abusive messages, and how newer forms of technology may change how these messages are conveyed. Overall, the themes provided more insight into the role of technology in abusive dating relationships.

The preceding array of research highlights the pervasive and serious nature of IPA in digital contexts, as well as illustrates the limited amount of research that has been conducted on digital forms of dating abuse. As a result, this study seeks to further explore the developing topic of digital dating abuse. The following research questions were posited:

RQ1: What forms of digital dating abuse are experienced by young women in heterosexual romantic relationships?

RQ2: What are young women's experiences regarding digital dating abuse in heterosexual romantic relationships?

RQ2a: How do these experiences impact young women's health?

Addressing Excluded Voices: Co-Cultural Communication

Co-cultural theory represents an eclectic approach to communication theory in that it draws from various existing conceptual frameworks related to culture, power, and communication. Specifically, co-cultural theory is founded on muted group (Kramarae, 1981) and standpoint theory's (Hartsock, 1983) central tenets and ideas. Co-cultural theory provides insights into the communicative strategies of co-cultural group members by examining how those who are without access to formal societal power communicate with those in privileged positions. As Orbe and Spellers (2005) explain, "Co-cultural theory offers a framework to understand the process by which individuals come to select how they are going to interact with others in any given specific context" (p. 174). Thus, co-cultural theory offers a practical conceptual framework to identify and assess women's communication experiences.

Muted Group Theory

Muted group theory advances that societies have social hierarchies where some groups are privileged over others, with the groups at the top of the hierarchies establishing the communication system of that society (Ardener, 1975, 1978). Over time, these communication structures become (re)produced by both dominant and nondominant members' discourse and, thus, the dominant communication systems remain in place. As Orbe (1998) explains, "This process [of social reproduction] renders marginalized groups as largely muted because their lived experiences are not represented in these dominant structures" (p. 4). Moreover, because asymmetrical power relations exist in all societies, there is always a muted group framework in place (Meares, 2003; Meares, Oetzel, Torres,

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Derkacs, & Ginossar, 2004). Thus, persons who have been "muted" often engage in communicative practices to resist the system's attempt to keep them as such.

Edwin Ardener (1975) was one of the first scholars to identify group muting taking place. In a study of Bakweri women, Ardener (1975) noted that communication systems in masculine societies tend to favor masculine codes and values, inevitably limiting the ability of women to articulate their concerns. As such, uniquely feminine beliefs and perspectives were not included in the construction of Bakweri communicative systems, and women were rendered inarticulate. Consequently, groups are "muted" when "lived experiences are not represented in dominant structures" (Orbe, 1998, p. 4). Dominant groups establish the rules and systems of accepted discourse, leaving nondominant groups without equal representation (Meares, 2003). These groups are thus marginalized due to their deviance from what the dominant groups have established as prototypical (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Inarticulateness is forced upon groups as they are forced to the margins of societies in an attempt to silence them. Muting then, according to Gal (1994), indicates the lack of a "separate, socially significant discourse" (p. 408).

This problem is confounded by the fact that nondominant group members are then expected to use the discursive structures of the dominant group to express a limited or controlled form of voice. Houston and Kramarae (1991) pointed out in their discussion of the silencing of women's voices that, "men are in charge of legitimatizing words – through control of grammar rules, dictionaries, most publishing, even when women, as school teachers, carry out the dictates" (p. 390). Though this form of expression can serve to empower nondominant groups by providing them a level of voice, the dominant

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discursive structures are consistently reinforced through both overt and subtle methods. Thus, the inability to find a distinct and empowered voice leaves nondominant group members implicitly disadvantaged and ultimately makes resisting against existing power structures difficult (E. Ardener, 1975).

Henley and Kramarae (1994) confirmed the notion that dominant groups maintain discursive and ideological power, thereby muting subordinate groups. In their analysis of communication failures between men and women, the researchers found that the interpretation of the more powerful figure, generally the male, became the accepted interpretation of the communicative event. The authors concluded that this occurred because male perceptions of reality were given primacy by discursive systems. Women, who were considered to be the suppressed class, had their opinions muted by the members of the dominant class, regardless of the relative veracity of each party's claim. This analysis confirms Wall and Gannon-Leary's (1999) assertion that, "Women's voices trying to express women's experiences are rarely heard because they must be expressed in a language system not designed for their interests and concerns" (p. 24). As a result, women, as a muted group, are often unable to attain the same level of credibility as males because of the ways social systems construct their discourse.

Further, muting may take place in myriad ways (S. Ardener, 1978). Although muting may indicate that groups are provided a reduced ability to express themselves, in some contexts it leads to the actual silencing of those groups. For instance, Ardener (1978) contends that often nondominant groups have little or no voice and lack representation in the symbolic linguistic structures the dominant group controls. The level

of influence that the dominant group is able to exert over nondominant groups grows increasingly powerful over time as the rules embedded in linguistic structures become more rigid. Thus, language becomes a critical means in ascertaining which groups are silenced in society.

Initially, Kramarae (1981) asserted that language was dichotomized between the public and private spheres; men controlled the important public sphere, and women controlled the insignificant private sphere, a division that purportedly masked the effects of muting. However, because of the critique leveled at the public/private sphere literature, that the two spheres are not strictly separated, that account of muting has been rejected as too simplistic (Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999). Muted groups therefore experience muting not as a singular phenomenon, but rather as a continuous process that changes over time. Moreover, muting does not simply occur within singular cultures or nations; indeed, intercultural muting is possible particularly because different cultures prioritize information and values in different ways, creating unique frameworks for interpretation (Shukla & Gubellini, 2005).

Colfer's (1983) ethnographic study of three sets of "unequals" made great strides in demonstrating the validity of muted group theory. The first case examined rural and urban citizens in Iran. The second case studied women and men from a small city in the United States. The final case analyzed scientists from both the hard and soft sciences. In all three cases, Colfer (1983) found "inarticulateness," as the groups with greater power in each setting limited the free expression of the members of subordinate groups. Dominant group members were able to comfortably express ideas and concepts while

nondominant group members felt restrained and spoke in ways that reflected that restraint. In that regard, language, according to muted group theory is "social behavior, reflective of social values and status positions within a culture" (Devine, 1994, p. 229). Subordination to other groups occurs because of an inability to articulate a position within the social structure imposed upon nondominant groups. Thus, nondominant group members are forced to operate within structures that fail to reflect their values unless they are able to identify effective means of resistance.

Standpoint Theory

Another theory that describes the variations of muted perspectives in society is standpoint theory. Standpoint theory was the result of feminist scholars' work (e.g., Harding, 1987; Hartsock, 1983; D. E. Smith, 1987; Wood, 1992), and addresses the significance of acknowledging a special societal positioning and the subjective perspective of persons as they interact with themselves and with others. This theory is an epistemological stance that argues that all perspectives are critical to fully understand social phenomena (Collins, 1986). Essentially, the framework suggests that for people to gain a deeper understanding of social phenomena, socially marginalized voices should be included (Collins, 1986). Thus, it is "through this process of inclusion, [that] alternative understandings of the world that are situated within the [everyday] activities of [nondominant] and dominant group members can be revealed" (Orbe, 1998, p. 235). Because all "truths," in essence, are standpoints, it is important to include and recognize various social actors' perceptions of their daily communicative experiences.

Standpoint theorists advance the proposition that "knowledge is always socially situated" (Harding, 2004, p. 7). That is, different groups develop knowledge that is grounded in gender, racial, ethnic, and social class differences as well as in specific historical eras, socio-cultural contexts, and political milieus. As such, the knowledge produced by the dominant group is very different than that produced by nondominant groups. Different relationships to domination lead to different life circumstances and social realities, all of which ultimately lead to qualitatively different knowledges. Because nondominant group members are forced to function within both of these social realities—that of the dominant group and that of their own—nondominant groups have a distinct opportunity to develop a comprehensive knowledge of the organization of their oppression, as well as the potential to use this knowledge to their advantage in an effort to resist subordination.

Based on an interpretation of Marx's dialectical method, Hartsock (1998) has argued that "if material life is structured in fundamentally opposing ways for two different groups, one can expect that the vision of each will represent an inversion of the other, and in systems of domination the vision available to the rulers will be both partial and perverse" (p. 107). Therefore, a standpoint is a potential position that subordinated groups are able to adopt in the process of achieving a critical understanding of the causes and consequences of their oppression. However, this social process is not automatic or inevitable. According to Hartsock (1998), "The vision available to the oppressed group must be struggled for and represents an achievement which requires both science to see beneath the surface of the social relations in which all are forced to participate, and the

education which can only grow from struggle to change those relations" (pp. 107-108). Hence, a standpoint is not a personal viewpoint nor individual perspective, but rather a social process that presents possibilities for developing forms and strategies of resistance as members of nondominant groups come to view their experience of oppression as an experience held in common with others who are members of their oppressed group.

Allen (1998) provides an example of standpoint theory in a description of her experiences as an academic. As a Black woman, she was the only person of color in her department at a traditionally White university. She described her experiences being asked to serve on every committee, having minority students look to her for help, and being caught in between concerns related to gender and race. She also described the experience of being the recipient of other faculty members' stereotyped expectations of her behavior and abilities. Through her lived experiences, she gave voice to a nondominant perspective that sheds light on one of many possible standpoints.

Co-Cultural Theory

Informed by both muted group and standpoint theory, co-cultural theory follows a line of theorizing from the margins which has deeply enriched communication theory and research (Buzzanell, 1994; Ellis & Bochner, 1996). According to these scholars, theorizing from the margins contributes to understanding of communication processes because "the oppressed can see with the greatest clarity, not only their own position but… indeed the shape of social systems as a whole" (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 8). Additionally, Orbe (1998) claimed, "the unique contribution of the ongoing research termed co-cultural theory is that it explores the common patterns of communication both

across and within these different marginalized groups" (p. 3). The present study contributes to this line of research by examining the everyday communication experiences of marginalized group members (i.e., young women) in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships in order to identify the communicative practices they identify as being most effective.

Specifically, co-cultural theory examines the experiences of nondominant members of society and their communication in response to dominant discourse, approaching the issue of power from the position of those without power in order to understand their perspectives (Orbe, 1996). The goal of co-cultural theory is to give power to those who have traditionally been marginalized from the dominant power structures. Through initial phenomenological interviews and focus group discussions with 27 co-researches from a variety of backgrounds, co-cultural communication research has yielded influential communication practices, factors, and orientations that serve as the basis for co-cultural groups' communicative practices (see Orbe's seminal study, 1996).

Co-cultural communicative practices. Orbe (1998) provides insight into the daily experiences of co-cultural group members by focusing on identifying the practices used by those who are traditionally marginalized to communicate with those within dominant societal structures. Specifically, Orbe (1998) maintains:

> Co-cultural group members' communicative experiences can be seen as responses
> to dominant societal structures that label them outsiders. A clear
> acknowledgement of how power dynamics are manifested in everyday life

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appears to exist among co-cultural group members, who recognize that societal

power is largely in the hands of European American males. (p. 87)

Through several research efforts, more than 25 different co-cultural commutative

practices have been distinguished (Ford-Ahmed & Orbe, 1992; Orbe, 1994; Roberts &

Orbe, 1996). These practices are not necessarily a definitive collection of mutually

exclusive communicative "performances." Instead, they are specific communicative

behaviors as described from the standpoints of co-cultural group members. The practices,

as explained by Orbe (1998), include: avoiding, averting controversy, maintaining

interpersonal barriers, emphasizing commonalities, exemplifying strengths, mirroring,

dissociating, dispelling stereotypes, manipulating stereotypes, embracing stereotypes,

developing positive face, censoring self, extensive preparation, overcompensating,

communicating self, educating others, intragroup networking, strategic distancing,

ridiculing self, using liaisons, increasing visibility, confronting, gaining advantage,

bargaining, attacking, and sabotaging others. Select practices are illustrated in Table 1

(see Appendix A for a complete list of practices).

Table 1

Select Co-Cultural Communicative Practices Summary

Practice	Brief Description
Avoiding	Maintaining a distance from dominant group members; refraining from activities and/or locations where interaction is likely
Mirroring	Adopting dominant group codes in attempts to make one's co-cultural identity less (or totally not) visible
Censoring Self	Remaining silent when comments from dominant group members are inappropriate, indirectly insulting, or highly offensive
Extensive Preparation	Engaging in an extensive amount of detailed (mental or concrete) groundwork prior to interactions with dominant group members
Dispelling Stereotypes	Myths of generalized group characteristics and behaviors are countered through the process of just being oneself
Manipulating Stereotypes	Conforming to commonly accepted beliefs about group members as a strategic means to exploit them for personal gain
Using Liaisons	Identifying specific dominant group members who can be trusted for support, guidance, and assistance

Communication factors. A more thorough analysis of the 26 co-cultural communicative practices revealed that each tactic represents an intricate selection process based on six primary factors (Orbe, 1996). These factors are: (1) preferred interactional outcome, (2) field of experience, (3) situational context, (4) communication abilities, (5) perceived costs and benefits, and (6) communication approach. In turn, these factors determine the orientations that co-cultural group members use to communicate within dominant cultural systems. The following statement by Orbe (1998) best summarizes the central idea behind these influential factors:

> Situated within a particular field of experience that governs their perception of the
>
> costs and rewards associated, as well as their capability to engage in various
>
> communicative practices, co-cultural group members will adopt certain

communication orientations— based on their preferred outcomes and

communication approaches—to the circumstances of a specific situation. (p. 19)

From these influential factors, co-cultural group members employ distinct

communication orientations in their interactions with dominant society. These

orientations are examined below.

Co-cultural communication orientations. According to Orbe (1998), co-cultural

group members' communication orientations stem from their preferred interactional

outcomes as well as their communication abilities within particular situational contexts.

Communicative practices can be clustered along the lines of how they promote a general

outcome: assimilation, accommodation, or separation. Individuals who prefer to

assimilate employ communicative behaviors that attempt to erase their cultural

distinctiveness to fit in with the dominant societal structure. Individuals who primarily

choose to accommodate retain their cultural uniqueness with the goal of creating a

pluralistic society that is accepting of cultural differences. Individuals who employ

separation tend to resist forming any common ties with dominant group members and

advocate for the maintenance of cultural communities that reflect their values and norms.

Additionally, co-cultural communicative practices can be distinguished along the lines of

an individual's communication approach: nonassertive, assertive, or aggressive (Orbe,

1998). Nonassertive communicative behaviors display communicative inhibition and

avoidance of confrontation. Individuals who employ nonassertive behaviors tend to place

others' needs before their own. Conversely, aggressive communicative behaviors

demonstrate highly expressive and controlling behavior. Individuals who employ this

style of co-cultural communication also tend to put their needs before others'. In between nonassertive and aggressive approaches is assertive communication, where individuals use self-improving, expressive communication that includes the needs of both self and others. These communication approaches, tied with the preferred interactional outcomes, yield specific communication orientations that co-cultural group members employ in their everyday interactions with dominant society.

Specifically, co-cultural theory offers nine co-cultural communication orientations based on people's preferred interactional outcome (i.e., assimilation, accommodation, or separation) and communication approach (i.e., nonassertive, assertive, or aggressive). Co-cultural theory outlines nine communication orientations: (1) nonassertive assimilation, (2) nonassertive accommodation, (3) nonassertive separation, (4) assertive assimilation, (5) assertive accommodation, (6) assertive separation, (7) aggressive assimilation, (8) aggressive accommodation, and (9) aggressive separation. The 26 various communicative practices are tied to a particular communication orientation. Table 2 illustrates the nine co-cultural communication orientations and their corresponding communicative practices.

Table 2

Co-Cultural Communication Orientations

	Separation	Accommodation	Assimilation
Nonassertive	• *Avoiding* • *Maintaining Interpersonal Barriers*	• *Increasing Visibility* • *Dispelling Stereotypes*	• *Emphasizing Commonalities* • *Developing Positive Face* • *Censoring Self* • *Averting Controversy*
Assertive	• *Exemplifying Strengths* • *Embracing Stereotypes*	• *Using Liaisons* • *Educating Others* • *Communicating Self* • *Intragroup Networking*	• *Extensive Preparation* • *Overcompensating* • *Manipulating Stereotypes* • *Bargaining*
Aggressive	• *Attacking* • *Sabotaging Others*	• *Confronting* • *Gaining Advantage*	• *Dissociating* • *Mirroring* • *Strategic Distancing* • *Ridiculing Self*

Nonassertive assimilation is when individuals use communicative practices that allow them to blend in with the dominant society. Communicative practices associated with this orientation are censoring the self, averting controversy in interaction, emphasizing commonalities, and developing positive face. *Nonassertive accommodation* involves seeking out change nonconfrontationally; communicative practices associated with this co-cultural orientation are strategically increasing an individual's visibility in social contexts and actively dispelling stereotypes. *Nonassertive separation* is when co-cultural group members use subtle communicative practices to stay distanced from dominant group members. Individuals who employ nonassertive separation practices distance themselves from places inhabited by dominant group members and maintain psychological barriers through verbal and nonverbal cues.

Individuals who use an *assertive assimilation* orientation also try to blend in to the dominant society, but they adopt more proactive communicative practices, such as manipulating stereotypes, overcompensating, bargaining, and preparing extensively prior to interaction. Co-cultural group members who employ an *assertive accommodation* orientation attempt to maintain a balance between self needs and others' needs, with the goal of changing dominant societal structures. Assertive accommodation practices include communicating in an authentic and open way with dominant group members, as well as educating others about an individual's cultural group. *Assertive separation* is when individuals make a conscious attempt at sustaining communities that exclude dominant group members. Those who use assertive separation communicative practices typically exemplify their cultural group's strengths and try to embrace stereotypes.

Co-cultural group members who employ an *aggressive assimilation* orientation make proactive efforts at fitting in with the dominant group. For those persons, being considered as a dominant group member is very important. Communicative practices associated with this orientation are dissociating from one's cultural group, mirroring dominant group members' behaviors, and ridiculing self. An *aggressive accommodation* orientation involves co-cultural group members trying to become part of dominant structures to change them, using communicative practices, such as confronting and gaining advantage over dominant group members. *Aggressive separation* is a proactive orientation that individuals use when co-cultural segregation is the main goal; communicative practices related to this orientation are attacking and sabotaging dominant group members to diminish their social privilege.

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A study conducted by Burnett et al. (2009) sought to gain deeper insights, through a phenomenological framework, into how a rape culture was communicatively created and sustained on a college campus. The authors framed women as co-cultural group members in a traditionally patriarchal society, such as that which exists in the United States. Results demonstrated that there exists ambiguity surrounding date rape and, thus, actual and potential date rape victims become "muted." The researchers found that the assimilation communicative orientation (Orbe, 1998) was the most salient in the participants' narratives. Participants reported the use of nonassertive assimilation strategies, such as self-censorship and averting controversy.

Similarly, Camara and Orbe (2008) examined the ways that diverse groups of people respond to discriminatory acts based on co-cultural group status (e.g., race, sex, age, sexual orientation, and disability). The authors surveyed 957 individuals from diverse racial, sexual, gender, age, and disability backgrounds at two state universities. Their analysis indicated that people primarily responded to discriminatory acts through co-cultural communication orientations, such as assertive accommodation (52%; asserting a strong self-concept by pointing to discriminatory acts and alerting perpetrators that such acts would not be tolerated) and nonassertive assimilation (25%; remaining silent and avoiding controversial subjects).

The preceding array of research highlights the position that co-cultural group members are often guarded in their use of communication when interacting with dominant group members, and illustrates the strategies they have developed to communicate successfully. Accordingly, this study seeks to gain insight into the co-

cultural communicative practices and orientations that young women employ in their interactions with their digitally abusive heterosexual romantic partner. The following research questions were advanced:

RQ3: What co-cultural communication strategies do young women enact in their digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationship?

RQ3a: How does the use of these strategies impact young women's health?

Literature Review Summary

Over the past 30 years, research in the area of IPA in married relationships has increased dramatically (Briere & Runtz, 1988; O'Leary et al., 1989). However, IPA in dating relationships has been less well studied, and has become an area of scientific study only in the last 20 years (Clark, Beckett, Wells, & Dungee-Anderson, 1994; Riggs, O'Leary, & Breslin, 1990). Adolescent relationships deserve increased attention not only because they can present early warning signs for adult IPA (Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, & Silva, 1998) but because they are at higher risk of IPA than any other age group (Morse, 1995; O'Leary, 1999; Wolfe et al., 2003).

The systematic study of IPA in dating relationships began with Makepeace's (1981) study of physical abuse in a college dating population. Since then, research on pre-marital dating relationship abuse has grown steadily. The majority of the data available on IPA in dating relationships is related to physical abuse occurring as a function of conflict resolution (Jenkins & Aube, 2002) and to sexual abuse and coercion. There is relatively little data available on psychological and verbal abuse in dating

relationships. Similarly, research on digital abuse is lacking among both married and dating couples.

Similar to IPA, the harmful effects of digital abuse by an intimate partner can be extended to one's health. A recent study indicated that there is an association between digital abuse by an intimate partner and mental health (MTV & Associated Press, 2009). Specifically, young people who have been the target of digital abuse by an intimate partner are twice as likely to report having received treatment from a mental health professional, and are nearly three times more likely to have considered dropping out of school. Digital abuse by an intimate partner can also be linked to risk of suicide. For example, 8% of victims and 12% of sexters have considered ending their own life in the past year compared to only 3% of people who had not been victimized and were not involved in sexting.

Co-cultural theory represents an eclectic approach to communication theory in that it draws from various existing conceptual frameworks related to culture, power, and communication. Specifically, co-cultural theory is founded on muted group (Kramarae, 1981) and standpoint theory's (Hartsock, 1983) central tenets and ideas. Co-cultural theory provides insights into the communicative strategies of co-cultural group members by examining how those who are without access to formal societal power communicate with those in privileged positions. As Orbe and Spellers (2005) explain, "Co-cultural theory offers a framework to understand the process by which individuals come to select how they are going to interact with others in any given specific context" (p. 174). Thus,

co-cultural theory offers a practical conceptual framework to identify and assess young

women's communicative experiences related to digital dating abuse.

CHAPTER 3

Photovoice

Many of the challenging health issues that confront society today have proven to

be ill suited for traditional outside expert approaches to research, which have often

yielded disappointing communication and community interventions (Green, 2001;

Hergenrather & Rhodes, 2008). Research targeted at understanding and eliminating

health issues has begun to focus on alternative orientations to inquiry, emphasizing

community involvement through partnership as integral to the research process (Amstein,

1969; Hergenrather & Rhodes, 2008). Community-based participatory research (CBPR),

for example, recognizes that an outsider can work best in partnership with lay community

members and community representatives who are themselves the real experts (Rhodes &

Benfield, 2006). Through partnership, community members and representatives work

together to identify and explore debilitating health issues and identify priorities. CBPR is

a process to increase the value of research and knowledge for researchers and community

members; to, ultimately, impact community wellbeing.

According to Hergenrather, Rhodes, Cowan, Bardhoshi, and Pula (2009), the

CBPR research process typically includes: (1) identification of a research question, (2)

assessment of community strengths, assets, and concerns, (3) selection of priorities or

targets, (4) development of research plan and data collection methodologies, (5)

implementation of research plan and data collection and analysis, (6) interpretation of study findings, (7) dissemination of study findings, and (8) application of study findings to develop action plans to enhance individual and community wellbeing. CBPR ensures that community members are involved throughout the research process to produce data that are authentic to community experience and action, that are appropriate and have meaning. Partnerships can create bridges between communities and researchers, incorporate knowledge and action based upon the lived experiences of community members, and ensure the collaborative development of research to impact individual and community wellbeing (Cornwall, 1996; Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Green et al., 2003; Rhodes & Benfield, 2006).

Originally proposed by Wang and Burris (1994), "Photovoice is an innovative [community-based] participatory research method based on health promotion principles and the theoretical literature on education for critical consciousness, critical feminist theories, and nontraditional approaches to documentary photography" (Wang, 1999, p. 185). Photovoice aims at empowering marginalized group members in a community by allowing co-researchers to document and discuss "everyday interaction" in order to help them critically reflect their needs (Tracy, 2007, p. 32). Through photovoice, co-researchers use cameras to take pictures that document various aspects of their daily lives. These photographs then become artifacts around which in-depth interviews and/or focus groups are centered. Thus, co-researchers are able to "tell their story straight" in order to help scholars and activists better understand the dimensions of social issues such as digital dating abuse.

Concisely defined as "a process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique" (Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000, p. 82), photovoice was described in a seminal article by Wang and Burris (1997) as having three goals: (1) to enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and (3) to reach policy makers. As suggested in these goals, the photovoice method is highly consistent with core CBPR principles stressing empowerment and an emphasis on individual and community strengths, co-learning, community capacity building, and balancing research and action (Israel, Schultz, Parker, & Becker, 1998).

According to Catalani and Minkler (2009), photovoice has shown promise in enabling public health researchers and practitioners to gain access to hard-to-reach communities and engage them in a meaningful, action-oriented research process. Specifically, photovoice is a flexible method that has been employed with culturally diverse groups to explore and address community needs such as medication adherence among persons living with HIV/AIDS (Rhodes, 2006), quality of life among Huntington's Disease family caregivers (Aubeeluck & Buchanan, 2006), immigration experiences of Latino adolescents (Streng et al., 2004), health-seeking behavior of persons with intellectual disabilities (Jurkowski & Paul-Ward, 2007), empowerment among Chinese women (Wang & Pies, 2004), HIV prevention among recently arrived immigrant Latino men (Rhodes & Hergenrather, 2007), quality of life among African American breast cancer survivors (Lopez et al., 2005), health promotion practices of

Tlicho women (Moffitt & VoUman, 2004), and health promotion among homeless persons (Dixon & Hadiialexiou, 2005).

Photovoice involves a series of procedures, aligned with CBPR, that include: (1) identifying salient community issue(s), (2) recruiting and training co-researcher, (3) identifying photo assignments, (4) discussing photo assignments, (5) analyzing photo assignments, and occasionally (6) a community forum for policy makers and influential advocates. While all of these aspects are important, the embodiment of photovoice research is the photographs. As such, co-researchers are provided cameras to take photos; the photographs enable co-researchers to record and reflect their strengths and concerns through photographic images. Photo discussions allow co-researchers to share and discuss the photographs they took for each photo assignment and promote critical dialogue about community strengths and concerns. Co-researchers present their photos during a facilitated discussion by contextualizing and often using root-cause questioning known by the mnemonic SHOWeD. The SHOWeD method proposes standard questions as a means of analysis: What do you See here? What's really Happening here? How does this relate to Our lives? Why does this problem or strength exist? What can we Do about this? The data of photo discussions are analyzed like other qualitative data, through exploring, formulating, and interpreting themes. The themes are often developed in partnership with the co-researchers. At minimum, themes are revised and validated by co-researchers. In some cases, a community forum is organized to reach local community members and policy makers in an attempt to build partnerships for community change.

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Theoretical Underpinnings

According to Wang and colleagues (Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997; Wang, Yi, Tao, & Carovano, 1998), three general theoretical and philosophical positions provide the foundation for photovoice. This section offers a critical summary of empowerment education, feminist theory, and documentary photography, each of which makes a unique contribution to photovoice.

Empowerment education. The theoretical and practical basis of photovoice is problem-posing education. Based on Paulo Freire's (1970) methods, "problem-posing education starts from the central issues in women's lives, and through dialogue, seeks to empower them to identify their shared issues" (Wang & Burris, 1994, p. 172). It begins with a concern for individual development. Discussion efforts then become directed at individual change, community quality of life, and institutional changes (Wallerstein, 1987). According to Freire (1970), photographs serve as one kind of "code" that reflect the community back upon itself, mirroring the everyday social and political realities that influence people's lives. In photovoice, co-researchers' images and words form the curriculum—the co-researchers' own portrayal of their lives and community. The process seeks to empower co-researchers to determine how the project unfolds, and to avoid approaches that foster dependency or powerlessness (Wallerstein, 1992).

In its essence, photovoice builds on the rhetorical elements of gaze and voice. Essentially the photo is an invitation to see the social realities of another person. It is a communicative act with local and structural value in that co-cultural group members may identify and communicate needs to policy makers. Freire's (1970) idea of empowerment

education feeds photovoice principles via his contention that "every human being, no matter how 'ignorant,' submerged in the 'culture of silence,' is capable of looking critically at the world" (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001, p. 561). Empowerment education manifests itself in photovoice by using images as a means by which co-researchers call attention to elements of their individual worlds that are worthy of celebration and derision. That is, co-researchers themselves are able to act as the empowerment agents.

An empowerment project based in China serves as a useful model for photovoice. Sixty-two women of different ethnicities and villages took photos of their daily lives. Group discussions were facilitated to encourage co-researchers to "analyze critically and collectively the social conditions that contribute to and detract from their health status" (Wang, Burris, & Xiang, 1996, p.1392). The collective reflection gave birth to situated knowledge that was practical and directed toward policy changes. As Wang et al. (1996) account:

> Through education for empowerment the women come to see themselves as community advocates and as participants in the policy dialogue. In other words, empowerment education seeks to transform their self-image from objects of policy to actors in the policy arena. (p.1392)

Feminist theory. Feminist theories and methods, diverse as they are, have consistently critiqued studies that assume women are objects of other people's actions, rather than actors in the world (Orbe, 1998). Feminist research views women as authorities on their own lives; in order to enable them "to construct their own knowledge

about women according to their criteria as women, and to empower themselves through knowledge making" (Kramarae & Spender, 1992, p. 80). More specifically, feminist theory insists that the impact of gender on lived experiences, especially women's experiences, must be at least part of the issue examined within any methodological approach. As such, women's realities must be carried out by and with women instead of on women, in ways that empower people, honor women's intelligence, and value knowledge grounded in experience (Reinharz, 1992).

According to Wang and Burris (1994), the choice to promote empowerment through an educational practice that revolves around women's documentary images draws on the version of feminist thought which has questioned our understandings of power, representation, and voice. Feminist research views women as authorities on their own lives; it enables them to construct their own knowledge about women according to their criteria as women, and to empower themselves through knowledge making.

Grounded in an ideology of accountability, feminist scholars have contended that knowledge or practice that exploits or oppresses is unjustifiable. They have argued for an inclusive form of knowledge construction. Similarly, a major contribution of feminist consciousness-raising groups of the 1960s was to assert the value of women's experience. From that model, the private, the daily, and the apparently trivial in women's activities come to be understood as shared rather than individual experiences, and as socially and politically constructed.

The choice to promote empowerment through photovoice "draws on the version of feminist thought which has questioned our understandings of power, representation,

and voice" (Wang & Burris, 1994, p. 174). Here, it is useful to think about power to, power with, and power over—although seen as three different kinds of processes, in reality they are rarely distinct (French, 1986). Power to is the ability to accomplish things. Power with is the ability to work with others toward a common purpose. Power over is the ability to influence or to direct other people, or the physical or material environment. Whereas digital forms of intimate partner abuse assert oppressive power and control, photovoice attempts to create the conditions in which women can further develop power to, power with, and power over, in order to affect healthy changes in their individual lives, and in their communities (Wang & Burris, 1994). For example, women might acquire the power to muster the community's support for increased prevention-education programs or a digital dating abuse center. They might develop power with one another to petition leaders to increase punishments for such actions. They might strive for power over community attitudes that view digital dating abuse as only a family matter, or power over the allocation of resources by participating in community decision-making. Knowledge, and then action, arises from a group sharing experiences and understanding the dominating institutions that affect their lives.

The positivist assumption that neutrality exists in the research process has been critiqued by feminists, Marxists, and other scholars. Feminist research creates knowledge. However, it differs from objective research in that feminist methods intertwine with its findings. In the oft-quoted twist on convention, and the means are the ends; as empowerment education has challenged traditional approaches to schooling, so have

feminist critiques of positivist research methods and the construction of knowledge pushed new aims and methods of inquiry.

Documentary photography. Documentary photographers have used the visual image to record violence, segregation, poverty, and social humiliation. Broadly defined, documentary photography portrays the social and mental wellness of both its subjects and the community of which they are a part (Wang & Burris, 1994). Yet, however skilled a photographer may be, concerns about the potential unfairness of documentary photography must be raised (Rosler, 1989). The presumed benefits of research focus on marginalized populations and problems that arise from disparities in social power between the researcher/photographer and the participants (Kramarae & Spender, 1992; Patai, 1991; Zinn, 1979). As such, photovoice approaches the communication among these groups from the perspective of those without power.

In traditional phenomenological research settings, the researcher observes behaviors, talk, and actions, and promptly translates those into spoken or written words via written or audio-recorded field notes (see Orbe, 1998). Photovoice is used to emphasize independent voice, and, as a practice that counters conventional documentary photography, opens up space for visual elements to become part of the research process rather than a simple ancillary feature. For example, Spence (1995), a documentary photographer, gave cameras to people who, historically, have been considered the objects of documentary photography. The cameras enabled the community members to photograph scenes recorded largely from the privileged position of the documentarian. In this sense, photovoice provides a means by which to see the world differently, through

the eyes of the co-researcher, and from a nondominant vantage point. Moreover, photovoice "empowers the interviewees to teach the researcher about aspects of their social world otherwise ignored or taken for granted" (Clark-Ibanez, 2004, p. 1524).

Photovoice as Method of Inquiry

The connections between research methodology and the visual are growing at a rapid rate; see Rose's (2007) anthology, entitled *Visual Methodologies*, which is dedicated to a multitude of image-based research methodologies spanning across epistemologies. According to Stanczak (2004) visual or image-based research possesses a "significant untapped potential across a broad scope of disciplines" (p. 1471). Photovoice remains but one image-based method among many available to researchers interested in analyzing visual texts and data. Images have been a means by which critics have observed the human condition for centuries. Mitchell (1994) traces the philosophical and critical interest in "the pictorial turn" as a means through which situations of the human condition can be captured, presented, critiqued, and appreciated. Mitchell (1994) highlights the historical interest in the visual of thinkers such as Pierce, Derrida, Wittgenstein, Foucault, and Rorty.

However, in the social sciences, image-based research has a much shorter history. Collier (1967) first argued for the possibility of including visual images in social scientific research; "in the field of anthropology as a whole, photography remains an extraordinary rather than a usual method" (p. 6). However, Collier (1967) saw possibility in photographic methodologies to "actually extend our visual processes and to help us find out more about the nature of man and his multi-faceted cultures" (p. 6). While

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Collier was certainly on the cutting edge of visual methodologies in the social sciences, the use of image-based research in the social sciences has remained sporadic since the release of his important text and did not grow more common until the mid-1990s. In communication studies, uses of photography-as-method have been minimal and have lagged far behind visual rhetoric (see Singhal & Devi, 2003).

Although uncommon, especially in communication studies, a few pertinent examples of closely-named and similar methodologies appear in the journals of other disciplines. Photoelicitation (Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Harper, 1987) is a research strategy where photographs, taken by either the researcher or the participant, are introduced into a research interview. Photonovella (Wang & Burris, 1994) and visual narrative method (Harper, 1987) most closely resemble photovoice, and the differences between photonovella and photovoice are minor. Photodocumentation (Suchar, 1997) is a method in which photographs are taken and analyzed in a systematic manner by the researcher. In this method, for example, in order to gather data related to a specific research question, a researcher may take photographs that capture various images that relate to that specific research question.

Despite the absence of images from social scientific research, the visual remains a key aspect of engaging and understanding the social world. For example, participant observation, a very commonly used qualitative method, is based almost entirely on the visual. Yet, the visual plays a nearly insignificant role in the presentation of findings. In a research setting, the researcher *observes* (i.e., sees) behaviors, talk, or other action, and promptly translates those into spoken or written words via written or audio-recorded field

notes. Photovoice opens up space for visual elements to become part of the research process rather than a simply ancillary feature. In a spirit articulated by Tracy (2007), photovoice can be one means by which we can capture and discuss "everyday interaction" while recognizing the multitude of ways in which "context shapes meaning-making" (p. 32).

Implications for Practice

Regardless of the name with which it is identified, photography is an increasingly popular and useful tool from which personal narratives and significant life events can be culled out from broader experiences. Specifically, photovoice has the potential to contribute to the field of communication in various ways including: (1) teaching and influencing others about aspects of marginalized group's needs which are often ignored or taken for granted, (2) increased involvement for both participant and researcher, and (3) empowering traditionally marginalized groups.

Photovoice can teach others. Photographs are important tools for the impact of communication research as the visual provides an alternative to "textocentrism" (Singhal & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006). According to Wang (1999), images teach and "contribute to how we see ourselves, how we define and relate to the world and what we perceive as significant or different" (p. 186). In short, images influence how we see the world. Wang (1999) argues that pictures can set agendas and show what the media and public do not want to talk about or are unable to talk about. As such, photovoice "empowers the interviewees to teach the researcher about aspects of their social world otherwise ignored or taken for granted" (Clark-Ibanez, 2004, p. 1524). With this method, however, people

do not only take pictures of important people, places, and interactions in their daily lives, but get to tell the story of those pictures as well. Photographs can serve as a beginning point for a dialogue among those with a traditionally-limited amount of voice and those in positions of power.

In a review of the literature, Catalani and Minkler (2009) found that the majority (60%) of photovoice projects culminated in action to address issues identified through community documentation and discussion. Among these projects, 96% organized public photo exhibitions to share their photographs and findings with the broader community, often including policy makers and other influential leaders. Wang and her colleagues (2000) for example, worked with homeless photovoice participants in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to hold several forums and showings of the participants' powerful words and pictures. They noted:

> First, participants snapped photographs and wrote descriptive text for newspaper articles. Second, participants' photographs and captions were exhibited locally at a downtown gallery. Finally, several hundred people, including policy makers, journalists, researchers, public health graduate students, and the public, came to the city's largest theater where photographers showed their slides with accompanying narrations and spoke to an audience of present and future community leaders. (p. 85)

This emphasis on involving policy makers and other community leaders in photovoice projects has been a part of Wang and colleagues' ongoing work and recommendations for best practices (Wang, Morrel-Samuels, & Hutchison, 2004; Wang & Pies, 2004).

Photovoice increases involvement for participant and researcher. Significant

evidence suggests that using visual forms of communication (e.g., pictures) in

combination with textual forms of communication to deliver information increases

involvement and comprehension of information for participants (Hergenrather et al.,

2009; Cannuscio et al., 2009). For example, Catalani and Minkler (2009) found that

photovoice projects improved the understanding of community needs and assets among

photovoice partners, service providers, local policy makers, other influential community

members, and the broader community. Practitioners claimed that this is due to, first and

foremost, the methodology's unique capacity to engage hard-to-reach groups and to elicit

open and honest conversation. Their literature review provides several examples of how

this happens. In their highly participatory project with Latino adults with intellectual

disabilities, Jurkowski and Paul-Ward (2007) noted that research and health promotion

interventions tend to overlook people with such mental challenges because they are

"often regarded as incapable of expressing their own health needs and incapable of

learning health-promoting skills" (p. 359). Although the researchers had already engaged

these participants in focus group discussion, they found that photovoice elicited rich

descriptive information about participants' everyday lives. Researchers used this

information to improve health promotion programs for people with intellectual

disabilities in their community.

Additionally, increased access to visual formats such as digital photographs offers

the potential to increase researchers' attention, recall, and comprehension of complex

social issues "because participants who collect visual evidence on a topic can offer these

data to researchers to supplement written survey data or interview data" (Villagran, 2011, p. 296). Thus, understanding of a topic may be increased when the participants themselves help frame the types of information gathered on any given topic. By providing cameras to individuals who might otherwise not have access to such a tool, researchers gain the ability to record communicative behaviors, and design interventions based on the contextual information drawn from the resulting photographs (Hergenrather et al., 2009).

Photovoice empowers the disempowered. The theoretical and practical basis of photovoice is problem-posing education. Based on Paulo Freire's (1970) methods, "problem-posing education starts from the central issues in [an individual's life], and through dialogue, seeks to empower them to identify their shared issues" (Wang & Burris, 1994, p. 172). Freire's (1970) idea of empowerment education feeds photovoice principles via his contention that "every human being, no matter how 'ignorant' or submerged in the 'culture of silence,' is capable of looking critically at the world" (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001, p. 561). Empowerment education manifests itself in photovoice practices by using images as a means by which participants can call attention to elements of their individual worlds that are worthy of celebration and derision (Novak, 2008). That is, the participants are able to act as the empowerment agents. For example, a photovoice project conducted by Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Deacon, Nievar, and McCann (2005) found that two iterative processes in particular facilitated empowerment among participants: (1) documenting community strengths and concerns using photography and (2) engaging in critical dialogue with other community members. In their breakdown of

the concept of empowerment, the investigators explained that "impacts ranged from an increased sense of control over their own lives to the emergence of the kinds of awareness, relationships, and efficacy supportive of participants becoming community change agents" (p. 275). Additionally, Carlson, Engebretson, and Chamberlain (2006) used a retrospective ethnographic analysis to evaluate the impact of a photovoice project in a lower income, African American urban community. The researchers analyzed dozens of photographs, participant stories, group discussion transcripts, and facilitator journals. They found that the photovoice project was able to generate a social process of critical consciousness and active grassroots participation, thereby facilitating empowerment by providing multiple opportunities for reflection, critical thinking, and then active engagement. The authors identified these opportunities as "deciding what to photograph, developing a story of why it was important, experiencing the entirety of the group's creation, and, finally, participating in a group dialogue of introspection" (p. 842).

Photovoice in Health Contexts

The practice of photovoice is growing rapidly, and the photovoice literature focusing on health issues is becoming more robust; describing and analyzing diverse, nuanced applications of the method within a range of geographic and social contexts. There is increasing evidence that photovoice can be used as a participatory tool for engaging communities as partners in a CBPR process (Catalani & Minkler, 2009). Photovoice has also shown promise in enabling health scholars and practitioners to gain access to hard-to-reach communities and engage them in a meaningful, action-oriented research process.

Participatory projects, such as photovoice, offer several important outcomes that are important to improving individual health. Specifically, more participatory projects tend to be associated with: (a) longstanding relationships between researchers and community, (b) intensive training to build community capacity, (c) an iterative cycle of community documentation and critical dialogue, and (d) multilevel outcomes including engaging community members in action and advocacy, enhancing understanding of community needs and assets, and facilitating individual empowerment. For example, the Video Intervention/Prevention Assessment (VIA), a project founded in 1994 by Dr. Michael Rich at the Children's Hospital Boston, gives video cameras to young people, asking them to teach clinicians about the realities of their illness experiences through the creation of audiovisual illness narratives. In a seminal article, 19 adolescents (8 to 19 years) were asked to create video diaries showing their experience living with asthma (Rich & Chalfen, 1999). These diaries, recorded over a four-week period using hand-held camcorders, included daily life activities, personal monologues, interviews with family and friends, and asthma management. The content of the narratives was logged, analyzed, and compared with information gathered during medical history interviews. The videos showed important information that was not mentioned during medical visits about the adolescent illness experience, including lifestyle elements, personal relationships, exposure to environmental triggers, and medication misuse. As such, VIA has the potential to readjust the clinician-patient power dynamic by providing patients a new voice for self-advocacy and offering clinicians information that can help them better tailor disease management strategies to a patient's unique circumstances and needs.

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Using visual methodologies such as photovoice in health contexts provides participants not only the opportunity of documenting what is meaningful to them, but allows participants to express the "unsayable" (Guillemin & Drew, 2010). For example, in a study conducted by Guillemin and Drew (2010), women participating in research on postnatal depression were sometimes able to draw their acute sense of helplessness and vulnerability, but were at a loss as to the words to describe these feelings. One of the participants drew a simple yet evocative image of herself reduced to a tearful eye, faced with blackness. All this participant could say of the image was that it was "no light, it's an eye with tears, helpless, me looking at black." The authors suggest that "when the experiences we are investigating in our research are difficult and confronting, words are sometimes not available for participants to express the raw emotions and feelings experienced" (Guillemin & Drew, 2010, p. 178). Using visual methodologies provides an avenue to access these experiences and understandings. As Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006) suggest:

> By inviting participants to create things as part of the research process, it's a different way into a research question… It's a different way in, and engages the brain in a different way, drawing a different kind of response. (p. 84)

Through the use of photovoice, then, it may be possible to identify and better understand the experiences and co-cultural communication practices of young women interacting as nondominant group members within dominant societal structures. Thus, the following research question was posed:

RQ4: How can photovoice be used to give young women voice in digitally

abusive heterosexual romantic relationships?

Photovoice Summary

Photovoice is an innovative research method based on health promotion principles

and the theoretical literature on education for critical consciousness, critical feminist

theories, and nontraditional approaches to documentary photography (Wang, 1999, p.

185). Photovoice aims at empowering marginalized group members in a community by

allowing co-researchers to document and discuss "everyday interaction" in order to help

them critically reflect their needs (Tracy, 2007, p. 32). Through photovoice, co-

researchers use cameras to take pictures that document various aspects of their daily

lives. These photographs then become artifacts around which in-depth interviews and/or

focus groups are centered. Thus, co-researchers are able to "tell their story straight" in

order to help scholars and activists better understand the dimensions of social issues such

as digital dating abuse.

Photovoice is an ideal methodological technique through which participants can

document, critically analyze, and improve contexts, such as digital dating abuse, that

affect women's health. By putting cameras in the hands of young women, it may be

possible to identify and better understand communication practices of young women

interacting as co-cultural group members within dominant societal structures.

Specifically, the camera may enable the women to tell "visual stories" about themselves,

thus creating opportunities for them to express themselves in their own images, words,

and reflections. In turn, these images may become points of entry into seeing beneath

surface issues, relationships, and societal events. In addition, visual methodologies such as photovoice provide participants not only the opportunity of documenting what is meaningful to them, but may also allow participants to express ideas that were not previously considered. This is particularly true with young people, as photographs act as a kind of communicative bridge for conceptualizing and articulating aspects of their personal circumstances that they may not previously have considered in any depth; or they may not have the maturity of cognition or expression with which to formulate discussion and explanation of complex experiences and ideas. Here, photovoice is used together with pencil-and-paper questionnaires and in-depth interviews to identify the lived experiences of young women in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

This study investigated the communicative experiences of ten young women in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships. Co-cultural theory guided this investigation and allowed co-researchers' voices to be placed at the center of the work. By entering the young women's "real life," the researcher sought to uncover the co-cultural strategies they identified using in their daily communication. The intent was to develop a conceptual framework that facilitated and enriched the understanding of human communication. The data for this study were gathered through multiple methods including, pencil-and-paper questionnaires, audio-taped, semi-structured interviews, and digital photography. Specifically, the aim of this investigation was to generate insight into the communicative strategies that young women in digitally abusive heterosexual dating relationships identified as being critical to succeeding in a dominant environment.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this investigation:

RQ1: What forms of digital dating abuse are experienced by young women in heterosexual romantic relationships?

RQ2: What are young women's experiences regarding digital dating abuse in heterosexual romantic relationships?

RQ2a: How do these experiences impact young women's health?

RQ3: What co-cultural communication strategies do young women enact in their digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationship?

RQ3a: How does the use of these strategies impact young women's health?

RQ4: How can photovoice be used to give young women voice in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships?

Methodological Paradigm

Traditionally, women have been misrepresented or overlooked in research studies. As Riger (1992) points out, feminist scholars have long argued that social science research "neglects and distorts the study of women in a systematic bias in favor of men" (p. 730). This has resulted in a lack of research on women's health conditions, including abuse through digital technologies. Moreover, a focus on quantitative research leaves the interpretation of women's experiences to the results of standardized scales, rather than the women who are living their experiences. This study will rely on multiple qualitative methods, framed by co-cultural theory, which is an ideal framework in which to study women suffering from digital abuse in heterosexual romantic relationships.

Miles and Huberman (1994) identified several strengths of qualitative research. First, qualitative research focuses on the "naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what 'real life' is like" (p. 10). Based on the research questions investigated, qualitative inquiry allowed the researcher to hear the co-researchers articulate their everyday experiences in their own words and focused the

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researcher on what their real life was like, which is particularly important when studying marginalized group members such as women. Secondly, qualitative data provide thick descriptions that are vivid and based on lived experiences that have a major impact on the reader. Miles and Huberman (1994) further note that real words are stronger and more revealing than statistics. According to Neuman (1997), meaning is inherent in the person. As such, meanings are interpreted differently from person to person. When conducting a qualitative study, researchers strive to report these multiple realities—often through the use of multiple quotes based on the actual words of different individuals. Using a conversational approach during the interviews may facilitate the co-researchers to thoroughly discuss their personal real life stories. Finally, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that through qualitative inquiry, we understand the "how and why", not just the "what and how many" (p. 12). In other words, qualitative inquiry allows researchers to supplement the information obtained by quantitative studies. Interviews with participants, for example, may allow for a more comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon under study.

The current study seeks to understand how digitally abused women communicate in heterosexual romantic relationships. As such, women's voices are at the center of this research. Pennington (1999) concluded that having marginalized groups, such as women, at the center of the research "gives their voices a long-denied privilege; more important, for researchers, it allows the women to be understood in the contexts in which they live, grow, and make sense of their lives" (p. 128).

Multiple methods. A multiple method approach combines different forms of data collection strategies in qualitative research, in order to draw conclusions with strong dependability (Creswell, 2007). Relying on only one or two data collection methods leaves one subject to questionable validity. According to LeCompte and Preissle (1993), by using a multi-method approach in qualitative research, the researcher can "pinpoint the accuracy of conclusions drawn by triangulating with several sources of data" (p. 48). The underlying assumption here is straightforward—using multiple data sources can deepen the understanding of the phenomenon under study and hence is advantageous in comparison to using a single method.

Denzin (1978) identifies four types of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. Data triangulation refers to the gathering of data at different points in time and from different sources. Investigator triangulation is the use of multiple researchers to study the same research question or the same setting, presuming that different researchers will bring different perspectives, thinking, and analysis to the table, thus strengthening the final assessment. Triangulating theory stresses that the research should examine the phenomenon from different theoretical vantage points to see which would be the most robust in helping to clarify and explain what has been studied. Methodological triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods to gain the most complete and detailed data possible on the phenomenon.

Any strategy of triangulation that adds a system of theoretical/methodological checks and balances to a study lends strength to that study. As Patton (1990) observed,

"studies that use only one method are more vulnerable to errors linked to that particular method… than studies that use multiple methods in which different types of data provide cross-data validity checks" (p. 188). A key means to strengthen communication research is to expand the range of methodologies used for the gathering of information, and the focus here is on methodological triangulation. Specifically, the current study employs methodological triangulation through the use of pencil-and-paper questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and photovoice methodology.

Researcher's Standpoint

Qualitative research is interpretative by nature, meaning the researcher interprets or makes sense of meaning gained during data collection. Yet, one major criticism of the qualitative process has been concern over separating researcher from subject. Husserl (2006) believed the experience of the researcher was essential to the process of interpretation. He did, however, address this separation suggesting that the researcher bracket his/her experience. Bracketing allows the researcher to separate his/her perspective from the insight gleaned during data collection. It does not mean, however, that personal experience is not honored during the analysis. As Husserl understood, the world is never perceived as only mine but rather as ours (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974). Therefore, before telling the co-researchers' stories, it is important for me to tell my story and provide readers with an understanding of how I am positioned within this study.

I enter this project with my own personal experiences that have shaped my perspectives. I am not a blank slate. As a cultural insider, I have to constantly question myself throughout this research process. Allen (2002) cautioned social scientists who are

cultural insiders to "resist the urge toward thinking that she knows the answers to research questions. This tendency might be especially pronounced for [women] researchers who identify with those whom they are studying" (p. 27).

As a victim of digital dating abuse during my adolescent years, I know what it feels like to be muted; I know all too well that "the words we have are not always the words we need" (Ashcraft, 2000, p. 3). My first "real" relationship was with an older male; I was 17 and he was 22. During this relationship, he exerted a great deal of control over me—always telling me what to do, where I could go, who I could spend my time with, among other things. Throughout our year-long relationship, I was aware that something was wrong, though, I could not identify with traditional terms used to describe partner abuse. Since I did not consider myself a "battered woman," "abused," or "victim of dating violence," and without the words to accurately describe what was happening to me, it was nearly impossible for me to express my reality. Instead, I was forced into silence due to the lack of communicative resources available to me.

Over the years, I have come to realize that what happened to me was, in fact, abuse. Although, I have made sure to not let it happen to me again, sadly, I have seen a number of my close friends endure the abuse—and more recently through digital technologies. These experiences highlighted for me the fact that digital dating abuse occurs in all contexts. In my first semester in graduate school, I began to wonder how other women, specifically undergraduate women, dealt with digitally abusive relationships. At this point, I wrote my first class paper on women in abusive romantic relationships, and have been conducting research on this topic ever since. I am invested,

both personally and professionally, in having a better understanding of how society can better serve women who have been in digitally abusive relationships.

As a cultural insider/victim I have my own set of beliefs about this population. My theoretical orientation affects the way I see the world and serves as a lens through which I do research. Because I believe that digital dating abuse is bigger than individual characteristics and is sustained by issues of gender inequality and sexism, I stem from a feminist perspective. This, in particular, has an impact on how I research intimate partner abuse; looking at both the individual and societal aspects. I believe that it is important to empower women to make changes in their own lives and to, when appropriate, help them understand the larger picture of abuse against women. As previously stated, it is imperative that I draw a line between my own personal experiences and beliefs and those of the co-researchers. My work here is to capture the lived experiences of young women who have encountered digital dating abuse in heterosexual romantic relationships. My aim is to listen to the stories that the women share with an open mind, remaining curious at all times and working towards describing the phenomenon. My hope is that by giving abused women a space to share their story, they will become empowered to transform their self-image from objects of abuse to actors of social change.

Protection of Human Subjects

Before data collection could begin, the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) at George Mason University was petitioned for review and acceptance of the study. Once accepted, data collection began in March 2011 and concluded in February 2012. All attempts were made to protect the privacy of co-researchers. Specifically, each was given

a pseudonym so that they could not be identified in any way. Audiotapes, transcripts, and field notes were stored in a locked box in the researcher's office, and will remain there for a period of five years. After that time, all files will be destroyed. Co-researchers were encouraged to ask questions throughout the process and were given a summary of the results once the study was completed.

Research Design/Photovoice in Action

Photovoice, a qualitative approach used to study the communicative experiences of diverse nondominant group members, is used here as a way to capture the lived experiences of digital dating abuse to young women in heterosexual romantic relationships. Through photovoice, co-researchers use cameras to take pictures that document various aspects of their daily lives. These photographs then become artifacts around which an in-depth interview and/or focus group is centered. Thus, co-researchers are able to "tell their story straight" in order to help scholars and activists understand the dimensions of social issues such as intimate partner abuse.

Executing a photovoice study generally involves five general steps: (1) selecting and recruiting co-researchers, (2) training co-researchers, (3) taking and collecting photographs, (4) discussing photographs, and (5) presenting the findings.

Co-researchers. According to Wang (1999), seven to ten people are an ideal group size for any photovoice project to allow for practical ease and in-depth discussion. In the current study, co-researchers included ten female college students recruited from a mid-sized Northeastern University. Co-researchers ranged in age (18 to 24 years), ethnic

background, socio-economic status, and education level. Table 3 provides a description

of the co-researchers who participated in this study.

Table 3

Demographic Characteristics of Co-Researchers

Name	Age (current)	Age (when abuse began)	Ethnicity	Age of Abuser (when abuse began)	Relationship Length
Amy	19	16	African American	16	1.5 years
April	20	14	African American	15	4.5 years
Becky	24	18	Asian American	19	1 year
Debbie	20	16	Caucasian	17	4 years
Julie	21	16	Asian American	19	2 years
Karen	19	17	Caucasian	16	2 years
Katie	24	17	African American	18	2 months
Kelly	23	19	Caucasian	24	1 year
Laurie	20	19	Caucasian	19	6 months
Sally	18	13	Asian American	13	4 years

Selecting and recruiting co-researchers. Purposive sampling was used to select

co-researchers for this study, based on their history with digital abuse in heterosexual

romantic relationships. Crabtree and Miller (1992) reported that this type of sampling is

not concerned with representativeness, but, more appropriately, with gathering rich

information to illuminate the study questions. As Patton (1990) indicated, this type of

sampling is used when subjects are selected because of a particular characteristic. This

study examined the experiences of ten digitally abused women in previous heterosexual

romantic relatioships. As Taylor and Bogdan (1998) assert, "an 'N of 1' can be just as

illuminating as a large sample (and very often so)" (p. 91).

Co-researchers were recruited through nine undergraduate Communication 100 and 101 courses (approximately 25 students in each class) at a mid-sized Northeastern University. All female students, 18 to 24 years of age, in each course were solicited by the researcher. The researcher visited each classroom and delivered a brief prepared presentation (approximately five minutes). The presentation included a description of digital dating abuse, an example of what digital dating abuse might look like, and other information regarding the study's procedures and compensation (see Appendix B for recruitment script). After the presentation was completed, the researcher then provided each female student a screening form (see Appendix C for screening form). The female students indicated on the screening form whether they were or were not interested in participating in the study. If the female student was interested in participating in the study, she was asked to provide her name (or pseudonym), email address, and/or phone number. If the female student was not interested in participating in the study, she was asked not to provide any identifying information. Female students who had experienced digital abuse and were willing to participate in the study were asked to identify the forms of digital abuse they had experienced. Co-researchers indicated various forms of digital dating abuse by checking the appropriate boxes from a list of commonly reported behaviors, which had been found in previous studies regarding cyber abuse. Although this study is primarily qualitative in nature, this quantitative information provided a baseline assesment of the incidence rate and forms of digital abuse that young women experience in dating relationships. Additionally, the young women who had experienced digital abuse and were willing to participate in the study were also asked to provide a

short story about one of the forms of digital dating abuse that had impacted them the most, as well as a description of how they responded to the incident. Given the time restrictions of an in-class recruitment presentation and the nature of the topic under study, this portion of the screening questionnaire was often left blank by the female students. As such, part two of the screening form was not utilized or reported in this research study.

The willing young women were then contacted by the researcher via their email address and were given information regarding a mandatory training session (approximately one hour), to take place within one week of the classroom presentation. All co-researchers attended one training session before participating in the study. Once training was completed, the co-researchers were given two weeks to take picutres of their experiences with digital abuse in past romantic relationships. The recruitment process began in March 2011, after the researcher received the HSRB approval, and concluded in February 2012.

Training co-researchers. Training is a critical element of the photovoice process. Training gives the researcher the opportunity to inform co-researchers on how to do photovoice, what to take pictures of, and how to effectively participate in the research (Novak, 2008). During the training session, co-researchers were further educated on digital dating abuse and instructed on photovoice methodology, procedures for collecting photographs, and compensation (see Appendix D for training session agenda).

The training session began with a more detailed description of digital dating abuse than was provided in the previous classroom visit. Co-researchers were told that digital dating abuse "is a form of non-traditional abuse when someone repeatedly controls,

pressures, or threatens someone they're seeing or dating, through their phone or online."

Examples of digital dating abuse were also provided, including: unwanted and/or

repeated calls/text messages, breaking into social networking account, and pressure to

share embarrassing or private pictures/videos. To help co-researchers understand the

phenomenon further, real life examples were shared (see Appendix D for examples).

Next, the research questions and goals of the project were addressed so that co-

researchers had some direction when taking their photographs. Co-researchers were

instructed to "take pictures of your lived experience(s) related to digital dating abuse."

This statement was broad enough so as not to confuse the co-researchers with specifics,

and was one that allowed them the freedom to tell their story as they saw fit. During the

training session, co-researchers were encouraged to think about the people, places, and

things they thought told their story of digital dating abuse. Co-researchers were given

additional questions to consider while taking photographs (see Appendix D for

examples).

Finally, co-researchers were briefed on photo-taking and compensation. Co-

researchers were instructed to use their digital camera or the camera embedded in their

cell phone (i.e., camera phone) to document their story. While other studies have

implemented auto rewind cameras, disposable cameras, and/or medium format Holga

cameras (see Wang, 1999) among participants, the current study sought to employ a more

modern form of technology, which may be more appropriate for the population under

study. According to a recent survey, young American adults "feel that cell phones have

become a vital part of their identities" (CBS News, 2008). Thus, by including the use of

camera phones in the study, richer narratives were more likely to be gathered. If co-researchers did not have or did not want to use their digital camera or camera phone, they were told that a disposable camera would be provided for them. All ten co-researchers used their own digital cameras and/or camera phones. Co-researchers were instructed that they could take pictures of "anything that describes your lived experience(s) related to digital dating abuse." However, they were encouraged to focus on objects instead of portraits of individuals. Co-researchers were told that compensation of $30 US would be given to them upon full completion of the study. A question and answer session followed the training. Before leaving, co-researchers signed informed consent forms indicating their willingness to participate in the study (see Appendix E for informed consent form), received a packet with the materials that had been discussed in the training session and a USB drive for the purpose of saving photographs.

Taking and collecting photographs. Once the photovoice training session was complete, co-researchers were sent out to capture their lived experiences over a two-week period. This time frame allowed co-researchers an adequate amount of time to capture the images that told their story of digital abuse in previous heterosexual romantic relationships. As previously stated, co-researchers used their own digital camera or camera phone in order to capture their lived experiences with digital dating abuse. Co-researchers were instructed to focus their picture-taking on abstract objects and not on portraits of individuals; however some images included identifiable individuals, including the co-researchers themselves. In these cases, the photographs were only used for the in-depth interview portion of the study. All photos that included identifiable persons,

including the co-researchers themselves, were kept confidential and will not be used when reporting the findings of this study in presentations or publications of any kind.

Once the co-researchers felt that they had taken enough photographs to tell their story (not to exceed the two-week time period), they then provided all of the photos to the researcher on the USB device that was given to each participant during the training sessions. The number of photographs that were submitted by co-researchers varied, ranging from 5 to 46. Once photos were received by the researcher, an email was sent to the co-researcher to schedule a face-to-face interview. The interviews took place within one week of the researcher receiving the photographs from the co-researchers.

Discussing photographs. Once photographs were collected, in-depth interviews were conducted with each co-researcher in order to elicit the lived experiences related to their photographs. The primary strategy for data collection was face-to-face, semi-structured, in-depth interviews which allowed the co-researchers to tell their stories in their own words. Open-ended questions were used for this purpose. The researcher's voice was heard when posing questions or requesting additional details. As Creswell and Miller (2000) assert, conducting interviews involves participants in the data collection process, by inviting them to share their stories, examine their lived experiences, and discover meaning.

Before beginning the interviews, co-researchers were informed about what they could expect over the next 60 to 90 minutes. They were told that they would be asked questions about their experiences with digital dating abuse in past heterosexual relationships. Co-researchers were notified that some of the questions might seem

uncomfortable, silly, or even redundant at times. They were told that their answers were important for understanding communication regarding digital dating abuse in heterosexual romantic relationships. Co-researchers were told that they did not need to modify their communication, but instead should speak openly and honestly about their experiences. They were reminded that the interview was confidential and that they should share their honest thoughts about digital dating abuse and communication, rather than the "politically correct" version. After this conversation, the tape recorder was started and the interview commenced.

A list of standard questions was developed; but the researcher had the flexibility to probe and ask additional questions (Berg, 2001). As Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggest, qualitative research can be equated to planning a vacation. You have an itinerary, but you remain flexible to change. As such, no one interview followed the same format. Instead, using a conversational approach, the researcher followed-up on responses or asked questions based on the responses of the co-researchers. The semi-structured format used to steer the young women through the interviews was guided by six areas: (1) personal demographic and other rapport building questions, (2) experience with digital dating abuse, (3) health questions, (4) co-cultural communication questions, (5) photograph questions, and (6) general concluding questions (see Appendix F for interview schedule). Specifically, the SHOWeD method was used as an interviewing structure to discuss the photographs (Wang et al., 2004; Wang et al., 1998). The SHOWeD method proposes standard questions as a means of analysis: What do you See here? What's really Happening here? How does this relate to Our lives? Why does this problem or strength

exist? What can we <u>Do</u> about this? Additionally, co-researchers were asked for a brief description of each photograph (e.g., Where was it taken? When? What is going on in the photograph?) and were questioned as to why the particular photograph was taken (e.g., What were you trying to say about digital abuse with this photograph?). Depending on the picture and the co-researcher's sense-making about it, the interviewer asked co-researchers to further elaborate on their experience(s) with digital dating abuse. Once all of the photographs had been discussed, the interview concluded with any other questions from the co-researcher that had not previously been addressed.

Additionally, the researcher took detailed field notes, maintained a log, and completed contact summary forms after each interview. Miles and Huberman (1994) advised completing contact summary forms (see Appendix G for sample contact summary form) no more than one day after the initial interview. These forms allowed the researcher to reflect on key themes from the interviews, summarize information that might not have been collected during the interviews (but could be collected at another time), prepare for the next interview or point of contact with the co-researchers, and reconnect the subject when preparing the write-up. The contact summary forms proved to be beneficial as the researcher moved from one interview to the next. They served as building blocks, helping the researcher focus on emerging themes, highlighting key points and impressions from the interview, and helping rephrase unclear questions.

Presenting findings. Presenting the findings is a key element of any photovoice project. Outlined by Wang and Burris (1994), photovoice is uniquely positioned to change policies, opinions, and situations. Therefore, an important goal of this study is to

have the photographs be of use to both the researcher on a scholarly level and to the co-researchers on a practical level. Thus, the researcher will establish with the co-researchers the ways in which the project can be mutually beneficial. For example, the co-researchers might aim to present the findings at a city council meeting as a means to initiate a particular public action. Or, individual co-researchers may recognize a sense of empowerment from the photographs and overall experience, and remove themselves or help remove others from potentially dangerous or harmful relationships.

Data Analysis

Research projects grounded in phenomenology are crucial for "gaining insight into populations that have been muted within dominant societal structures" (Orbe, 1998, p. 12). The current study is phenomenological in nature. Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry is a human science that explores the lived experiences of people who have participated in a particular phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). Researchers look for the essence or central underlying themes related to the experience and derive general or universal meanings (Creswell, 2007). The phenomenological research approach involves three steps: (1) gathering descriptions of lived experiences; (2) reviewing capta to reveal essential themes; and (3) determining the interrelatedness of themes (Orbe, 1998).

The process is not exact, and interpretations of the same materials could vary (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In addition, de Laurentis (1984) cautions that the phenomenon being examined is not fixed; the construction of memories and experiences may change. According to Orbe (1998), "Because phenomenological researchers are consciously engaged in their own life world, interpretations change the instant that they view the

finished product and begin to reflect on it" (p. 237). This fluidity of interpretation, however, is not necessarily a limitation, as it contextualizes interpretations, making them implicitly reflective of one's own positionality in relation to dominant discourse. Thus, the phenomenological approach has proven to be an effective research tool when working with nondominant group members (Orbe, 1996).

In short, phenomenology represents a human science research method that studies the lived experiences of persons while remaining sensitive to the uniqueness of the person (van Manen, 1990). This qualitative method rigorously seeks to assign meaning to phenomena. Lanigan (1979, 1988) and others outline three steps in a phenomenological framework—description, reduction, and interpretation—that strive toward this objective. The first step in a phenomenological inquiry is gathering descriptions of lived experiences.

Phenomenological description. During the initial phase of this phenomenological study, in-depth interviews were used to gather descriptions of lived experiences of co-researchers. As such, primary data for this study consisted of transcripts and audio-taped interviews with ten young women who had experienced digital abuse in a past heterosexual romantic relationship. The audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed verbatim, producing approximately 182 pages of single-spaced data. The researcher repeatedly reviewed the transcripts for consistency with the audiotapes. Additionally, contact summary forms and the researcher's detailed field notes were used to verify the transcripts. The researcher followed-up with co-researchers if more information was needed, and conducted member checks with each participant in

order to ensure the information in the transcripts accurately reflected their interpretation of the interview.

For the purposes of this study, analysis began when the researcher conducted the first interview. According to Tesch (1990), one of the first tasks involved with phenomenological research is a conceptual one that requires researchers to identify their own preconceptions of the phenomenon under investigation. Research scholars refer to this process as bracketing (Husserl, 2006). This occurs when the researcher suspends his/her meaning and interpretations by setting them aside to enter the life world of the co-researchers. As Tesch (1990) maintains, some researchers write out their own biases as a means of being clear. However, he cautioned that phenomenological researchers must realize they cannot control all of their biases. Earlier in this chapter, the researcher explored her personal standpoint and addressed potential biases.

Phenomenological reduction. During the second phase of this phenomenological study, the co-researchers' descriptions of their lived experiences serve as fundamental recollections that the researcher typically logs via tape recordings and then onto written transcripts (Nelson, 1989). The process of transcribing interviews is important in phenomenological reduction because it represents an opportunity to become more aware of the phenomenon as consciously described by co-researchers (Nelson, 1989). Through this process, transcripts begin to "speak" to researchers, and themes, which are essential to the phenomena under study, begin to emerge from the text (Orbe, 1998, p. 42).

Transcripts were transcribed verbatim and read by the researcher numerous times to become familiar with the lived experiences described by the co-researchers. The

reduction phase required the researcher to read each transcript horizontally (Orbe, 1998), bracketing initial themes. Interrelated and redundant themes were placed under one broad heading, and unrelated themes were eliminated. While listening to the audio-taped interviews, the researcher made notes on the transcribed pages. Additionally, this process allowed the researcher to note similarities and differences in each life story shared by the co-researchers. Based on the research questions posed, the researcher coded each transcript for emergent themes.

The researcher listened to the audiotapes several times, which helped immerse the researcher in the data. This process also helped the researcher understand how the co-researchers described their everyday lived experiences. No notations were made during this initial process. Although time consuming, this process allowed the researcher to become familiar with the words of each of the co-researchers and to perform self-reflexive exploration. Following this process, the researcher read each transcript once without making any notations. During subsequent readings, the researcher read line-by-line, making corrections were needed. Words were added or deleted, spelling and grammatical mistakes were corrected, and paralinguistic features were ensured as the researcher continuously listened to the audiotapes. According to Nelson (1989), transcribing involves much more than simply transcribing verbatim. You must listen for and describe pauses, laughter, noises, and anything else that occurs. "Attention to paralinguistic features functions to discover the invisible, that which is not verbalized by the speaker, and that which was heard but not foregrounded by the hearer" (Nelson, 1989,

p. 230). The transcripts were reviewed repeatedly to ensure they accurately reflected the co-researchers experiences.

Before continuing analysis the co-researchers were each given a full transcript to review for accuracy. After receiving feedback from the co-researchers, analysis continued. Some of the co-researchers expressed that they were surprised at the level of detail in the transcripts, some made grammatical changes (not changing the context of the interview), and others needed clarification about how the researcher would actually present the data in the study.

After final corrections were made, the researcher, once again, listened to each transcript. This time, the researcher paid attention to each statement to see if and how it was related to each of the research questions. If the statement was relevant, notations were made in the margins that identified the specific piece of evidence that answered the research questions under study. For example, the code CS (communication strategies) was used to note co-researchers' lived experience of co-cultural communication strategies in digitally abusive relationships. Contact summary forms were also used to help the researcher reconnect and recall key insights gained during the initial interviews. Specifically, field notes and contact summary forms were reviewed and notations were made about recurring themes that emerged from the interviews and ones that were noted on contact summary forms.

Thematic analysis. The primary method of analysis was thematic analysis, in which the researcher categorized data by identifying recurring themes and patterns. According to Keyton (2006), a theme is a conceptualization of an interaction, a

relationship, or an event. Specifically, themes are identified in textual data based on three criteria: recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Recurrence is present when at least two parts of a report have the same thread of meaning. Recurrence is not simply repetition of the same words or phrase; different wording may result in the same meaning. Thus, this criterion focused on salient meaning. The second criterion, repetition, is the explicit repetition of key words, phrases, or sentences. The third criterion, forcefulness, is present when the data reveal vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pause which serve to stress and subordinate some utterances from others (Owen, 1984). The three criteria— recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness—can be found in participants' vocal or written records. Thus, when used they identify what the salient issues are and demonstrate the degree of salience for participants.

Additionally, Ryan and Bernard (2000) argue that theme identification is one of the "most fundamental tasks in qualitative research" (p. 1). The authors offer various techniques designed to assist researchers in the process of discovering themes in text, including: word repetitions, indigenous categories, keywords-in-context, compare and contrast, social science queries, searching for missing information, metaphors and analogies, transitions, connectors, unmarked texts, pawing, and cutting and sorting.

Following their thematic discovery techniques, Ryan and Bernard (2000) provide a model that guided thematic analysis for this study. While listening to audiotapes and reading through the transcripts, particular attention was given to transitions, which Ryan and Bernard (2000) describe as shifts in conversation and changes in tone. Additionally, during analysis the researcher searched the co-researcher's narratives for metaphors and

analogies. Finally, word repetition and recurrence were examined, as both helped the researcher identify salient issues for the co-researchers. Ultimately, these techniques assisted the researcher in identifying and making comparisons and contrasts between the co-researchers' lived communicative experiences.

During the initial phases of thematic analysis, breaking down the data, pawing was used. Pawing involves marking the transcripts with colored highlighters to indicate patterns in the text (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This same process was used with data generated from contact summary forms and field notes. In using this technique, the focus was on looking for salient themes specifically related to the research questions being investigated. Each transcript was read line-by-line to uncover information that specifically answered each of the research questions. For example, if the response was related to RQ1, then chunks of data were marked with a pink highlighter; and if it was related to RQ2, it was marked with a green highlighter; and so on. This was completed by paying attention to coding (e.g., CS) and other notations in the margins from earlier readings. For example, the codes DDA (forms of digital dating abuse), EXP (experiences of digital dating abuse), HEXP (experiences of digital dating abuse and health), CS (communication strategies), HCS (communication strategies and health), and PV (photovoice) were marked throughout each transcript. As Ryan and Bernard (2002) found:

> Coding serves two distinct purposes in qualitative analysis. First, codes act as tags to mark off text in a corpus for later retrieval or indexing. Tags are not associated

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with any fixed units of text; they can mark simple phrases or extend across

multiple pages. Second, codes act as values assigned to fixed units. (p. 782)

Once the transcripts were marked, the unmarked text was thoroughly examined. The

information that was not highlighted was considered rapport-building information;

various types of personal information about the co-researchers.

The final stages of thematic analysis involved cutting and sorting the text. Using

the researcher's personal computer, all text that was originally highlighted from the co-

researcher's transcripts and other data sources was cut and pasted into an Excel

spreadsheet. The highlighted text was pasted under each co-researcher's pseudonym to

clearly identify which one made the comments. For example, all text that was highlighted

as evidence from "Sally's" transcript was placed in one area of the spreadsheet under her

name until all information related to RQ1 was cut and pasted for each co-researcher. This

allowed clear distinction about who made the statements and in what context they were

made. This same process was followed for the remaining research questions. The process

described above allowed the researcher to reduce approximately 182 pages of single-

spaced data to 34 pages of single-spaced data.

Phenomenological interpretation. The third and final step in this

phenomenological study was interpretation. Nelson (1989) describes this step as one that

attempts to discover the interrelatedness among the themes that link the phenomenon

under investigation with consciousness. Furthermore, the goal of a phenomenological

interpretation is to find the meanings that were not immediately apparent in the earlier

steps. Merleau-Ponty (1962) refers to this operation as "hyper-reflection" or an

interpretation that incorporates its findings and then reexamines the initial interpretation. According to Nelson (1989), hyper-reflection is a process "which takes itself and the changes that it introduces into the phenomenon into further account" (p. 134). In this sense, the process of simultaneously thematizing, bracketing, interpreting, and then beginning the process again is described by Nelson (1989) as a hermeneutic spiral.

Within this reexamination of the interpretive process, one seemingly significant phrase will emerge and serve to interconnect all of the essential themes drawn from the co-researchers' description of their lived experiences (Orbe, 1998). Although often first passed by or discarded as unimportant, these relevant phrases manage to tap the essence of the phenomenon under investigation.

Once all 34 pages of the text were thematized, the patterns and trends were examined. Then, a list of 15 themes that emerged from the data collected from each co-researcher was compiled. Themes were developed from the words of the co-researchers. A matrix was built to visually display the data and allow the researcher to compare and contrast emerging themes by co-researcher. This matrix illustrated patterns, themes, and trends across the co-researcher's collective descriptions and responses. This display provided a means of identifying themes that emerged from each research question. During this stage, thematic descriptions among co-researchers were cross-checked and verified by the researcher.

Conclusion drawing and verification. Qualitative researchers use a different set of canons than traditional research to establish trustworthiness. Conventional terms such as internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity are replaced with

naturalistic terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability; a set of criteria for judging the soundness of qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, after themes were established, multiple co-researchers validated the accuracy of the themes through a process known as member-checking. Member-checking is the process of receiving feedback from participants (Creswell, 1994; Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007). When themes were established, co-researchers were contacted and asked to provide insight into whether the established themes were accurate representations of their experience. The researcher had phone conversations and, in some cases, met with co-researchers to answer any questions they had about the researcher's interpretations. Triangulation is another validation strategy that enables the researcher to improve the validity and reliability of a study by having other researchers or those involved with the phenomena, in this case co-researchers, review, provide input for, and correct (if necessary) data collection procedures (Creswell, 2007; Golafshani, 2003; Patton, 2001).

It is important to understand that the goal of qualitative research is not to generalize findings but rather to interpret events germane to one sample selected because of their ability to speak on the topic. Thus, the findings of this study are not generalizable to a larger population of women. Nelson (1989) citing Husserl articulated a strong point that speaks to transferability of phenomenological inquiry:

> …phenomenological procedures performed in one study cannot be exactly
> replicated in another, precisely because the phenomenological method is
> grounded in, and dependent upon, adhering to the specificity of the

experience/phenomenon under investigation, in addition, the method is dependent

upon its very performance, because how the researcher "lives" with the data

becomes a central feature of the research itself (p. 222).

That said, it is possible that the themes that emerged from this data may be similar to

those experienced by other women in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic

relationships. Thus, while this study may have limited external validity, the findings are

applicable to this population and likely for others who fit the criteria for inclusion in this

study.

Reliability is unique in qualitative studies due to the personal nature of the study.

However, in the interest of full disclosure and increased reliability, the researcher has

provided information about her position within the study and every effort was made to

make the data collection process as transparent as possible. All data collection tools are

provided in the appendices to this study and can be used to replicate a study of this

nature, with a similar sample, in the future.

Methods Summary

This study investigated the lived experiences of ten young women in digitally

abusive heterosexual romantic relationships. Specifically, the aim of this investigation

was to generate insight into the experiences and communicative strategies that young

women in digitally abusive heterosexual dating relationships identified as being critical to

succeeding in a dominant environment. As a result, the co-cultural communication

strategies that women identify could be used as positive health models for other women

in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships.

Data for this study were gathered through multiple methods including, pencil-and-paper questionnaires, audio-taped, semi-structured interviews, and digital photography. Phenomenological method of inquiry was used to illuminate the discourse of co-researchers who participated in this study. The purpose was not to generalize the information, but to elucidate the particular, the specific (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006). In addition, photovoice, a qualitative approach used to study the communicative experiences of diverse nondominant group members, was used as a way to capture a deeper level of understanding of young women's experiences with digital dating abuse. Through photovoice, co-researchers use cameras to take pictures that document various aspects of their daily lives. These photographs then become artifacts around which an in-depth interview and/or focus group is centered. Thus, co-researchers are able to "tell their story straight" in order to help scholars and activists understand the dimensions of social issues such as intimate partner abuse.

CHAPTER FIVE

Findings

This study investigated the lived communicative experiences of ten young women who had previously been involved in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships. Narrative research illuminated common experiences during in-depth interviews with these women. Specifically, 15 themes emerged in the clustering of significant statements provided by the co-researchers. With regard to forms of digital dating abuse, four themes were illuminated: (1) constant connection, (2) monitoring behaviors, (3) private becomes public, and (4) verbal assaults. Concerning co-researchers' experiences with digital dating abuse, three themes were presented: (5) controlling communication, (6) fear, and (7) abnormal/normal behaviors. Regarding the co-cultural strategies enacted by the young women, five themes emerged: (8) nonassertive assimilation, (9) assertive assimilation, (10) assertive accommodation, (11) aggressive accommodation, and (12) nonassertive separation. Finally, in relation to photovoice, three themes were revealed: (13) visually confirm the verbal, (14) tell stories in more depth, and (15) articulate aspects not previously considered. These accounts provide insight into the diverse communicative strategies and standpoints of the digitally abused women who participated in this study. Pseudonyms were used to refer to the co-researchers as well as other individuals reported in this section.

Forms of Digital Dating Abuse

The research question guiding this part of the qualitative analysis focused on the forms of digital dating abuse experienced by young women in heterosexual romantic relationships. Specifically, the research question asked: *What forms of digital dating abuse are experienced by young women in heterosexual romantic relationships?* Co-researchers discussed a wide variety of psychologically aggressive behaviors that occurred via digital technology such as stalking in cyberspace, posting incriminating photos, and texting harassing messages. Specifically, four interrelated themes emerged from in-depth interviews with co-researchers: (1) constant connection, (2) monitoring behaviors, (3) private becomes public, and (4) verbal assaults. Connected by the overarching premise of control, which is discussed further in regard to research question two, these thematic categories describe the types of digital abuse that may occur among heterosexual couples and how newer forms of technology may change how these messages are conveyed. As such, the themes provide more insight into the role of digital abuse in heterosexual romantic relationships. Table 4 provides a description of the four emergent themes.

Table 4

RQ1: Emerging Themes

Salient Themes for RQ1	Thematic Description
Constant Connection	Describes the constant and routine digital connection throughout the day (i.e., morning to night), via phone calls and text messages, in some instances consisting of 150-200 per day. Also includes the sending of persistent, unwanted calls, texts, or online messages.
Monitoring Behaviors	Describes the consistent monitoring of location and activity without permission. Specifically, co-researchers mentioned that their partners would use family members, friends, and social networking websites to track their physical location. Also includes monitoring digital devices and social networking websites to track activity and communication with others.
Private Becomes Public	Describes how private information between couples becomes public domain and the consequences associated with this exposure. Several co-researchers discussed how disgruntled partners used Internet sources such as social networking websites to harass, embarrass, or control them.
Verbal Assaults	Describes how forms of digital dating abuse were often accompanied by verbal assaults, such as yelling, hurtful language, swearing, name-calling, and put downs.

In addition, using a pencil-and-paper questionnaire, co-researchers were asked to

indicate, from a list of previously identified forms of digital abuse, which forms they had

experienced in their past heterosexual romantic relationships. These forms were used to

construct the above mentioned themes. The various forms of digital dating abuse, as they

pertain to each of the four interrelated themes, are identified in Table 5.

Table 5

Forms of Digital Dating Abuse

Salient Themes for RQ1	Form of Digital Dating Abuse	
Constant Connection	Sent repeated texts asking where you are or what you're doing	(100%)
	Sent persistent, unwanted calls, texts, or online messages	(90%)
Monitoring Behaviors	Checked cell phone to see who you are talking to or texting	(100%)
Private Becomes Public	Accessed online accounts without your permission	(20%)
	Shared private information electronically without your permission	(20%)
Verbal Assaults	Sent threatening or harassing messages online or via a cell phone	(30%)
	Sent sexually harassing messages online or via a cell phone	(30%)
	Spread rumors or has posted negative comments about you online	(20%)

Constant connection. One of the most common themes that emerged from the qualitative data was constant connection which includes routine and consistent communication or persistent, unwanted calls, texts, or online messages. Although a partner may not engage in physical acts of abuse using digital technology, intimate partners can use controlling techniques by communicating via cell phones, social networking websites, and other electronic devices. Amy discussed how her boyfriend maintained control through constant communication:

I'd wake up around 6:30 in the morning, and he'd be like have a nice day, you're beautiful, and usually I'd wake up and answer [the text message], but then if I were to go get ready and then come back he would have sent it twice, and been like are you okay, are you awake, which sounds concerning, like I hope she's not oversleeping, but it's like yes I was fine, I'm getting ready for school, which I'm going to now. And then I would text him like right up until homeroom, like turn off the phone, put it in the locker. And then I didn't really text during school

because if you got caught you had to get your parents to come in and get your

phone. Um, so then at the end of the day at 3:00, if I didn't text by 3:15 he was

like are you okay? What's going on? And then like while I was doing homework

it would be do two minutes of homework and then text, then do two more minutes

of homework then text, text nothing because there was nothing else new to talk

about. And then I usually went to bed like around 11:00, so around like 10:00 we

would talk on the phone for an hour, like every single night, so it was like

constant connection from like 3:00pm until 11:00pm.

Similarly, April recalls a typical day in her relationship and the pressure to be in constant

communication with her boyfriend from morning until night:

Yeah, there was like a good morning – like a morning text message, and there was

always a text message at night, and throughout classes we'd text, and [sports]

practice, we were texting each other all the time… Oh yeah, like there would be

times um, I work at the gym, and there would be times when I wouldn't have [my

cell phone] on me or if I did I wouldn't be able to text because I'm at work, and

like if I, I'd always put it on vibrate, and if I could hear it vibrate I'd go to the

bathroom really quick and respond, and like come back out, and there were times

when I felt like I needed it.

Romantic partners can also exert control over their significant other by

continuously sending persistent, unwanted calls, texts, or online messages. Katie and

April discussed their experiences:

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(Katie): I told him I'd call him when I got home, but my cousins were both in from college, so they came over to my house and we were talking, and I could hear my phone ringing upstairs. I didn't think anything of it. And then my cell phone rang. And it was him, and I pressed ignore and was like I'd call him back. Then my house phone rang again, then my cell phone rang again, then my house phone rang, then I heard a beep where somebody left a message, then my cell phone rang, house phone, cell phone, back and forth. He ended up calling a total of around 34 times between those two phones, left a couple messages on my house phone, a couple messages on my cell phone.

(April): I think the most I've ever gotten, which I realized when I was looking back, would be 27 without me responding. And then five phone calls. 27 texts and five phone calls. I don't know, I'd say that's definitely not normal...

Other co-researchers recounted their experiences with constant forms of digital communication from their boyfriends, including phone calls to family members and friends. Two of the young women also discussed receiving "double-texts," or the same text message sent multiple times, from their boyfriends. Laurie and Debbie explained:

(Laurie): He would like text me a bunch of times like the same text over and over and over. Has anyone ever done that to you... like a million... like sent like a million... like sent like a mass text to you? Hmmm... it's awful. They can like... there's something... I don't have a fancy phone like that, but they can send like a 150 text like simultaneously and it'll just come to your phone...

(Debbie): Um, it was a constant calling my house. If I wouldn't answer my cell

phone it was calling my house and um, and if I didn't again answer the first time

it would be constant. Or he'd call one of my friends I was with or he wouldn't

believe them and he'd try to call like numerous people. Um, there was a constant

texting and if again I didn't answer the text it was again would start with the calls.

If I ignored the calls they'd keep coming. And it would just be like constantly…

in the middle of the night… like 4:00am and he'd be calling me and telling me

like… yelling at me or something… He called me, he ruined my first frat

experience ever because he was calling me [all night]... I would say every five

minutes at least through three hours, so it was a lot.

While the increased use of digital technologies continues to become a prominent

part of social life among teens and young adults, these digital devices also allow abusers

to feel constantly connected to (and within reach of) their dating partner, who often feels

that there is no escape from the torment. This may be enhanced by the fact that co-

researchers and their significant others constantly had their cell phones with them both

day and night. Consequently, maintaining a constant connection with one's partner may

be related to issues of power and control, perhaps the most important underlying issues in

intimate partner abuse (IPA).

Monitoring behaviors. Another form of digital dating abuse that the co-

researchers discussed was how their boyfriends would consistently monitor their location

and activity without their permission. Specifically, co-researchers mentioned that their

partners had used family members and friends to track their physical location. For

example, Amy described the following situation that includes control through monitoring behavior:

> I just turned my phone off. And I was with a close friend, and he was like texting her, can you get Amy to turn on her phone? Can you do whatever, like can you get her to talk to me?

Similarly, April and Kelly described more extreme situations in which their boyfriends monitored their whereabouts through family members and friends:

> (April): He'd be like back to back. There were times when he'd be like hey, and if I wouldn't respond in five minutes he'd be like hey, what are you doing? Okay, obviously you don't want to talk to me. I really don't know why you don't want to talk to me. I don't know what I did. We haven't been fighting. What's going on? And he'd call, and he'd call again, and my sister and I used to share a house line, and he would call my cell phone, the house line, and then he'd call my sister, and there were times when he would call my roommate and be like is she with you? Where is she? And she'd be like I don't know where she is. And he would be like well when was the last time you saw her?

> (Kelly): I wanted to go to bed [early], and some nights I would text him and be like I can't stay up, I have to be up really early tomorrow, and I was like I'm going to bed, and even though I would turn my phone on silent, he would still text me… But there were times when he thought I was lying, and he had the number to my little sister, and she's like oh she's in her room sleeping, and then he would like – he wouldn't question me about that, but I didn't know he was texting her

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until later on in the relationship. She came up to me and was like you know he's

texted me like three times today asking me where you were, and I was like no I

didn't know that. So then she told me he had been doing that throughout the

relationship. If I was going to bed early and he wasn't sure, he would text a family

member to check.

In addition, boyfriends can monitor the social networking websites of their

girlfriends in order to keep track of their physical location. For example, Laurie described

how her boyfriend would monitor her position through family members and friends, as

well as through social networking websites such as Facebook:

He would call me a couple of times and if I didn't answer he would call whoever

he thought I was with. It was like he would either call Jamie or he would call…

like our best friends or he would call like my roommates. Um, and then if… and if

none of them answered he would just get frustrated and like try to reach me other

ways. I don't know… like see if I was on Facebook or like… different things like

that, like it was just overload.

Partners can also monitor the actual digital devices, such as cell phones and

computers, as well as the social networks of their significant others. For instance, many

of the co-researchers described situations in which their boyfriends would scrutinize their

cellular and social networking activity. April and Kelly explained:

(April): There would be times when I would leave my phone down and go in the

other room, and when I would come back he would be like oh, so and so texted

you, um, and I'd be like okay. I'd lift up my phone, and you know usually it

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would say the person's name and then like a text message or whatever, but it

wouldn't say that because he'd already opened it and read it.

(Kelly): Both Facebook and MySpace were the biggest problems other than

texting. He would stalk my pages and like look at my activity, and Facebook is

obviously more stalkerish than MySpace, so he continuously would read anything

that people posted on my wall and he would go to their pages and see who they

were, and he wasn't really concerned with girls, it was just the guys... he used to

question me about my Facebook if someone commented on my wall, and one time

he demanded that I log on to Facebook and was like show me you haven't been

emailing these people private messages. So I had to like prove to him to try to

calm down that there was nothing to worry about.

Different forms of digital technology enable partners to monitor their girlfriends'

private conversations. As indicated in the previous example, these monitoring behaviors

may spark an abusive altercation. Because monitoring behaviors are ways in which

partners can exert continuous control, the previously mentioned situations are potential

examples of digital dating abuse.

Private becomes public. Co-researchers also illustrated how private information

between couples can become public domain and the consequences associated with this

exposure. Some forms of interpersonal communication via technology are more private

than others. For example, conversations that occur through cell phone calls are more

confidential than insults posted on social networking websites. Several of the young

women discussed how disgruntled boyfriends used Internet sources such as Facebook or

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MySpace to publicly harass and embarrass them. Julie, for instance, discussed how her former partner used these communication methods:

> If I would send him pictures or anything people would be like oh I saw that picture you sent him and it would just like get around and everyone would be like oh, that's awkward, and they would like make fun of me and stuff. One day he like – one of my friends calls me into the bathroom and she's like oh I have something to show you. My boyfriend just got this text, and it was a picture of me and it didn't have my face, um, but it had my name at the bottom. It was like Julie Smith, pass it on, and they were passing it on to everyone at my school, everyone, because her boyfriend went to a rival school, everyone at that rival school, and the other rival school. And people had been forwarding it, and resending it, and to like everyone… I would go to country concerts or I would go to places and people I didn't know would be looking at me and they would be like oh I know her, and I would just be like hi, and I would start getting friend requests from guys from all different schools, and I was like I don't know you. And they would start messaging me and be like oh hey, I'm so and so, I don't know. It was just horrible.

Not only can others learn about a couple's indiscretions online, but they can even join in the harassment. Julie talked about what happened when her boyfriend posted negative comments about her online:

> He would go on Facebook and he would start commenting on my pictures, and then get all of his other friends to comment on it, and they would have

conversations that were like pages long on my pictures. Giving me over 100, 200 conversations and in-between the conversations they would talk shit about me, like in the middle I would sit there and read through all of it, which was annoying, but sometimes I would find things, like they would say things about me… It just got ridiculous, and I don't know.

Other co-researchers commented on how their boyfriends would access their cell phones and online accounts without permission, another example of private becoming public. Becky and Julie stated:

(Becky): I think that he would like jokingly, he would make it look like he wasn't [looking through my phone]. He would say he was playing a game or something like that – he would make it look like he was doing something else on my phone, but I knew he was going through my messages. And then, but it wasn't as suspicious sounding as it sounds now. Because it was like – it seemed like he was joking, or he'd be like oh who are you texting? And look through my phone, but I guess at the time I didn't realize that he was seriously looking I thought he was just messing with me.

(Julie): One time, I don't know how, but he liked hacked into my Facebook, and he was like reading all these messages between all my friends and brining up little things from guys, and I wasn't cheating on him or anything, but if I even talked to another guy he would like just freak out and bring it up.

These psychologically aggressive behaviors, once considered private exchanges between the couples, constitute digital dating abuse.

Verbal assaults. Data from co-researchers also indicated that digital dating abuse may be a precursor for other types of abuse. While many of the young women in this study experienced threats or harassment via cell phones or the Internet, they were often accompanied by verbal assaults, such as yelling, hurtful language, swearing, name-calling, and put downs. For example, Debbie and Julie described their experiences:

> (Debbie): I mean, it would be all those derogatory terms like slut, skank, hoe, like um, he'd call me like I was a pussy for not like sending him pictures or like that I wouldn't stand up to him or something. And like, he would um, he would just yell at me every time. He would bring up like my whole past if I wouldn't answer him. He's like I'm going to tell everyone like anything you've ever done, like you're such like a skank and uh, and like I don't know why I'm with you. And he would just put me down. And um, but those… that's what I remember the most… he would just yell at me and like threaten um, just little things.

> (Julie): So he would call me when I would go to sleep and leave me like hateful voicemails. Like calling me a bitch and calling me a whore and all this stuff, like really mean things, and like calling me on holidays, and when I didn't even expect it too. And call me and bitch me out and everything, and I just didn't understand it.

Similarly, Kelly explained how her boyfriend would use hurtful words and name-calling to verbally assault her through digital technology:

> He'd call me a lot of names if he was accusing me. He'd call me a bitch and a slut most of the time, god knows what else. He'd send me messages accusing me of

all the guy friends I have – like oh no, you're sleeping with so and so, you're

dating so and so. And I'm like no, you need to just calm down, and most of the

time I'd be at work when he was doing this, so I would have to go to the

bathroom and look at my phone then get back to work.

The examples above illustrate the damaging role of digital technologies in IPA.

Specifically, they highlight how digital devices can be used to perpetrate digital dating

abuse, both psychologically and verbally.

Photovoice and forms of digital dating abuse. Through the use of photovoice,

co-researchers discussed elements of digital dating abuse using both in-depth interviews

and photographs. With regard to the first salient theme, two of the young women

illustrated digital dating abuse as a constant connection by supplying photographs of

"random electronics" and a "flooded inbox." The first photograph represents the various

digital devices that co-researchers often used in order to keep continuous communication

with their boyfriends, while the second photographs illustrates an inundated inbox with

text messages from one of the co-researcher's boyfriends; a constant image in her

everyday life. Amy and Becky stated:

(Amy): This is just like having to constantly be in contact, so I just grabbed

random electronics from my room, just like always having to be in contact

somehow… unless I had something I was doing.

Figure 2. Variety of digital devices used to represent constant connection.

(Becky): Oh, this just reminded me, this just randomly popped into my phone one day when I turned my phone on. And if you look at the date it says 12-31-69, like that was before I was born. But it was just my whole thing was flooded, and my inbox says two, but there's like when I opened it up it was a whole page of the same no sender, no subject messages, so it just reminded me of all the missed calls, um, because I used to look at my phone and decline it and decline it, and I think just at one point if I didn't want to talk I would put it on vibrate and just walk away. And then when I would come back later it would be flooded with missed calls.

Figure 3. Flooded inbox of text messages used to represent constant connection.

Julie's photograph adds another dimension to digital dating abuse. Specifically,

she mentioned that constant communication occurs whether or not a person is in direct

contact with their romantic partner. For example, she recounted a time when her

boyfriend was constantly text messaging her on a shopping trip to the mall with her sister.

Although she was not responding to his text messages, "he knew that I would see it and

he kept sending them over and over and over again." Even though Julie and her boyfriend

were not in direct contact, he was able to maintain control through constant

communication:

> I remember going shopping with my sister and I remember – like I couldn't even
>
> shop because my phone just kept going off. And Trevor was trying to constantly
>
> contact me, and I was getting angry. And sometimes I would respond, and she
>
> was like no, don't say anything back. And that's kind of why I took that picture.

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That's what it reminded me of… It was the whole day basically. They were

paragraphs long and they were one after the other and there was barely any time

in between. And it was rambling and ranting. At first I was responding and that's

when my sister was like let's shop, let's not think about it, and I couldn't even go

shopping because I was getting mad, and I finally put my phone away, but it kept

going off and he kept constantly texting me… he would just keep going. Because

he knew that I would see it and he kept sending them over and over and over

again.

Figure 4. Shopping mall used to represent constant connection.

Other co-researchers used photographs to represent how private information

between couples can become public domain. For instance, Debbie used a photograph of

lingerie that her boyfriend had purchased for her in order to help explain her experiences

of private information becoming public. Specifically, she recalled a time when her boyfriend posted an embarrassing photo of her online:

> That would be the typical thing that um, he would ask me to send. Was, he used to buy me stuff. He'd buy me a bunch of lingerie and he'd be like just wear this for me, like when we're together but, I mean last year a lot of it was pictures because we were away. Um, I mean, a lot of couples will do it if they're comfortable with each other, if they're going to like, I don't know, so I thought it was like a normal thing, and uh… he would send me stuff like packages of this and be like okay, you know, take pictures and wear that. And so, that just was one of the ones he sent me. And I just thought like, um, oh, it can't be horrible, it's harmless, I'll take the picture, can wear it for when we're back at home, it'll be okay and like, it ended up being one of those pictures online.

Figure 5. Lingerie used to represent private becomes public.

By using photographs to discuss the various forms of digital dating abuse, co-researchers were able to both verbally and visually illustrate their lived experiences. For example, the theme constant connection is confirmed through young women's stories of routine and consistent communication with their boyfriends as well as through their photographs of "random electronics" and a "flooded inbox," which visually represent the same concept. As such, these findings allow for a more accurate and credible portrayal of digital dating abuse.

Experiences Regarding Digital Dating Abuse

The research question guiding this part of the qualitative analysis focused on the young women's lived experiences with digital dating abuse. Specifically, the research question asked: *What are young women's experiences regarding digital dating abuse in heterosexual romantic relationships?* Through in-depth interviews three interrelated themes emerged: (1) controlling communication, (2) fear, and (3) abnormal/normal behaviors. These thematic categories may be reflective of the lived experiences that occur among many young women in heterosexual romantic relationships. As such, the themes provide more insight into the role of digital abuse between heterosexual romantic couples. Table 6 provides a description of the three emergent themes.

Table 6

RQ2: Emerging Themes

Salient Themes for RQ2	Thematic Description
Controlling Communication	Describes the attempt to gain power over another through commanding and threatening forms of digital communication.
Fear	Describes the terror experienced by co-researchers in response to their partner's controlling communication.
Abnormal/Normal Behaviors	Describes co-researchers perplexing experiences with digital dating abuse. Specifically, the young women knew something was wrong, or that their partner's actions were "not normal," but at the same time were also "not a big deal."

Controlling communication. While the traditional view of IPA attributes the problem to either poor anger management skills or to individual pathology, most often abusive behaviors are not about expressing anger as much as they are about exercising control. That is, IPA is not merely a result of partners frequently losing their temper or turning psychotic. Rather, it is about one partner explicitly attempting to exercise systematic control over the other partner. Control may include physical and/or psychological manipulation and intimidation; and using mental duress, threats, put downs, and other forms of coercion to control a romantic partner's behavior. Through in-depth interviews the young women exposed numerous incidents of controlling communication enacted by their boyfriends. For example, Debbie explained how her boyfriend would control her physical location when talking on the phone:

> So um, it just progressively… and even when I got to college he would call me
> every night. I'd have to walk out of my dorm. I had a roommate. So I'd have to

walk out of my dorm um in like the cold and walk around because he was like I don't want anyone hearing our conversation.

Using information that was sent privately between partners to influence behavior is another dimension of control related to digital dating abuse. For example, Debbie explained how her former boyfriend would use pictures she had sent him privately to manipulate her physical and emotional behavior whenever they got into arguments:

That's, um, that reminds me of that one night, that one night where I saw like the little red check in my messages of him explaining to me why I had the pictures up there, um that they can be taken down as soon as like I would call him… he put the um, pictures up on Facebook because I had hung up on him and because I wouldn't answer again, so the message was about you need to call me back right now or these pictures are staying up here. Like I want everyone to see them, to see how much of a slut you are… He would threaten to put them up online when we got into fights and that was probably the worst is when he actually put them on Facebook. I actually had to um, have my friends like constantly monitor Facebook and like make sure nothing was up there because he made it so I could only see it and then I was petrified that everyone else could see. And like that's not something I needed to deal with. And it was just embarrassing and as like a female, like, I don't know. I felt violated.

Another co-researcher described her ex-boyfriend's digitally controlling behavior as "he's always there, even if he's not." Because abusers can easily monitor their dating partners by frequently checking on them through cell phones, text or instant messenger,

or popular social media sites such as Facebook or MySpace, they can exert almost constant control over a partner both day and night. April explained:

> And this one is like he had seen my Facebook profile picture, and you look great. And I was like, great; it's like one of those things where it's like he's always there, even if he's not. Even if I'm not placing him there, if I'm not reaching out to talk to him he's there anyway.

Many of the co-researchers echoed these sentiments. In particular, the young women felt as though they were being controlled not only by their boyfriend's behavior, but also by the digital devices themselves. For example, several co-researchers described feeling a constant pressure to have their cell phones or other digital devices with them at all times, and one of the young women mentioned that she felt "digitally dependent" with regard to her cell phone and computer. Sally and Becky recalled similar experiences:

> (Sally): Probably daily he would call me and he would want to talk for hours at a time up to like one o'clock in the morning on a school night, and I had so much homework to do and he wouldn't understand that I wouldn't want to talk to him… that I would just want to do my work… like focus on my academics. But he insistently kept calling like every hour, even if I would tell him… he'd be like okay, I'll leave you alone and give you your space, but then he would get angry overtime that I would want my space… because he wanted so much attention…
>
> (Becky): Because it was like when you're - that was one of the biggest things because I felt like I was waiting all the time, not all the time, but those are the times that stick out and you feel the craziest because you're waiting. Waiting for a

phone call, and then you're calling them or texting them and they're not answering, and it was constantly checking what time it was to see how long it had been since I sent my last message, or got a message, or whatever it was.

Katie illustrated another type of controlling communication with regard to digital abuse. Specifically, she described how her ex-boyfriend would constantly analyze her Facebook page, telling her which photos she was allowed to keep on her page and which photos she would have to delete. She also mentioned how he would consistently look through her cell phone call logs, telling her which friends she was allowed to speak to and which friends she was not allowed to contact anymore. Katie stated:

He always called me going through my Facebook, he was always looking at stuff on Facebook, and he wanted to – me to delete certain pictures, or you have pictures of your ex [boyfriend] up there, and like it's a picture. So I'd delete some pictures but I wouldn't think anything of it. And he'd go through another album, and then there would be another issue, and that would start getting more and more annoying, and there were some pictures I would delete and there were others I would make private, like so only I could see them, or only he can't see them. And it wouldn't be an issue. And then it would be an issue of who's texting me. He wouldn't, he would always ask to borrow my phone, because at the time he didn't have his cell phone, so he would ask to borrow mine, to like text somebody real quick, or call somebody, but then he's going through them, and he'd make a big deal. I see um your ex still texts you…

As previously stated, abuse is often about one partner explicitly attempting to exercise systematic control over the other partner. In the previous examples, boyfriends use controlling communication by manipulating and/or restricting their partner's behavior through digital means. Because this type of communication is a way in which partners can exert continuous control over their girlfriends, the aforementioned situations are potential examples of digital dating abuse.

Fear. According to Ohman (2000), fear is a distressing negative sensation induced by a perceived threat and is often invoked by a romantic partner in order to gain their significant others' compliance with their demands. As a result, victims may overcompensate in various ways. In this study, co-researchers acknowledged being fearful of their boyfriends for diverse reasons. Most often, the young women reacted to the pervasive fear of discrimination by their partners, family members, and friends. Specifically, co-researchers discussed a persistent fear of disconcerting their boyfriends, being "judged" or embarrassed, and not knowing what to do. As a response, co-researchers would often conduct themselves in a manner inconsistent with their own wants and needs. Because this behavior can also be viewed as a co-cultural strategy, a brief example is provided below and a more thorough explanation is further discussed in regard to research question three.

Karen discussed the constant fear of not wanting to upset her boyfriend. She explained how she would always have her cell phone with her, never putting it down or shutting it off, so as not to make her boyfriend angry. She explained:

Um, no because I didn't want him to get upset so I would like… I would always

have my phone on me. Um, and there was never like a time where I would shut it

off so that like I wouldn't answer him, like wouldn't talk to him… just because I

didn't want to make him upset. I know one time I was studying and I was like

"I'm studying… like I really just need to study. Can I talk to you later?" That was

the only time that I ever like put the phone away and like didn't talk to him for

like two hours… it was like two or three hours… and it was at night so like that

was kind of like a big deal.

Realizing that their boyfriend's controlling behaviors were not normal, other co-

researchers described a persistent fear of being judged by family members and friends.

Specifically, the young women discussed their hesitation in not wanting to talk to others

about their abusive situations out of fear of being labeled "ridiculous" or "crazy" by

family and friends. Kelly and April illustrated:

(Kelly): [I talked to] my best friend at the time. We had known each other for a

long time and she had been there through some of my past break-ups and she was

like you do realize this is ridiculous, people shouldn't do this to you, and I was

like yeah I know, and she would do it on a very friendly level but she wasn't

trying to attack me. But she was probably the only one I confided in and told

because I didn't want anyone judging me.

(April): So I mean there were times like this, there were a lot of times like this,

where it would be situations where I kind of thought it was weird, but I thought if

I told anybody about it they'd be like this is crazy, you need to seek some kind of help, but I didn't.

Another fear that many of the co-researchers discussed was a constant fear of being publicly humiliated by their boyfriends. For example, one of the young women described the pressure of sending her boyfriend private photos and the constant fear of whether or not her boyfriend would share those photos with others. As her story went on, Debbie mentioned that her boyfriend would often use the photos as a bargaining tool in getting her to do what he wanted; another aspect of this pervasive fear of embarrassment. Debbie explained:

It would be anywhere from just topless to lingerie to being naked… just… it all ranged. Because he would ask for certain pictures. He'd be like oh send me this today, send me this… and then. Like I even felt upset when I was doing it. Like taking pictures of myself I didn't think that was normal. Like I don't want to send that around because I was scared that it would get around… to the Internet, but he always said they're safe with me, I love you, I would never hurt you. And that just led to him actually hurting me and me getting publicly embarrassed.

Co-researchers also discussed a fear of not knowing what to do about being in a digitally abusive relationship. Many of the young women mentioned that they were confused about who they could talk to for help, as they thought most people would not be able to understand their situation. For example, Julie described "not knowing what to do, where to go, or who to talk to:"

I remember the person that I talked to – that I thought would understand the most was my biological older sister, and she kind of seemed to understand, but not really, and she kept trying to just like downplay it and be like oh, you know, like, it's fine, and it just made me mad that she didn't understand. So then I didn't try to explain it to other people, and I think I tried to tell my mom, and the fact that the two people who are closest to me didn't really understand or care as much kind of made me like, why don't you understand? It scared me. And they're like it's fine, it'll pass, just don't talk to him, and I'm like you don't understand, he keeps sending me messages. I'm not saying anything back!

Other co-researchers illustrated an insidious fear of harm. Specifically, they were worried that their boyfriend's "crazy" behavior would lead to other extremes such as physical harm. While the young women had not directly experienced physical abuse in their relationships, many of them inherited the fear of those women who had and explained its accompanying discomfort. Julie stated:

I think I felt really insecure, and just unsafe. And I didn't know what he – since he would say all these things I didn't know what to expect, and especially with all of the crazy things you hear on the news, with things going on and it scared me. Like one day he could come to my dorm, like he knows where I live, and one day he could come to my dorm and get really angry, and especially if he has mental problems, like, I just felt so unsafe and I felt like as I got older I realized how creepy and not okay it was.

Kelly and Katie experienced a similar fear of physical harm:

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(Kelly): I felt kind of depressed and alone. And I really felt insecure because I wasn't sure how to deal with it, and I didn't know how to get out of it. And then I was slightly scared because you're like showing up at my house uninvited, even if we're dating unless I invite you here you don't belong here, this is my territory. And taking my phone and stuff made me feel really vulnerable, I don't know why, but I felt really uncomfortable.

(Katie): At that point I felt unsafe. He did know where I lived, and I didn't want to have random people show up at my house or things like that. I mean, I did change my number, but I'm living at home, there's my mom, and then we also have foster sisters, and so I was like okay I definitely don't want people showing up like this, but luckily we had a – one of the sheriffs living around our area and he was like okay, I'll keep an eye out.

Abuse through the destruction of a person's self-esteem or a sense of safety, often occurs in relationships where there is an imbalance in power or control. Behaviors of dominance, such as those illustrated above, have been viewed as a means to gain power in abusive relationships, often times out of fear on behalf of the victim. As such, the aforementioned situations are potential examples of digital dating abuse.

Abnormal/Normal behaviors. Although previous studies have found digital dating abuse to be a common college experience and a form of psychological abuse, it is often not considered abusive behavior early (or at all) in the dating relationship and therefore may go unreported. In the current study, co-researchers acknowledged that there was something "not normal" about their boyfriends' controlling behaviors, but also

considered the same behaviors "not a big deal." Instead of recognizing their boyfriend's controlling behaviors as abuse, the young women described the abusive behaviors as "annoying," "weird," or "ridiculous." Specifically, Julie and Karen described their boyfriends' abusive behaviors as "crazy" and "weird:"

(Julie): It was crazy, I realized it wasn't normal, and I tried to tell my family and they tried to tell me it was normal, and I was like no, this is creepy, and it got to the point where I wanted to like call Verizon or call the cops or something. I think I was the one who came to realize it wasn't normal.

(Karen): He went through my phone and I didn't even notice until like probably later that night. I was just looking through my phone because when you open my contacts it goes to the last person you were looking at and it was like a P and I was like, "Wait, where is Peter's number?" And then he was like "Oh, I deleted it." And I was like "Okay… that's fine." It was kind of weird...

The young women also described their boyfriend's abusive behaviors as "not a big deal" and "like whatever." For example, Kelly and Amy explained their boyfriend's controlling behaviors as unimportant:

(Kelly): If I went to the bathroom he read my phone, and at first I didn't know it or it didn't matter. And if I fell asleep or if I slept over at his house he would actually send text messages to random guys in my phone, and he was smart enough to delete them, so I didn't realize it most of the time… I started noticing my phone was always moved when I had come back into the room, but it didn't bother me that much it was like whatever.

(Amy): And so there's a lot of drama with that, or like, there's one instance where I was going to go hang out with two guys from my youth group, and they're like brothers to me so it wasn't a weird thing, but they like wrote on my wall, and he saw that, and he was like is this why you can't hang out with me on Sunday afternoon, or whatever, so I guess that's like digital drama, which wasn't that big of a deal…

Similarly, Karen described how her boyfriend looked through her cell phone and deleted all of her ex-boyfriends' contact information without her permission. She followed-up by stating that she did not "really mind" the controlling behavior exhibited by her boyfriend:

When he actually came to visit for the first time he like deleted all my ex-boyfriends out of my phone, which I didn't really mind because I didn't talk to them anyway… but I, well, I was just – I didn't really care because I didn't really talk to the people that he deleted anyway. I just had the number in my phone just because it had been there. Um, I didn't necessarily like it because I didn't delete stuff out of his phone, but I mean I didn't not like it. I was just like neutral…I didn't really care.

In order to further justify the digital dating abuse as unimportant, the young women often cited reasons such as being "young and naïve" or thinking "it was nothing." For example, Julie and Debbie conveyed:

(Julie): I would send texts to him and he would end up showing other people that were in his grade, and I would find out about it, but I wasn't offended by it at the time because I was just like oh, I'm flattered. I was like oh it's my boyfriend,

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whatever… it wasn't like he was doing it in a revenge way, it was more like he was doing it in like a bragging way, because that's how he was at that age. It was him trying to show off.

(Debbie): And then it would, uh, sometimes he would start with the pictures. A lot of people I guess when you're young it's the cool thing to do, and he would ask like send me this, send me that, and like me being young and naïve, like I just thought it was nothing and he would um, constantly tell me like everyone's doing it, everyone's doing it, so I would do it…

While co-researchers acknowledged that something was wrong with their boyfriends' abusive behaviors, in many instances they did not take it seriously or consider his harmful actions as important. Consequently, many of the young women did not acknowledge that there was a serious problem until late in the relationship, often when it was too late. Categorizing digital dating abuse as non-problematic may be harmful, both mentally and physically, to young women in digitally abusive relationships.

Photovoice and experiences regarding digital dating abuse. Through the use of photographs, co-researchers discussed their experiences with digital dating abuse. For instance, Kelly explained the concept of controlling communication through one of her photographs. Specifically, she captured the image of a woman sitting alone with her cell phone. As she described the image, she explained her feelings of depression and being controlled by an inanimate object. Kelly stated:

Uh, it's a picture of a girl sitting there texting, and I felt like that's kind of how

my life was, I was very depressed but I felt like I was being controlled by my

phone, and it's an inanimate object, and I didn't feel like that was right.

Figure 6. Girl texting used to represent boyfriend's controlling behavior.

Similarly, Laurie represented controlling communication through one of her photographs.

She captured the image of a couch; specifically, the exact couch that her boyfriend would

insist she sit on while talking to him on the phone. Laurie explained her boyfriend's

abusive behavior:

Um, this one is of my phone on the couch. Um, that's… he was like really like

every night he would text me and he would ask me to call him and um, but he

would like really be specific about where I was when I talked to him. It was really

weird. Like I had to be like sitting down on the couch, like he'd be like oh, like go

to the couch that… like he'd just name a specific couch… like I'd have to sit on that one when I'd talk to him. It was really weird… kind of.

Figure 7. Cell phone on "the couch" used to represent behavioral control.

Additionally, co-researchers used photographs to represent the various types of fear they experienced in their digitally abusive relationships. For example, Sally and Laurie used photographs to help them describe the fear of not knowing what to do or who to talk to about being in an abusive relationship. Specifically, the young women used photographs of a window and a chained fence to visually depict their feelings of being "trapped" in digitally abusive relationships:

(Sally): Um, this is a picture like looking outside of a window. I guess it's to represent me feeling kind of trapped… not knowing what to do, where to go, or who to talk to… specifically because no one else could understand how I felt or what I was going through.

Figure 8. Window used to represent fear of being trapped.

(Laurie): Um, this one is like my [friend's] backyard with a chain around it. That's like the door to get back there and um, this kind of represented the feeling of like being trapped and like not being able to say anything like serious, and anything that would matter in the relationship. I think that's a reason why I didn't like talk to him or say anything to him because I was like it's not going to matter… he's not going to listen to me. So, um, yeah… just that represents my feeling of being trapped.

Figure 9. Chain on fence used to represent fear of being trapped.

Other co-researchers used photographs to describe the unusual and unimportant behaviors their boyfriends enacted. For instance, April used a photograph of a text message from her ex-boyfriend to represent his abusive behavior as "not normal." She stated:

Um, this was a good example [of a text message sent by my ex-boyfriend], I see the light was on in your bedroom. And a lot of times I would laugh because I thought it was funny, like you can't really be outside of my room, you can't be driving by, because you can't see my bedroom from the street, so you would have to get out of your car to see it. And I would be like this is really crazy, and he'd be like yeah, well, I'm here. Like, I just wanted to see what you were doing, and as you can see it's 11:19 at night. That's not – you know – normal… This was creepy, this isn't normal.

Figure 10. Text message sent by boyfriend used to represent his unusual behavior.

Through photographs co-researchers were able to verbally and visually illustrate their lived experiences regarding digital dating abuse. For example, the theme controlling communication was explored through one co-researcher's verbal description of her boyfriend's controlling behaviors as well as through a photograph of a couch that reminded her of his degrading demands. As such, employing a multi-method approach may allow for a more accurate and credible portrayal of the phenomenon under study.

Additionally, the use of visual imagery in conjunction with in-depth interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of the various types of fear experienced by the young women. While describing photographs related to their experiences with digital dating abuse, two of the young women illustrated feelings of being "trapped" in their abusive relationships; a response to their boyfriend's controlling behaviors. Thus, photographs allowed for a deeper understanding of digital dating abuse, something that could have been missed if only drawing interpretations from one data collection procedure.

Impact of Digital Dating Abuse on Health

The research question guiding this part of the qualitative analysis focused on the young women's health in regard to their lived experiences with digital dating abuse. Specifically, the research question asked: *How do these experiences impact young women's health?* The co-researchers discussed a wide variety of emotional, physical, and social health effects as a result of digital dating abuse. Particularly, the young women revealed 13 different health effects of digital dating abuse. The most commonly identified health effects were stress and depression. The complete list of health effects related to digital dating abuse is identified in Table 7.

Table 7

Health Effects of Digital Dating Abuse

Health Effects of Digital Dating Abuse
Stress
Depression
Anxiety
Loneliness
Fear
Low Self-Esteem
Fatigue
Seclusion
Binge Drinking
Binge Smoking
Acne
Migraine Headaches
Relationship Termination

Consistent with other forms of IPA, digital dating abuse is associated with elevated levels of distress. Many of the co-researchers agreed that their boyfriend's abusive behaviors were "stressing them out." For example, Amy described being "super stressed out" and feeling a lot of pressure regarding her digitally abusive relationship. She explained the incessant pressure from her boyfriend to be in constant communication with him, never having time for her other commitments. Amy stated:

I was super stressed out, and part of it was like I had all of the control, so it was like all of the expectations were on me. Um, and then I felt like I was always the one that was disappointing because I cannot talk to you right now, and he was never saying I can't talk to you right now except for football, which was like two hours. Um, so that definitely stressed me out… Um, well I was really stressed out, and like I definitely think that he – people never said anything to me about that,

but after I broke up with him people were like oh now you're so much more free.

So, by default, I guess they noticed. Just feeling stressed out, a lot of pressure. Similarly, Becky described her experience with a highly stressful digitally abusive ex-boyfriend. Not only did she feel overwhelmed by his abusive behaviors, she also had to see a doctor for migraine headaches caused by high levels of stress in the relationship. Becky explained:

> I started to get really bad migraines, and I didn't know what it was from so I had gone to the doctor, and I didn't know what it was but I didn't realize it was a migraine, and then my doctor prescribed me what was it…Tylenol three for it, and I was like really? Because of stress?

Additionally, many of the young women discussed instances of depression as a result of the digital dating abuse. One of the co-researchers even sought counseling for the deep depression she experienced as a result of her boyfriend's abusive behaviors. April and Kelly discussed their experiences with "extreme" depression:

> (April): Oh yeah, I'd definitely say that [it affected my mental health]. Even like towards the end of our relationship and after like I was depressed. I was so depressed and down on myself… I did end up having to go to counseling… I wouldn't go out, I wouldn't eat, I would just kind of like sit in my room. It's actually really depressing to think about – I wouldn't do anything. I would cry all the time. All the time… I mean this went on for about two months. And that, I was so depressed to the point that I wouldn't workout. I would sit in the room and cry. I wouldn't see any of my friends, and my parents were finally like okay, you

have got to talk to somebody. We've got to get you seeking some type of health. This isn't normal.

(Kelly): So I became really depressed, probably more than I should have at that time. So, I was extremely depressed, and I really wanted to be alone after that, so I would just go on walks and like go sit in Arlington cemetery by myself just to be alone with my thoughts.

Julie also discussed how depression affected her, both mentally and physically. Specifically, she described not wanting to go anywhere, or do anything because she "felt so bad about" herself. Often, in relationships where there is an imbalance of power or control, abuse is utilized as a tool through the destruction of a person's self-esteem or a sense of safety. As such, low levels of self-esteem and fear may be common side effects of depression among women in digitally abusive relationships.

[I was] a little bit depressed… Like I wouldn't want to do anything because I felt so bad about myself. He made me feel so bad about myself. Like not do my normal like things, and not act how I usually act at school and around people because I felt like everyone was watching me and knew things about me.

The health effects of digital dating abuse are not only mentally and physically damaging, they can also negatively impact one's social health. For example, one of the young women illustrated her willingness to terminate existing friendships in order to keep her boyfriend satisfied and to avoid fights. Because this behavior can also be viewed as a co-cultural strategy, a brief example is provided below and a more thorough explanation is further discussed in regard to research question three. Karen explained:

…it caused me to like just not even want to hang out with those guys like

because… I didn't want to get in a fight with my boyfriend about it, like I was just

fine hanging out with my girlfriends. So I guess it kind of was because it caused

me to like change how I was acting because I kind of just like kept to myself and

like my close girlfriends.

Co-researchers experienced several negative health effects as a result of being in a

digitally abusive relationship. Previous research suggests that negative health impacts

that result from being abused as a teen or young adult continue into adulthood. As a

result, it is important to understand the lived experiences of those who have faced digital

dating abuse in order to help other young women cope with the evils of such abuse.

Co-Cultural Communication Strategies

The research question guiding this part of the qualitative analysis focused on the

co-cultural communicative strategies that young women enacted in heterosexual romantic

relationships. Specifically, the research question asked: *What co-cultural communication*

strategies do young women enact in their digitally abusive heterosexual romantic

relationships? Findings revealed that co-researchers described their communicative

experiences in diverse ways. Through a co-cultural lens, young women's descriptions

were largely clustered around five previously established orientations (Orbe, 1998)

aligned with assimilation, accommodation, and separation preferred outcomes. Table 8

provides a description of the emergent themes.

Table 8

RQ3: Emerging Themes

Salient Themes for RQ3	Thematic Description
Nonassertive Assimilation ▪ Developing Positive Face ▪ Censoring Self ▪ Averting Controversy	Describes the attempt by co-cultural group members to avoid conflict with dominant group members.
Assertive Assimilation ▪ Extensive Preparation ▪ Overcompensating	Describes the attempt by co-cultural group members to down-play co-cultural differences and promote a convergence into existing structures within dominant society.
Assertive Accommodation ▪ Intragroup Networking ▪ Using Liaisons	Describes the efforts aimed to create a cooperative balance between consideration for both co-cultural and dominant group members.
Aggressive Accommodation ▪ Confronting	Describes the attempt by co-cultural group members to change dominant structures.
Nonassertive Separation ▪ Avoiding ▪ Maintaining Interpersonal Barriers	Describes attempts by co-cultural group members to further encourage co-cultural separation.

Nonassertive assimilation. Within a nonassertive assimilation orientation, co-researchers described three different co-cultural practices that were enacted with their significant other: *developing positive face*, *censoring self*, and *averting controversy*. Karen and Laurie described specific practices, or tactics, to strategically *develop positive face* when interacting with their boyfriends during potentially tense or violent situations. To develop a positive face is to assume a gracious stance "in which one is more considerate, polite, and attentive to dominant group members" (Orbe, 1998, p. 16). Here, the co-researchers talked about how they would "say the nicest things" and be "respectful" when communicating with a partner, often out of fear of his possible reaction. Karen and Laurie explained:

(Karen): But he'd always get mad… even if I answered him and was saying the nicest things ever. He'd still be upset. And nothing I could say would make him happy until the next day when he'd forgotten about it.

(Laurie): I was very respectful. I said, I wanted to respect you and go out on this date with you because I have… partially because I was scared too but I didn't tell him that… like scared to say no… but and then I was like I am not interested, I just want to be friends with you. We're really good friends, we've been friends for two years… I don't know why you're rushing into it. And then, yeah, and then he said awful things to me.

Developing positive face centers on stroking the ideals of the abusive partner. The goal is to use facework as a way to reinforce one's subordinate position within the relationship, and in the process maintain positive face for the abuser. In the previous examples, co-researchers take different approaches to appear less threatening and more invested in their respective relationships.

Moreover, many of the co-researchers explained how they would often silence themselves, rather *censoring self*, during interactions with their boyfriends. For example, Becky stated, "I feel like I wouldn't say a lot of things because I didn't want to make him mad." Other co-researchers support this claim; Katie and April explained:

(Katie): I guess in terms of either avoiding it or trying to not make things worse because it always seems like it would get worse. Even if I'm telling you it doesn't matter, it's just a picture, it's just this or that, if I felt like you weren't getting it, I'm not going to bother repeating myself so much. But I feel like even if I want to

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say it again I don't want to sound like a broken record. Maybe I'm saying it wrong, or maybe you're just not getting it, I don't know, so eventually I would just stop talking about it. I'd leave it alone and try to go the other way, brushing it under the rug.

(April): There were times when I like wouldn't say anything at all, because there would be times when you're with someone for so long you want to be able to tell them everything, I'd say in the middle, like the second and third year of the relationship it was so much easier not to say anything at all, because it could spark an argument… I think I became more – because I'm pretty extroverted, but I became more introverted as far as my thoughts and things I would want to say to him. I would just hold my tongue, because I was like there's no point. Because at the end of the day you're going to win this argument.

Regarding censoring self, co-researchers also indicated their desire to accommodate their significant other instead of expressly stating their own thoughts and concerns. For example, April and Kelly stated:

(April): As far as accommodating, well there'd be times when he texted me and I would like not answer on purpose. There would be times when I would answer and go along with his story. If he'd be like well are you at your house, or oh you must have been helping your mom, and even if I was doing something else, I would be like yeah I'm just doing stuff with my mom. Because it would be easier, because to me there's no point of me having to explain to you why I'm doing it or why I'm doing it with this person.

(Kelly): I tried to accommodate to his needs, so if I felt like he didn't trust me or was feeling depressed about it, I would just try to communicate look I love you, and sometimes I offered to stop talking with some of my guy friends just to like try to make him happy.

The aforementioned references to silencing and restricting communication illustrate a specific tension caused by the young women's partners in an attempt to gain control. As a response to the tension, co-researchers either do not talk to their boyfriends or alter their communication when interacting with their boyfriends, practices aimed at the larger strategy of censoring self. Additionally, pretending not to see the digital message implies an act to avoid confrontation, and simultaneously accommodate the boyfriend.

Averting controversy is perhaps the most commonly employed co-cultural communication practice. Many of the young women disclosed their efforts to avert potential controversy and conflict by deflecting communication away from topics that dealt with certain controversial or potentially dangerous subject areas likely to enrage their partner. As Laurie and Kelly explained:

(Laurie): And like sometimes he would bring up, um, like different things about like blackmailing me for my grades or for um, like, different things with guys… its just so ridiculous. But he would bring them up and want to talk about them, and kind of tease me about them, so I would either avoid those topics, avoid saying anything about that to remind him of that, or um, like change the subject really fast… try to change it jokingly, or just like hang up and say my phone died.

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(Kelly): Towards the end though I became really frustrated and I didn't want to deal with it so I avoided our conversations altogether, I would just try to find a way to distract him so we didn't have to deal with that. I'd be like let's get food I'm really hungry. So I never communicated all of my feelings in the relationship because I was too focused on his feelings. [To avoid showing him stuff], I would distract him, by being like oh well I need to go to the bathroom, or I'm really hungry let's go eat first, just trying to show alternatives.

Here, attempting to change topics is an intentional act of the nondominant communicator seeking to ward off, prevent, or minimize abuse. Other young women averted controversy in a slightly different manner. Instead of changing the topic or diverting the conversation, Debbie and April would simply give up or apologize to their boyfriends—in an attempt to make the problem disappear. They stated:

(Debbie): And so, I would finally call him back and um, we'd work it out and then we would attempt to like talk about it and he would say all this stuff and be like oh, this is all you had to say to me, like I don't know why you try to start fights. And he'd tell me I started a fight and then we'd just . . . I'd just say . . . okay, okay, okay, and then at the end of the night be like I love you. Okay. And the next day it'd be fine.

(April): Usually I was really apologetic, that was the easiest way to be. I'd say at the end of the relationship I would be like apologetic about questioning him when I had my trust issues toward him, and then in the middle of our relationship I was like more or less I would try to fight back and I was like you know it's not like

that, you know I love you, I want to make this work, we've been together for so long, and towards the end of it I was like I'm sorry you feel that way, it's not that way at all, I love you, it was just one of those things where towards the beginning and end I was apologetic. Because in the beginning I was trying to keep him there and get through the bad points, and at the end I was like this is going to work or it's not going to.

Employing a nonassertive assimilation orientation produces several potential costs for the co-researchers. Through this positioning, the young women may have endured negative effects on their self-concepts. For example, co-researchers who discussed developing positive face in order to avoid arguments with their boyfriends also reported feeling "insecure" and "lonely" in their digitally abusive relationships; feelings that surely have a negative effect on one's self-concept. In addition, engaging in communicative practices associated with this orientation often promote an unhealthy communication climate that inherently reinforces the dominant groups' institutional and social power.

Assertive assimilation. Concerning an assertive assimilation orientation, co-researchers illustrated examples of *extensive preparation* and *overcompensating*. Many of the young women felt that their communication should be carefully selected, well thought out, and focused on task orientation. As such, they engaged in *extensive preparation* before and during interactions with their boyfriends. For example, Kelly described how she would alter her Facebook page before seeing her boyfriend so that he would not be upset and a conflict would not ensue. Kelly explained:

He would yell at me and try to force me to get on [Facebook] and show him the messages I sent back to these people and I was like look you're being ridiculous, but most of the time I would show him and be like see, you have nothing to worry about. Even the harmless ones though, if I was talking to another guy friend, if I was like oh yeah I'll see if we can go to lunch one day, even that would be taken as I was cheating on him. So I tried to avoid showing the site to him, but if I did have to show it to him most of the time before I got to his place I would just delete a bunch of messages…

Additionally, the young women told stories of *overcompensating*. While extensive preparation is typically practiced before face-to-face interactions with dominant group members, overcompensating is a tactic that is used more consistently when co-cultural group members find themselves interacting regularly with those representing the dominant culture (Wood, 1993). Typically in response to a fear of inequality, co-cultural group members often find themselves trying to be the "exemplary team player."

Because all of the co-researchers were teenagers when they first experienced the digital abuse, they often mistook abuse for love. As one of the young women stated, "I was blindly in love with him so I was willing to put up with anything." Consequently, several of the co-researchers felt as though they had to overcompensate in various ways as a response to pervasive fear of discrimination by their significant other. For example, Debbie and Laurie tried to be exemplary girlfriends by giving in to their boyfriends' degrading demands:

(Debbie): Um, well he convinced me [sending nude pictures] was okay. He convinced me that um, he'd say girls have done it, previous girlfriends have done it. Um, so he always convinced me like oh it's okay, like um, so-and-so's girlfriend does it for him too, and like it's what we have to do or we're away from each other, he's like… I don't want to cheat on you and he's like just send it to me. And I was like okay. So, it just convinced me that I had and like, all my friends here were actually had their boyfriends or whatever, and they could dress up for them, be sexy for them, and like I couldn't so I thought in my head it was like justified like oh, this is how, you know, keeping the relationship like hot, I guess.

(Laurie): That was my life for three months because he would text me all the time, like maybe like 150-200 text a day. And so, I would always have my phone with me and I could never put it down. Um, otherwise he would be upset that I wasn't answering his phone calls, so like everywhere I was, like if I was hanging out with other friends, if I was in a movie… doing something that I would like love to do… um, yeah, I would just like have to respond… like have my phone with me.

Karen and Kelly elaborated further on this concept:

(Karen): Or if like I was hanging out with someone watching a movie, like I'd want to say… I would want to tell him like "I'll text you after the movie" but he'd always want to talk during the moving and I didn't… I like wanted to pay attention. Um, so obviously I'd talk to him during the movie because I didn't want to make him upset.

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(Kelly): He started showing jealousy issues a lot, and I'm like some people need extra attention and if that's what makes you happy I can definitely do that. I don't personally like to text that much, and so it irritated me, and we had a discussion about that one time, I told him I don't like to text that much, my phone bill is ridiculous, and he was like I get bored at work, and I'm like I guess I understand that. If you're sitting out in a field by yourself all day, fine. So I texted him thinking it would not only make him happy, but show him that obviously I cared about him. But clearly it didn't.

Other co-researchers described additional ways of overcompensating in order to keep their boyfriends happy. For example, April explained how she would have "to be all over him all the time" in order to keep him from getting upset or thinking that something was wrong with the relationship. She stated:

I mean I obviously would like –the way I talked to him wouldn't necessarily be the way I talked to my friends, like I would be more relaxed with my friends, more at ease with my friends, and if there had been times when maybe we hadn't seen each other in a while because of our schedules and he would want me to be all over him all the time, that would just have to kind of be the way it would have to be. Because if I wasn't he'd be like what's wrong? Why are you being this way? What's going on? And to avoid the questions it was just like let me make you happy.

While those with assertive assimilation orientations may strive to downplay co-cultural differences and promote convergence into existing structures within dominant

society, the attempts illustrated here, especially overcompensating, may instead reinforce co-cultural stereotypes and power differences associated with an unhealthy "us-them" mentality. Moreover, the attempts made by co-researchers to suppress one's co-cultural identity to blend into dominant societal structures may be accompanied by a significant amount of exertion, stress, and burnout. For example, co-researchers who engaged in extensive preparation such as deleting or hiding text messages, phone calls, and photographs from their boyfriends, also experienced the stress and anxiety that inherently comes with such complicated communication practices.

Assertive accommodation. One of the most important communicative practices to engage in while participating in dominant structures is networking with other co-cultural group members. Traditionally, most nondominant group members locate other people like themselves for support, encouragement, and inspiration. These individuals are better able to identify with, and subsequently understand, the issues related to functioning in settings that are not representative, nor necessarily supportive, of co-cultural positioning.

Within an assertive accommodation orientation, the young women described forming networks of social support with other women, or *intragroup networking*. Specifically, co-researchers discussed talking with sisters, roommates, and mentors about their digitally abusive relationships. For example, Julie and Laurie explained:

> (Julie): I even tried to tell other people about it, and they were like oh we know
> him, he's not that creepy, and then when I would talk to my sister about it, like,
> she kind of realized that it was like really bad. But she was kind of trying to sugar

coat it, like just don't talk to him, and I was like I haven't, I haven't been responding, and he keeps sending me these page-long text messages, and everything.

(Laurie): I think when I talked to my roommates I had more of like a just an emotional attachment to it, and then I would talk, um, just because they were like right there and are just kind of let me blurt everything out. And then when I talked to my mentor, um, she would kind of, I don't know, I kind of like would think about it for awhile and process it and then go talk to her, so it was more of a... I was trying to reason things out and figure out what was going on... and kind of get her advice about what to do.

Other co-researchers utilized a different assertive accommodation practice, namely *utilizing liaisons*. Here, the young women identified specific dominant group members (i.e., men) who could be counted on for support, guidance, and assistance during their interactions within dominant societal structures. Debbie and Laurie stated:

(Debbie): Um, I had one really good guy friend. I told him the complete story because he was always around my ex-boyfriend when we were fighting. He heard everything. I would call him and he would come over. He was just always there. And um, I literally said every... I think I shared more with him than I shared with my um, female friends. I felt... for some reason I've always connected towards my guy friends a little bit more. I feel like I can trust them more because girls can be like caddy and you don't know what they're saying behind your back. Like, I felt like sometimes my friends could be picturing me as a fool and saying like I'm

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an idiot for what I'm doing, but I feel like guys they're not going to go around and

you know yeah, this is like what's going on. You know? So I disclosed a lot of

information with him.

(Laurie): I didn't really use examples. Um, I would just tell him, like, who [he]

was as a person and how he acted kind of vaguely. And how, like it made me feel

and like ask for like… I don't know, like advice, same thing but kind of like from

a guy's point of view. I was like is this normal, like, I don't even know. So, I

needed like a guy's perspective.

Through such practices as intragroup networking and using liaisons, co-

researchers were able to express an assertive voice in an attempt to change existing

dominant structures. However, it seemed that their attempts were often met with

resistance and defensiveness by both nondominant and dominant group members who

often downplayed the severity of the digitally abusive situation. This dismissal may have

been another contributing factor to the young women's feelings of stress and depression.

Aggressive accommodation. Within an aggressive accommodation orientation,

the young women described the practice of *confronting* their significant others. This

occurred most often at the end of the relationship when co-researchers has reached a

breaking point and wanted to face their boyfriends about their controlling behaviors. For

example, Katie and Amy discussed the direct communication they employed with their

significant others:

(Katie): There was one instance where I was like you call me one more time I'm

coming over there and dropping my phone off, so you can call yourself. You can

speak on my end, you can speak on your end, you can make up what I say, I don't

care, because I don't want to speak to you.

(Amy): I think later on it got more direct… I tried being more direct. Early on it

was more like oh I'm tired, so you should connect the dots because I'm tired and I

want to go to bed. Um, but you clearly are not picking up on that. So I'd say okay

I'm tired, I know you want me to talk but I've got to get up for school so I'm

going to sleep.

Kelly echoed these sentiments:

But towards the end after figuring out the avoidance wasn't working I would tell

him straight up we can't do this anymore. You make me uncomfortable, you can't

just show up at my house, so I tried to directly communicate what it was I wanted.

Efforts made by co-researchers under an aggressive accommodation orientation

may be perceived as self-promoting, confrontational, or unnecessarily intense, but the

young women who adopted this orientation were not overly concerned with dominant

group perceptions. Instead, their goal was to change the dominant structures in their

relationship; to fight back against their boyfriend's controlling behaviors. It is important

to note, that of the young women who employed this type of orientation, almost all of

them did so late in their relationships. As such, the young women's few attempts to

confront their significant other did not appear to be fruitful.

Nonassertive separation. Within a nonassertive separation orientation, the young

women described the practice of *avoiding* certain interactions with significant others and

maintaining interpersonal barriers. According to Orbe (1998), *avoiding* is more physical

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in nature than averting controversy. Because digital dating abuse is a physical communicative experience (i.e., communicating through digital means), it is important to highlight the physical nature of this coping strategy. In this study, several co-researchers talked about how they would physically avoid communication with their significant other. Specifically, the co-researchers discussed not answering or ignoring phone calls, not responding to text messages, and avoiding social networking sites such as Facebook. Katie and Laurie explained:

(Katie): I would avoid getting on Facebook so I could play ignorant to what's going on, if someone leaves a comment, well I didn't see it, so how do you expect me to control that? I didn't see it, I didn't leave it.

(Laurie): Yeah, like in the beginning of our relationship, he would like text me and I would be like okay, we're friends this is not a big deal and then once he started like texting me and using more forceful language and kind of um, I mean it's not, yeah, forceful language and kind of trying to like control me, I was like okay this is weird I'm just not going to talk to him, because if I don't want to do something like I'm just going to pretend like I didn't see it. Um, and so I would like turn off my phone during the day or like, I don't know… not respond right away…

The previous reference to forceful language illustrates a specific tension caused by a perpetrator's attempt to gain control; this is mental or verbal abuse. As a response to the tension, the co-researcher does not talk to her boyfriend, a practice aimed at the larger

strategy of avoiding. Additionally, pretending not to see the digital message implies an act to avoid confrontation and simultaneously accommodate the boyfriend.

In addition, co-researchers also practiced avoiding by maintaining a physical distance from their boyfriends. For example, April described going out of her way to various locations in order to gain time away from her boyfriend. She stated:

> I'd go to the gym. I'd spend hours at the gym… For me it was a way to get away, and plus the gym was on base, and he's not military, so it was like I don't have to see you because we have membership to the same gym too, so it was like one of those things like the gym – the one we had membership to was like three minutes away from my house, I would drive ten or 15 minutes to go to the one on base. It was a stress release, like I'm not going to see you, I'm going to concentrate on something besides our relationship, I could not take my phone in there and it would be like oh I'm not just avoiding you, it's like oh I just took my iPod to listen to music.

Related to the idea of avoiding is the mechanism by which co-cultural group members maintain existing interpersonal barriers to reduce the chances of communication. Specifically, co-researchers employed various nonverbal tactics to discourage communication with their significant others, or *maintaining interpersonal barriers*. For example, the young women explained how they would move their phones to another room or turn them to silent in order to avoid communication and/or the thought of communication with their boyfriends. Kelly and Katie explained:

(Kelly): Well, I had a fight with him an hour before that, because I lived an hour away from him, so I drove home and I was really frustrated and I'm just done, so I just needed to go upstairs and relax, so I just threw everything on the counter and walked away from it. I figured that would be a nice little break, just to think about everything without a phone sitting next to me and haunting me, trying to force me to call him or something.

(Katie): I'm like you're annoying the crap out of me, stop calling me, because – and I'm very, I get very – what's the word, agitated, especially if you're waking me up. I don't want to hear the phone ringing. And sometimes I would take the phone at the beginning I would go take the phone and put it in the other room so I wouldn't hear it and I would turn my cell phone on silent.

In a more extreme effort to maintain interpersonal barriers, two of the co-researchers actually broke their cell phones to avoid communication with their boyfriends. By breaking their cell phones, the young women were able to maintain a physical and psychological disconnect from their boyfriends. Debbie and Becky explained:

(Debbie): My phone would end up in the closet. I've broken about 3 or 4 phones because I'd get so aggravated that I would just hope that my phone would even break. Like let me just break it that way he won't call me. I ended up, there was one time he was calling me, I was at a fair and um, he's… my phone was off. I'm trying to have a good time with my friends and he would not stop calling, I was like you just need to leave me alone. Like I'm having fun, like I'm not doing

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anything wrong, like you just need to know I'm not, I'm out. And he wouldn't… I

ended up throwing my phone. It broke. It was the best thing that could have

happened that night because he couldn't call me, he couldn't contact me. My

friend turned off her phone so he couldn't call her either, and I… its what I would

always try to do in my room, like let me just break my phone, he won't contact

me or anything.

(Becky): But I broke, I think I went through two phones… I broke two phones

because we were screaming at each other and one of them I threw and it was a flip

phone that broke in half, but it was primarily just the angry aggressive calling and

yelling at each other on the phone.

One can attempt to avoid a person or topic, choosing to communicate only when

absolutely necessary. In fact, the previously illustrated communicative practices may

highlight safe-space where co-cultural group members maintain distance from potential

conflict. Consequently, avoidance is a physical and psychological endeavor.

Photovoice and co-cultural communication strategies. Through the use of

photographs, co-researchers demonstrated their use of co-cultural communication

strategies. With regard to the nonassertive assimilation orientation, Karen spoke to the act

of aversion as she explained the meaning behind a photo of an exit sign. Seemingly the

reluctance to act on repeated warning signs is one way to avert controversy:

Um, this is just like another exit sign; like the exit is like that way but I didn't go

that way… I would just apologize and not try and fix the problem. I was just

doing the easy things and say I'm sorry like you don't have to worry.

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Figure 11. Exit sign used to represent reluctance to act, or averting controversy.

Additionally, extensive preparation, related to an assertive assimilation orientation, was described by one co-researcher as she explained her reasoning for taking a photograph of her Facebook page. Specifically, the photo shows the young woman customizing her Facebook settings, limiting her boyfriend and others from seeing content on her page. Katie stated:

It would escalate from being nice to slightly withdrawing or hiding things, where I'd put the phone in the other room, put it on silent, I wouldn't answer, I'd hide the pictures [on Facebook], I'd delete the pictures, I'd put [the pictures] to private so you're not seeing it, diminishing the problem, but no matter what you did they're going to find a problem. There's always going to be a new comment, always a new picture, a new thing for them to harp on.
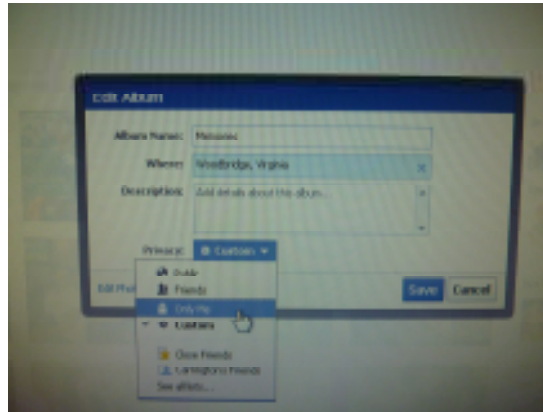
Figure 12. Facebook settings used to represent extensive preparation.

Other co-researchers utilized photographs to explain communicative practices from the assertive accommodation orientation, namely intragroup networking and using liaisons. Specifically, Karen discussed how she formed networks with both co-cultural and dominant group members for social support as she described the meaning behind a photo of a young tree. She stated:

> And then that was, um, this is… like a little baby tree being like supported by the two little wooden sticks so it doesn't fall over. And I thought that was, um, like the two little sticks were like Charley and Taylor trying to help me… and I'm the little tree because I'm like new and [laugh] I don't know anything about the relationship… like the bad part about it. And they were like there to support me but they didn't really know exactly how to help me.

Figure 13. Tree used to represent intragroup networking and using liaisons.

Karen also spoke to the act of confronting, an example of the aggressive accommodation orientation, as she explained the meaning behind a photo of a long hallway with an exit sign at the end. Seemingly, she may have had a better, and perhaps, less stressful relationship had she been more direct in her communication attempts with her boyfriend. She said:

Oh, and this is… I thought this one was like, um, like getting out of… obviously it's a long hallway with the exit at the end… um, I feel like the exit at the end was like getting at of the whole controlling aspect of it. Like talking to him about it, but I always took like the closer door of just apologizing so we wouldn't fight about it, when I should've just gone to the end and been like "Look, this can't happen" like "You can't tell me who I can be friends with. You can't control who I talk to." And I feel like if I just said that then I would have been out of it… and it would have been a fine relationship.

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Figure 14. Long hallway with exit sign used to represent confronting.

Within a nonassertive separation orientation, many of the young women illustrated behaviors they would enact in order to avoid, both physically and psychologically, their significant other. For example, one of the young women described a picture of her bed as "my zone," a place where she could go to get away from her abusive boyfriend. Julie stated:

My bed… it's like my, my zone, whatever, when I want to get away from everything and go to sleep. And it was like when I would wake up in the morning and like get voicemails from him that were just like him being completely ridiculous and saying mean things.

Figure 15. Co-researcher's bed used to represent avoiding.

Using photographs, co-researchers were able to both verbally and visually illustrate the various co-cultural communicative strategies they employed in their digitally abusive relationships. For example, the nonassertive assimilation orientation was supported by one young woman's story regarding the act of aversion as she explained the meaning behind a photograph of an exit sign. This finding allowed for a more accurate and credible portrayal of averting controversy, a communicative component of digital dating abuse.

Additionally, the use of photographs allowed for the emergence of new themes that would have otherwise been missed by employing only one data collection procedure. For instance, one of the co-researchers described a picture of her bed as a safe place where she could escape her boyfriend's abusive behaviors. This concept was not previously discussed in her verbal interview. As such, photovoice allowed the young women to articulate aspects of digital dating abuse that were not previously considered.

Impact of Co-Cultural Communication Strategies on Health

As a result of employing certain co-cultural communication strategies, the young women experienced both positive and negative health effects. Specifically, the research question guiding this part of the qualitative analysis asked: *How does the use of these strategies impact young women's health?* Co-researchers discussed various ways that employing certain strategies affected their overall health outcomes. The most effective co-cultural communication strategy was being direct through an accommodative orientation (e.g., *confronting),* and the most ineffective co-cultural strategies were being indirect through assimilation and separation orientations (e.g., *developing positive face, censoring self, averting controversy, avoiding,* and *maintaining interpersonal barriers*).

One of the co-researchers described the use of a more forceful approach in confronting her boyfriend. Described as an "in your face" technique (Orbe, 1998), *confronting* allowed the co-researcher to "let it out," simultaneously reducing stress. For example, Katie recalled:

Um, it kind of was – I don't know what it is, if I continuously ignore you and you're still calling my phone, you're not getting it. So I have to answer now and tell you, and it kind of felt like a stress relief to be able to say it to them, where as before I'm trying to put it in a nice way and I'm going to slowly break away from you so our relationship just diminishes or whatever, you still aren't getting it. So now I'm going to yell and act however I want… The only one I guess I noticed a change in mood or mental state was the yelling. I would either – sometimes it just would help, it felt good to say it and let it out, I felt like it lifted something to let

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you know, not just how I feel, but by being precise in my words, but how I completely just feel. All the crap you've had a mess in my head I'm letting it out to you and I feel a bit better. It wouldn't last because it would end up happening again, but for right now I feel good that I can just say that and let it out.

Other co-researchers described being direct, or confronting, in a more non-aggressive manner. By being direct with their partner, many of the young women felt empowered and saw the "stress going away immediately." For instance, Kelly and Amy explained:

(Kelly): But when I was direct I felt more empowered, and I felt more that life was going to get better, and I just need to stick through with my opinions and wait it out a little bit.

(Amy): When I was direct and I finally ended it I felt better. And also that's my personality, so why – that's why it was such a red flag that I wasn't being direct because I'm a very direct person... Like, stress going away immediately, because all that emotion that was built up inside I was able to get out on the table. And… I think in this case what came along with it was when I was breaking up with him it was like I don't have to worry about another person, I only have to worry about me, I can do what I want. So that was very liberating and not stressful.

Similarly, some of the co-researchers discussed what "could have been" regarding their relationships if they would have communicated more directly with their boyfriends. These sentiments may show the importance of *communicating self*, or displaying a

confident self-presentation in which one's point of view is asserted in an open and genuine way (Orbe, 1998). For example, April and Julie stated:

(April): Well, besides not even dating at all, I would say like, I think I would have been more direct, I would have either, it would have helped if I had been direct the entire way through, because that would either have put us together or would have cut us apart earlier, which would have been better. Because I definitely now, I don't avoid conflict. I'd rather you tell me the problem and we work through it. And I think that in that relationship if I had been more direct, if I had been willing to put my thoughts and feelings out there and not been worried about what he was going to say in response it could have been a lot better, a lot more successful.

(Julie): Well even talking about it now, I think it would be good to confront the person… I was never like oh, well, you should stop talking to me. So that's definitely good advice, if someone is bothering you rather than ignoring them. I mean you should ignore them, but maybe first just be like I don't want to talk to you anymore. And tell them straight up like you're making me uncomfortable. And tell them how you feel.

Conversely, the most ineffective techniques employed by the young women were those that led to them indirectly communicating with their boyfriends. For example, *developing positive face, censoring self, averting controversy, avoiding*, and *maintaining interpersonal barriers* were five of the co-cultural communication strategies that led to increased stress, depression, and anxiety among co-researchers. Amy and Kelly explained:

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(Amy): Um, well in this case there's like being indirect and not... not saying what I mean. Yeah, I feel like, but in other relationships that when you're being indirect they get what you're trying to say, but in this case indirect didn't work out... I think it led to the stressed out-ness, the stress and the anxiety. I felt like I wasn't able to say what I was really feeling so it was building up. And then if I was being indirect he wasn't picking up on it, which then made me frustrated, which made me more stressed out.

(Kelly): Accommodating, that was the worst. I put up with so much for so long, and it didn't really get me anywhere, except insecure feelings... when I was accommodating I think it made me more depressed, and I felt like I had no one to talk to. I felt like I couldn't talk to my family, and I definitely couldn't talk to him, and I felt like I was very alone. And I felt really, really depressed; that was probably the lowest part of my life so far.

By engaging in nonassertive assimilation and separation orientations, co-researchers endured negative health effects, especially with regard to their self-concepts. Ultimately, engaging in the communicative practices associated with these orientations promotes an unhealthy communication climate that inherently reinforces the dominant group's institutional and social power. Instead, co-researchers should strive to use an assertive or aggressive accommodation orientation in order to better promote their voice and possibly maintain a healthier, happier life.

Photovoice

   The final research question guiding this qualitative analysis focused on the ways in which photovoice helped give voice to young women in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships. Specifically, the research question asked: *How can photovoice be used to give young women voice in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships?* Through in-depth interviews three interrelated themes emerged regarding the ways in which photovoice was used by the young women. Specifically, co-researchers indicated using photovoice to: (1) visually confirm the verbal, (2) tell stories in more depth, and (3) articulate aspects not previously considered. Consistent with previous photovoice research, the themes provide further insight into the utility of photovoice as a visual methodology among co-cultural group members. The themes also help establish photovoice as a reliable multi-methodological data collection procedure. Table 9 provides a description of the three emergent themes.

Table 9

RQ4: Emerging Themes

Salient Themes for RQ4	Thematic Description
Visually Confirm the Verbal	Describes the use of photovoice as an avenue to transcend the (false) binary between visual and verbal communication, as images and words work in tandem to tell co-researchers' stories.
Tell Stories in More Depth	Describes the use of photovoice as a way to tell more in-depth "visual stories" regarding lived experiences; thus, creating opportunities to express one's own images, words, and reflections. In turn, images become points of entry into seeing beneath the surface issues.
Articulate Aspects Not Previously Considered	Describes the use of photovoice as a communicative bridge for conceptualizing and articulating aspects of one's personal circumstances that they may not have previously considered.

Visually confirm the verbal. Using photovoice in conjunction with more common data collection measures, such as in-depth interviews, provided co-researchers the opportunity to document what was meaningful to them both visually and verbally. For example, Becky reflected on multiple photographs in order to portray her feelings of loneliness:

> This one is me on a bridge looking out at – this is at Green Falls. I liked how it
> was, I look really alone. There's no one else around. That's how I felt…

Figure 16. Co-researcher alone on a bridge used to represent feeling of loneliness.

> I took this picture of this one person crossing the street and everything else was
> pretty deserted, but then there are these people everywhere. I figured it looked
> dark and gross out, and it didn't look very happy, but then… outside there would
> be tons of people around. But then inside you feel lonely.

Figure 17. Busy street with lone person used to represent feeling of loneliness.

Similarly, Kelly used a photograph of a winding road to visually explain the communicative approach she took with her digitally abusive boyfriend. This account was also told in her verbal interview. Kelly stated:

It was kind of the path I had to take in this relationship. The communication skills were very far away from each other, so I was open, then accommodating, then avoiding, so I felt like the winding path represented all of the ways I had to go in the relationship until I reached the end.

Figure 18. Winding path used to represent communication in abusive relationship.

Using visual methodology, such as photovoice, gave co-researchers the opportunity to create ideas in their own way. Specifically, photovoice allowed visual elements to become part of the research process rather than simply ancillary features. In a spirit articulated by Tracy (2007), photovoice can be one means by which we can capture and discuss "everyday interaction" while recognizing the multitude of ways in which "context shapes meaning-making" (p. 32). Specifically, taking photographs provided young women an additional avenue to access their experiences and explain concepts through both verbal and visual representations.

Tell stories in more depth. Photovoice is an ideal methodological technique through which participants can document, critically analyze, and improve contexts, such as digital dating abuse. Specifically, photographs enabled the young women to tell more in-depth "visual stories" regarding their lived experiences of digital dating abuse; thus,

creating opportunities for them to express themselves in their own images, words, and reflections. In turn, these images became points of entry into seeing beneath the surface issue of digital dating abuse. For example, Katie and Karen discussed photographs of caution tape and a fire alarm to represent the potential harm of digital dating abuse:

(Katie): This is a computer with the caution tape, and especially the last relationship made me not want to be on the computer, so that's when I would avoid Facebook, um, avoid getting on any social media, and also more representative of when he was at my house as well he would always want to be on my computer. At one point in time he had the password so he could get on and see – he was bored or whatever so he could just get on, but it just annoyed me even having him on my stuff because I didn't know if he was going through things or if he was actually doing something so I just changed the password. It was also representative of blocking other people from using my stuff.

Figure 19. Caution tape used to represent the potential harm of digital abuse.

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(Karen): Oh and that's just like, um, like… well obviously it's like a fire escape

like alarm… um, I took it because I feel like I should've like pulled it... like

imaginary pulled it… saying that like I didn't know what was going on but I

should've seen it when it was happening and I could've like pulled that and gotten

out of it and, um… kind of like at the end it was an emergency pull button

because it was getting so bad that, um like its all that he would talk to me about

and I should have pulled the fire escape so it would've stopped… and like we

should have talked about it.

Figure 20. Fire alarm used to represent the underlying dangers of digital abuse.

Amy also used photographs to further reveal underlying issues associated with

digital dating abuse. Specifically, Amy explained the inherent "pressure" associated with

this type of abuse:

Well, it's not a big deal for a guy, a shirtless picture, because it's not a big deal.

And so then he would be like why don't you send me a picture? And I'm like

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okay, I'll go get my bathing suit, and put on makeup, and then go take a picture, and send it to him… Um, pressure to look good, and also with the taking pictures to like – okay, let me go put on some makeup… He was never like get all dolled up, or make yourself look nicer, I just had like pressure for myself to always look nice… Just in the pressure to look good, so like it wasn't just oh let me throw a pony tail holder in, it was like a lot more than that. So I think that captures that.

Figure 21. Cosmetics used to represent the inherent pressure of digital abuse.

Other co-researchers used photographs to detail the raw emotions they experienced during their abusive relationships. For example, Kelly described feeling "dead inside" through the use of multiple photographs, a feeling that was not fully captured in her verbal interview alone. She explained:

Um, this picture is of a graveyard. I took this picture because inside that's how I felt. I felt really insecure and dead inside. I wasn't happy any more. It wasn't just because of my dad's death, it was this relationship that was dragging me down

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even more. I felt very alone and really depressed. That's what that picture represents.

Figure 22. Graveyard used to represent feeling insecure and dead inside.

This is a picture of, I'm not sure if you can tell but it's a picture of a chimney, I took this picture because this is how I felt in the middle of the relationship. Instead of being the whole house with the chimney attached, it was just the chimney and that's like – I was dead inside, but the outside of me was still standing there, but there was really nothing going on in the inside.

Figure 23. Chimney used to represent feeling dead inside.

By putting cameras in the hands of co-researchers, it was possible to identify and better understand the lived experiences of young women interacting as co-cultural group members within digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships. Specifically, photographs allowed co-researchers to delve deeper into their experiences regarding digital dating abuse, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying issues associated with this type of abuse as well as the deeper-level emotions experienced by co-researchers in digitally abusive relationships.

Articulate aspects not previously considered. Particularly true with young people, photographs act as a kind of communicative bridge for conceptualizing and articulating aspects of their personal circumstances that they may not previously have considered in any depth. Specifically, co-researchers revealed various aspects of digital dating abuse not previously revealed in their verbal interviews. For example, Sally

discussed multiple hobbies that she undertook in order to avert communication with her boyfriend:

> Okay, this is a picture of a pair of shoes that I painted on, um, while I was dating that guy. When I would want time to myself I would take up so many hobbies… just to distress myself. So, this is just an example of one of the things that I did.

Figure 24. Painted shoes used to represent hobbies that deflect communication.

> This is an example of like another hobby that I did… I took up spray painting and graffiti. Um, when I would want to be by myself and not talk to him, I would go outside and breathe [laugh].

Figure 25. Graffiti used to represent hobbies that deflect communication.

Similarly, Debbie revealed her "comfort zone," a nearby place where she could go for relief from her boyfriend's constant harassment:

Okay. Alright so that's pretty much my home. Um, it's like right down the street. I can walk to it, and it was one place that if I needed to get out no matter what time of the day, I could go there. It was usually late at night. Um, back in high school I would just walk there and um, it was safe, it was a comfort zone because he didn't know where I would go, or like I would just get to that point where my phone would just be… I'd turn it off and I would just walk and I would go here and I felt like it was necessary to put because it was a comfort zone for me.

Figure 26. Secluded beach area used to represent co-researcher's "comfort zone."

Often, the experiences investigated in social scientific research are difficult and confronting; as such, words are sometimes not available for co-researchers to express the raw emotions and feelings they have experienced. Using visual methodologies, such as photovoice, provides an avenue to access these experiences and understandings. Specifically, by inviting co-researchers to create things in their own way as part of the research process it is a different way into a research question, and may engage the brain in a different way, drawing a different kind of response. Through the use of photographs, then, co-researchers were able to identify and better understand their experiences, some of which had not been previously discussed in verbal interviews.

Findings Summary

This study investigated the lived communicative experiences of ten young women who had previously been involved in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships. Narrative research illuminated common experiences during in-depth interviews with these women. Specifically, 15 themes emerged in the clustering of

significant statements provided by the co-researchers. With regard to forms of digital dating abuse, four themes were illuminated: (1) constant connection, (2) monitoring behaviors, (3) private becomes public, and (4) verbal assaults. Concerning co-researchers' experiences with digital dating abuse, three themes were presented: (5) controlling communication, (6) fear, and (7) abnormal/normal behaviors. Regarding the co-cultural strategies enacted by the young women, five themes emerged: (8) nonassertive assimilation, (9) assertive assimilation, (10) assertive accommodation, (11) aggressive accommodation, and (12) nonassertive separation. Finally, in relation to photovoice, three themes were revealed: (13) visually confirm the verbal, (14) tell stories in more depth, and (15) articulate aspects not previously considered. These accounts provide insight into the diverse communicative strategies and standpoints of the digitally abused women who participated in this study, and have implications for women, social science research, medical practice, educators/advocates, and society at large.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion

Intimate partner abuse (IPA) is widespread and certain groups of individuals, such as young college-aged women, are particularly at high risk (Forke, Myers, Catallozzi, & Schwartz, 2008; Katz et al., 2002). Although there is a wide body of literature that examines the risk factors for physical, psychological, and sexual partner abuse among this age group (Fang & Corso, 2007; Luthra & Gidycz, 2006), recent studies have been criticized for their lack of attention to a wider range of behaviors that may be considered detrimental to victims of IPA (Southworth et al., 2007; Waltermaurer, 2005). One new research area that examines negative behaviors that may occur between romantic dating partners is digital dating abuse, which refers to the use of newer communication technologies to facilitate repeated harassment with the intention of harming their significant other (Aricak 2009; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Kowalski et al. 2008). Although several anecdotal accounts of digital abuse among intimate partners exist, little is known about how electronic devices may be utilized to stalk, harass, and control intimate partners. Consequently, this study employed photovoice, a phenomenological method, as a way to capture the "lived" experiences of digital dating abuse among young women in heterosexual romantic relationships. Through photovoice, co-researchers were able to document various aspects of their daily lives in order to "tell their story straight" to help

scholars and activists better understand the dimensions of digital dating abuse. Through this examination, co-researchers shed light on various forms of abuse, as well as the co-cultural communication practices they employed to cope with digital dating abuse. A discussion of the specific findings and implications for future research are presented in the following sections.

Interpretation of RQ1: Forms of Digital Dating Abuse

Today's youth are increasingly reliant upon technology in their everyday lives. Cell phones, email, social networking websites, and personal computers provide young adults with almost constant communication. While technology has greatly improved adolescents' ability to stay in touch with their friends, families, schools, communities, and dating partners, these new technologies can also present a challenge in dating relationships with more and more youth experiencing digital aspects of abuse.

With regard to the forms of digital dating abuse experienced by co-researchers, four interrelated themes emerged: *constant connection*, *monitoring behaviors*, *private becomes public*, and *verbal assaults*. These thematic categories describe the types of digital abuse that may occur among young women in heterosexual romantic relationships. As such, the themes provide more insight into the role of digital technology and abuse among dating couples.

Two of the themes, *constant connection* and *monitoring behaviors*, highlight the different behaviors that intimates may engage in online. According to the young women who participated in this study, individuals who engage in digital abuse can maintain control over and contact with their partners both day and night. They can also monitor

their partner's location and activities without permission. These negative communicative behaviors have the ability to further escalate online abuse and impact offline, face-to-face interactions between partners.

Although these behaviors may be similar to those perpetrated in person, there are unique aspects of abusive messages conveyed by technological means. By using newer forms of technology, people are constantly accessible even if they are not located in the same geographic area (Burgess & Baker, 2002). In modern society, people can be reached anywhere at any time via cell phones, personal computers, and other portable communication devices, and receiving constant, harassing messages may intensify a victim's perceptions of vulnerability (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Furthermore, communications in cyberspace often lack the visual social cues (e.g., facial expressions) that are present in offline interactions, and those who send hurtful online messages are not immediately confronted with their partner's reaction and the consequences associated with the negative communication (Dehue et al., 2008). As such, each of these aspects of newer forms of communication may impact the interpretation and content of the correspondence, potentially leading to increased online and offline harassment.

Co-researchers also discussed how newer forms of technology have the capacity to change how and with whom intimates communicate, or *private becomes public*. Although some may regard technological exchanges as private conversations (e.g., cell phone calls), these messages may also be dispensed very quickly to a wider audience because recipients can forward these electronic communications to multiple technology users. Additionally, the young women also described situations in which other people,

such as friends, became involved in online arguments that were posted on social networking websites. As such, private information and aggressive exchanges no longer necessarily occur behind closed doors (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1981), instead partners may harass and embarrass their partners in the public arena.

For the final theme, *verbal assaults*, co-researchers discussed the presence of verbal abuse through digital devices; a finding which is consistent with the larger body of IPA literature that finds that individuals who experience one form of abuse are often at risk for experiencing other types of aggression (Coker et al., 2000; Thompson et al., 2006). The potential for dating abuse through technology goes beyond mere monitoring to harassment, threats, and intimidation. One in four teens in a relationship has experienced harassment, name-calling, or put downs from a current or former dating partner through a cell phone or text messaging (Picard, 2007), and nearly one in five has been harassed or put down through a social networking website (Picard, 2007). According to Melander (2010), intimate partners may communicate differently using technology than they normally would when interacting in person. Because individuals engaging in digital communication are not speaking face-to-face, they do not have to worry about the immediate repercussions of their digital communication. As such, arguments that occur through newer forms of digital technology may escalate, often leading to more detrimental emotional abuse.

Interpretation of RQ2: Experiences Regarding Digital Dating Abuse

In addition to the various forms of digital abuse, co-researchers also described several topics related to their lived experiences regarding digital dating abuse. One of the

most common themes that emerged from the qualitative data was *controlling communication* which included diverse controlling behaviors such as using "private" information to control the physical and emotional behavior of one's partner, using fear to control the physical location of one's partner, and monitoring the location and activity of one's partner. As a result, the young women reported overcompensating in various ways as a response to the pervasive *fear* of discrimination by their partner, family members, and friends. Specifically, co-researchers discussed a persistent fear of upsetting their boyfriends and/or being "judged" by others. As a result, they would often conduct themselves in a manner inconsistent with their own wants and needs. The young women's behavior is likely a result of the gendered-related values of power and control in Western society. Specifically, IPA against women usually takes place in the context of a range of controlling and coercive acts (Dobash & Dobash, 2004) in situations where unequal relations of power are exploited. In fact, Dutton and Goodman (2005) explain that within this framework of IPA, abuse is traditionally viewed as a tool within patterns of coercive control among other tools including financial deprivation, threats, intimidation, abuse of children and other relatives, and isolation. To this contextual view of abuse, Yodanis (2004) adds that a "culture of fear" of men's abuse against women, secures men's status in intimate heterosexual unions (p. 658). This fear is reinforced by the various stories, images, and symbols of men successfully using abuse; thus creating boundaries for women's actions. As a consequence of the differential social construction of manhood and womanhood, similar boundaries do not exist for most men in these relationships. In her discussion of women's fear of crime, Yodanis (2004) argues:

Not every man must be violent toward every woman for violence to control

women's behavior. Rather, knowing that some women are victims of horrific

violence is enough to control their behavior and limit the movement of all women

in society (p. 658)

She notes that although most violent crimes are committed against men, women tend to

be considerably more fearful of violent crime than men. This, she explains, is a result of

women's greater vulnerability to sexual abuse and IPA. The fear of being victimized

creates subordinate subject positions for some women, particularly women who have

experienced abuse in their current or previous relationships. As such, it is imperative that

women develop communicative strategies to survive and cope in such environments.

Moreover, co-researchers discussed their experiences in terms of encountering

abnormal/normal behaviors from their boyfriends. Specifically, the young women knew

that something was wrong, or that their partner's actions were "not normal," but at the

same time were also "not a big deal." Acknowledging that something is wrong in their

relationships may be the first step in recognizing the different levels of domestic

inequalities in heterosexual romantic relationships. However, viewing the abuse as

unimportant is detrimental in that the young women remain muted and the potential

dangers of digital dating abuse are kept hidden from family members, friends, and society

at large. According to Ashcraft (2000), one reason some women might not identify

harassment or controlling behaviors as abuse is due to the fact that abuse in the United

States has been labeled using only the terms violence and/or abuse, which might make

depictions of different levels of domestic inequalities nearly impossible to recognize,

such as digital dating abuse. "Because feminists attempted to frame oppressive behavior and its effects within a dominant paradigm—violent behavior is more damaging than nonviolent—their only available rhetorical strategy for highlighting the seriousness of these often ignored behaviors was to define them also as violence" (Ashcraft, 2000, p. 4). As such, co-researchers may have felt that to label themselves as victims of abuse would be to trivialize the experience of women who suffer from "real" abuse. To equate their problems with the problems of a battered woman would compromise the seriousness of her situation. However, this leaves them unable to confront their partners because words to express their situations do not exist. Because they cannot describe the problem effectively, their partners are left unaccountable for the oppressive actions in which they engage.

Further, co-researchers may have overlooked the seriousness of the digital abuse given the lack of educational resources available to the public regarding digital dating abuse. Because it is a recent phenomenon, only a few campaigns exist to inform teens, young adults, and parents of the harmful effects related to digital dating abuse. One of the more popular campaigns, "That's Not Cool: A Public Education Campaign to Prevent Teen Dating Abuse," has employed television and radio announcements, interactive video games, and social networking tools to help teens and young adults navigate their way through the issue of digital dating abuse. Funded by the Family Violence Prevention Fund (2009), this campaign seeks to empower young people to set their own limits regarding dating abuse, and help them break the ice and get the issue out in the open. Another well-known campaign regarding digital dating abuse is MTV's "A Thin Line."

This campaign was developed to empower youth to identify, respond to, and stop the spread of digital abuse. Specifically, the campaign is built on the understanding that there is a "thin line" between what may begin as a harmless joke and something that could end up having a serious impact on themselves or someone else. Additional educational resources should be made available to teens and young adults, in order to increase their understanding of the serious and pervasive nature of digital dating abuse.

Interpretation of RQ2a: Impact of Digital Dating Abuse on Health

Given the lived experiences of co-researchers, it is easy to see the potentially damaging nature of digital dating abuse; specifically, the negative effects that it can have on mental health (Campbell, 2002; Campbell, Kub, & Rose, 1996). In accordance with previous research, the results of the present study found that various forms of digital dating abuse were associated with negative emotional, physical, and social health behaviors including: stress, depressive symptoms, anxiety, loneliness, fear, low self-esteem, fatigue, seclusion, binge drinking and smoking, acne, migraine headaches, and relationship termination. Depression has been listed by Olweus (1994) as one effect caused by abuse as an adolescent that may continue into adulthood. That is, adults who have been digitally abused as an adolescent may continue to have negative health consequences. For example, Kaltiala-Heino, Frojd, and Marttunen (2010) surveyed 2,070 15-year-old girls and boys in Finland to measure depression as both a dependent as well as an independent variable to cyberbullying. Two years later, a follow-up study was done and it was concluded that being bullied predicts later depression. Although not examined

here, it is possible that a future follow-up study could reveal more long-term, detrimental health consequences to the young women who participated in this study.

Targets of cyber abuse may also experience a variety of social effects. Some of these social effects may include post-traumatic stress disorder (Montgomery, 1994), internalizing or externalizing of problems (i.e., shootings; Berger, 2007), and loneliness (Light & Dishion, 2007). Feelings of being lonely have been noted to be a serious problem that results from abuse. For example, Tritt and Duncan (1997) conducted a study of undergraduate college students and found that loneliness in adults may be linked to being abused as a child. Ireland and Power (2004) found that emotional loneliness (defined as feelings of loneliness while still maintaining social contact with others) increased among the 19-year-old participants who had been bullied in cyberspace. These researchers note that it was difficult to determine whether or not loneliness was the cause or the outcome of the bullying. In this study, several of the co-researchers acknowledged feeling lonely in their digitally abusive relationships. As previous research indicates, this may have a negative impact on the young women's emotional and social development in adulthood.

Interpretation of RQ3: Co-Cultural Communication Strategies

In order to cope with the inherent stressors of digital dating abuse, the young women reported utilizing a combination of co-cultural communicative practices when interacting with dominant group members. For example, separation strategies revealed how co-cultural group members strived for independence, reinforced stereotypes of themselves, and/or attacked the dominant group as a way to strengthen nondominant

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groups whose voices would otherwise remain muted. This study found two primary

separation strategies used by co-researchers to avoid communication with their digitally

abusive partner: *avoiding* and *maintaining interpersonal barriers*. Although Orbe (1998)

describes separation as the preferred outcome of co-cultural groups wanting to remain

detached from dominant structures, in this instance separation was used as more of a

dodging technique, or a brief distraction from the underlying problem of abuse. In other

words, co-researchers may have, unconsciously or consciously, participated in efforts to

reinforce co-cultural separation, an ideology grounded in the basic notion that certain

groups should not occupy spaces reserved for dominant group members.

Orbe's (1998) category of accommodation occurred in terms of *confronting*,

intragroup networking, and *using liaisons*. With regard to *confronting*, co-researchers

described their aggressive attempts of using direct communication with their boyfriends

regarding his digitally abusive behavior. For example, one of the young women said: "I

think there was one point when I was like I just got out of school, I have a lot of

homework, I'm only going to text you if I have something to say." According to Orbe

(1998), at times, efforts such as this may be perceived as self-promoting, confrontational,

or unnecessarily intense, but co-cultural group members who adopt this primary

communication orientation are not overly concerned with dominant group perceptions.

Instead, their fundamental goal is to change dominant structures. However, when using

an aggressive accommodation orientation, one must also cultivate genuine desire to work

with, and not necessarily against, dominant group members. Because the young women

did not work with their boyfriends when using such a harsh strategy, their actions may

have been perceived as more separatist in nature; a potentially harmful effect for co-cultural group members.

Co-researchers also reported employing *intragroup networking* and *using liaisons* with regard to an accommodative orientation. Specifically, the young women shared that they had honest conversations with other males (e.g., friends, fathers, brothers) about their experiences regarding digital dating abuse, and formed networks of social support with other women who were affected by digital dating abuse. Unfortunately, in some instances confidants were not always supportive of the young women. For example, one young woman recalled a time when her boyfriend showed his friends private and embarrassing photos of her: "He would show them and they'd text me and be like guess what I saw. They would just laugh at it. They just thought it was funny, because they didn't think anything of it…" Consequently, the young women's few attempts to accommodate did not appear to be fruitful.

By and large, these young women appeared to work at assimilating into the dominant communication system. Several examples illustrated Orbe's (1998) nonassertive assimilation strategies, such as *developing positive face*, *self-censorship*, and *averting controversy*. Some described how they developed positive face by being polite, respectful, and more attentive when interacting with their boyfriends, while others reported censoring self when their partners used forceful language to communicate with them. Co-researchers also talked about their ability to avert controversy. Specifically, three of the co-researchers reported using this practice to deflect communication away from topics that dealt with controversial or potentially dangerous subject areas—areas

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that were likely to upset their partner. Additionally, assertive assimilation strategies, such as *overcompensation* and *extensive preparation*, occurred when co-researchers tried to please their partners by being exemplary girlfriends, and/or engaged in an extensive amount of groundwork prior to interactions with an abusive boyfriend.

Each communication orientation involves potential benefits and costs for co-cultural group members. According to Orbe (1998), "assimilation may be advantageous for co-cultural group members who seek to be regarded as persons whose goal is to focus on task production and/or social standing" (p. 111). In this regard, an assimilation orientation may enhance a person's ability to participate within the confines of dominant structures. Yet, to effectively participate in dominant society, nondominant members must conform to the structures of mainstream organizations, risk losing one's own normal behavior, or minimize difference to the point of marginal insignificance. Co-cultural group members learn implicitly, "as long as you live in my house, you live by my rules" (Orbe, 1998, p. 91). For nondominant group members, it is commonly understood that "my house" refers to the place of power that dominant group members own and operate.

In addition, co-cultural group members may endure negative effects on their self-concepts, and "engaging in the communicative practices associated with [the assimilation] orientation promotes an unhealthy communication climate that inherently reinforces the dominant group's institutional and social power" (Orbe, 1998, p. 111). The direct result of assimilation includes the perpetual muting of important social issues such as digital dating abuse, as well as the women's voices who experience such issues. There

is a great need to challenge the dominant culture by speaking out and educating others about the horrors of digital dating abuse. Without digital dating abuse prevention programs and voices of co-cultural group members, changing the broader culture will be difficult.

Interpretation of RQ3a: Co-Cultural Communication Strategies and Health

As a result of employing certain co-cultural communication strategies, co-researchers experienced both positive and negative health effects associated with digital dating abuse. Specifically, co-researchers discussed various ways that employing certain strategies affected their health outcomes. The most effective co-cultural communication strategy employed by the young women was being direct through an accommodative orientation (e.g., *confronting*), while the most ineffective strategies included being indirect through separation and assimilation orientations (e.g., *developing positive face, censoring self, averting controversy, avoiding,* or *maintaining interpersonal barriers*).

Co-cultural group members functioning from an accommodation perspective insist that dominant structures, "reinvent or, in the least, change the rules" so that they incorporate the life experiences of each co-cultural group. In this sense, the essence of accommodation is the development of appreciation, interdependence, and communication skills to effectively work with persons from other cultures. Here, co-researchers described such attempts by confronting their digitally abusive partner, and as a result they reported feeling less stress, depressive symptoms, and anxiety in their relationships. Other co-researchers discussed what "could have been" regarding their relationships if they would have communicated more directly with their partners. For example, one

young woman stated: "If I had been willing to put my thoughts and feelings out there and not been worried about what he was going to say in response [the relationship] could have been a lot better, a lot more successful." These sentiments show the importance of *communicating self* for co-cultural group members. According to Orbe (1998), co-cultural group members who exhibit positive self-esteem are likely to be self-assured communicators when interacting with dominant group members. As a result, these persons display a positive self-presentation by which they feel comfortable in asserting their point of view and constantly remain open, friendly, and genuine. By working with, instead of against dominant group members, co-researchers may have endured less emotional, physical, and social health risks related to digital dating abuse.

Interpretation of RQ4: Photovoice

Co-researchers used photovoice in three distinct ways, each of which helps to establish photovoice as a reliable multi-methodological data collection procedure. Confirming previously expressed verbal accounts, photovoice was employed as an avenue to access lived experiences through visual imagery. In presenting co-researchers with a "different way in" to the problem, it was possible to enable a different kind of response. Specifically, by allowing co-researchers to document their experiences of digital dating abuse through multiple forms of data, findings were confirmed through both in-depth interviews and visual imagery. The photographs evoked by the young women in response to the questions asked were powerful and meaning-laden, and often enabled responses elaborating on their already expressed verbal accounts.

Additionally, photographs enabled the young women to tell more in-depth "visual stories" regarding their lived experiences of digital dating abuse; thus, creating opportunities for them to express themselves in their own images, words, and reflections. In turn, these images became points of entry into seeing beneath the surface issue of digital dating abuse. For example, co-researchers revealed the underlying dangers and pressures associated with being in a digitally abusive relationship. Research by Niesyto (2000) highlights the ever increasing proliferation of media materials in young people's lives and how these are integral to the construction of social worlds and self-perception.

Photovoice also allowed co-researchers to reveal various aspects of digital dating abuse that were not previously revealed in their verbal interviews. Often, the experiences investigated in social scientific research are difficult and confronting; as such, words are sometimes not available for co-researchers to express the raw emotions and feelings they have experienced. Using visual methodologies, such as photovoice, provides an avenue to access these experiences and understandings. Specifically, by inviting co-researchers to create things as part of the research process, such as photographs, it is a different way into a research question, and may engage the brain in a different way, drawing a different kind of response. Through the use of photovoice, co-researchers were able to identify and better understand their experiences, some of which had not previously been discussed in their verbal interviews.

Moreover, photovoice attempts to investigate co-researchers' "everyday lived experience… through their own eyes" (Bloustein, 1998, p. 117). Specifically, the photovoice process facilitated an arena in which the young women were able to

experiment with the way in which they represented their experiences regarding digital dating abuse; it engaged them in the research versus a more passive process. Many of the co-researchers enjoyed the process of taking pictures because they thought the images captured their lived experiences exactly as they portrayed them; there was no room for erroneous interpretation. For example, one of the participants commented: "I think it explained my story pretty well. I'm more of a verbal, direct person, so I feel like the screen shots were like this is exactly what happened, this is how it went."

Further, the picture-taking process reflected the social and cultural frameworks and limitations impacting upon the women's perceptions of themselves. Specifically, the use of the camera empowered co-researchers, the camera becoming a tool for interpreting and redefining their words. Because empowerment educations manifests itself in photovoice practices by using images as a means by which participants can call attention to elements of their individual worlds that are worthy of celebration and derision (Novak, 2008), co-researchers were able to act as empowerment agents. Specifically, this study brought about awareness of digital dating abuse as an issue for some of the co-researchers. For example, the young women explained that through their participation in this study, they became aware of the issue and for the first time were able to express their feelings regarding their digitally abusive relationships.

Limitations and Direction for Future Research

Previous research on online abuse has not examined whether these behaviors occur among those currently or formerly involved in heterosexual intimate relationships, and partner abuse research has not incorporated technological forms of cyber abuse. As

such, this project integrates and advances both areas of research. Specifically, this study provides new insight into the lived experiences and co-cultural communicative choices of young women affected by digital dating abuse. However, there are limitations to this project. First, co-researchers were limited in terms of the quantity of participants and their experiences. Despite contacting approximately 100 young women, only ten participants identified as previously experiencing digital dating abuse in a heterosexual romantic relationship and elected to participate in this study. As such, there is a need to expand participation for a more inclusive perspective on the issues. Second, this particular study focused on the experiences of young, primarily European American, women from one mid-sized Northeastern college campus. As such, generalizations should not be made to other co-cultural groups. Third, this study focused solely on heterosexual abuse, ignoring the tremendous ramifications of homosexual abuse. In fact, co-researchers only talked about cross-sex digital dating abuse, which undoubtedly impacted the results, but also underscores the hegemonic heterosexuality in society. Fourth, this study examined how college students, particularly females, experience digital dating abuse, but does not examine how other co-cultures respond to the same type of abuse. For example, high school students and women with low socioeconomic status may have alternative communication strategies that were not explored in this study. Because marginalized group members are often protected by Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), future efforts should seek to work with IRBs to gain access to these groups in order to help tell their stories and share their experiences with digital dating abuse. Finally, this study used the term "digital dating abuse" when recruiting participants. It is possible that

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the term "abuse" limited some young women from participating in the study if they did not identify with the more commonly used terms abuse and/or violence. Future studies should employ a pilot test to determine the appropriate phrasing of the phenomenon under study; "digital dating drama" is one viable option.

Given the findings from this study, it is reasonable to conclude that future efforts should be aimed at enhancing digitally abused women's co-cultural communicative orientations and practices. There is a need to further identify specific tensions associated with digital dating abuse. In terms of strategies, experimentation among healthcare/service providers, scholars, activists, and society at large is encouraged. For example, communication strategies can be incorporated into professional training and certification programs for shelter workers, counselors, general marriage and/or family counselors, and other providers who work with people in troubled relationships. Providers, in turn, can include a broader range of strategies in both their literature and in face-to-face interactions with consumers. This would offer providers and the people in these relationships a more comprehensive analysis and understanding of their experiences.

Furthermore, incorporating co-cultural communication options into a range of educational activities may provide the public with opportunities for a more holistic understanding of digital dating abuse and gender inequality. Expanding the current literature and educational/awareness campaigns to include a broader range of co-cultural communication orientations and strategies might include a campaign similar to "Take Back the Night" where women and men receive violence prevention education. At the

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high school level, these strategies could be used in curricula and programs that address health education, dating violence, and family issues. Likewise, these options should be made available in university classes and curricula that address topics such as family communication, interpersonal communication, intercultural communication, and gender relations.

Women who are experiencing various forms of relational inequality must experiment and refine these communicative practices to accurately reflect their respective lived experiences. This may involve creating new terms, strategies, and orientations that may more accurately reflect the multiple realities of women's experiences. Most importantly, we must continue to talk about the issue of abuse, and encourage victims to seek help. Communication is a tool for women to express their experiences as they see fit and is a crucial step toward emancipation from the dominant construction of abuse.

Conclusion

The principle intent of this investigation was to examine young women's lived experiences of digital dating abuse and explicate the co-cultural communicative strategies young women used in digitally abusive heterosexual romantic relationships. The purpose was to understand which strategies digitally abused women identify as being most effective to their health and wellbeing in dominant culture. Through photovoice, co-researchers were able to document various aspects of their daily lives in order help "tell their story straight" regarding the various dimensions of digital dating abuse. Specifically, co-researchers revealed 15 salient themes with regard to women's lived experiences of digital dating abuse and the co-cultural strategies used to manage such

abuse. These accounts provide insight into the diverse communicative strategies and standpoints of the digitally abused women who participated in this study. As Allen (2001) explained, identifying strategies and skills assists in the process of emancipating women's communication. By identifying the positive, women are able to provide models to emulate (Allen, 2001). As such, the findings from this study may have implications for future prevention and intervention efforts.

Because digital dating abuse is a common experience among young women, high school and college campuses may want to take measures in providing adequate resources to help victims of this form of abuse. Additionally, service providers need to have an increased awareness of these harassing and monitoring online behaviors as they may contribute to or compound the negative impact of offline partner victimization and/or increase the likelihood of perpetration. College students may also benefit from public service announcements similar to those promoted in the "That's Not Cool" campaign, which is targeted at educating young teens about unhealthy cyber communications (Family Violence Prevention Fund, 2009). These efforts may assist teens and young adults with adequately identifying digital dating abuse and provide them with resources to effectively cope if it occurs. Service announcements and educational initiatives may decrease the occurrence of digital dating abuse and perhaps also reduce the risk of offline partner abuse.

Co-Cultural Communicative Practices Summary
(Orbe, 1998)

Practice	Brief Description
Avoiding	Maintaining a distance from dominant group members; refraining from activities and/or locations where interaction is likely
Averting Controversy	Averting communication away from controversial or potentially dangerous subject areas
Maintaining Interpersonal Barriers	Imposing, through the use of verbal and nonverbal cues, a psychological distance from dominant group members
Emphasizing Commonalities	Focusing on human similarities while downplaying or ignoring co-cultural differences
Exemplifying Strengths	Promoting the recognition of co-cultural group strengths, past accomplishments, and contributions to society
Mirroring	Adopting dominant group codes in attempts to make one's co-cultural identity less (or totally not) visible
Dissociating	Making a concerted effort to elude any connection with behaviors typically associated with one's co-cultural group
Dispelling Stereotypes	Myths of generalized group characteristics and behaviors are countered through the process of just being oneself
Manipulating Stereotypes	Conforming to commonly accepted beliefs about group members as a strategic means to exploit them for personal gain
Embracing Stereotypes	Applying a negotiated reading to dominant group perceptions and merging them into a positive co-cultural self-concept
Developing Positive Face	Assuming a gracious communicator stance in which one is more considerate, polite, and attentive to dominant group members
Censoring Self	Remaining silent when comments from dominant group members are inappropriate, indirectly insulting, or highly offensive
Extensive Preparation	Engaging in an extensive amount of detailed (mental or concrete) groundwork prior to interactions with dominant group members
Overcompensating	Conscious attempts—consistently employed in response to a pervasive fear of discrimination—to become a "superstar"
Communicating Self	Interacting with dominant group members in an authentic, open, and genuine manner; used by those with strong self-concepts
Educating Others	Taking the role of teacher in co-cultural interactions; enlightening dominant group members of co-cultural norms, values, etc.
Intragroup Networking	Identifying and working with other co-cultural group members who share common philosophies, convictions, and goals
Strategic Distancing	Avoiding any association with other co-cultural group members in attempts to be perceived as a distinct individual
Ridiculing Self	Invoking or participating in discourse, either passively or actively, which is demeaning to co-cultural group members

Using Liaisons	Identifying specific dominant group members who can be trusted for support, guidance, and assistance
Increasing Visibility	Covertly, yet strategically, maintaining a co-cultural presence within dominant structures
Confronting	Using the necessary aggressive methods, including ones that seemingly violate the "rights" of others, to assert one's voice
Gaining Advantage	Inserting references to co-cultural oppression to provoke dominant group reactions and gain advantage
Bargaining	Striking a covert or overt arrangement with dominant group members in which both parties agree to ignore co-cultural differences
Attacking	Inflicting psychological pain through personal attacks on dominant group members' self-concept
Sabotaging Others	Undermining the ability of dominant group members to take full advantage of their privilege inherent in dominant structures

Recruitment Script

A Feminist Vision of Empowerment through Photovoice: Portraits of Digital Dating Abuse
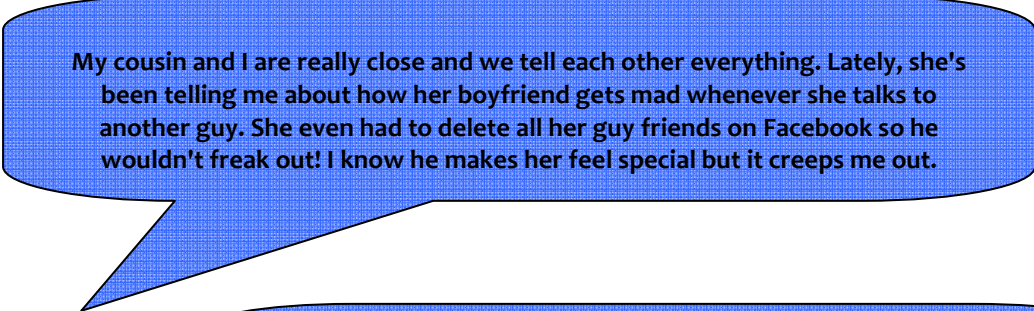
A research team at George Mason University is conducting a study in order to assess individuals' experiences related to digital dating abuse (DDA). I am here today to invite you to participate in our study. Specifically, we are hoping to capture your unique perspectives and experiences associated with DDA.
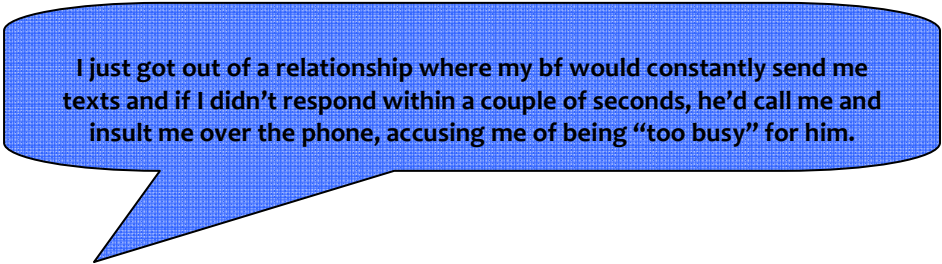
What is Digital Dating Abuse?
Digital dating abuse is a form of non-traditional abuse when someone repeatedly controls, pressures, or threatens someone they're seeing or dating, through their phone or online. For example:
1. Unwanted and/or repeated calls/text messages
   a. About 1 in 3 teens said partner had text messaged them up to 30 times/hour to check on what they were doing, where, and who with
   b. 65% of teens say this is a serious problem
2. Breaking into social networking account
3. Pressure to share embarrassing or private pictures/videos
   a. More than 1 in 10 teens reported that a partner has shared private or embarrassing pictures/videos of them
   b. 68% of teens say this is a serious problem

What does DDA look like?

My cousin and I are really close and we tell each other everything. Lately, she's been telling me about how her boyfriend gets mad whenever she talks to another guy. She even had to delete all her guy friends on Facebook so he wouldn't freak out! I know he makes her feel special but it creeps me out.

I just got out of a relationship where my bf would constantly send me texts and if I didn't respond within a couple of seconds, he'd call me and insult me over the phone, accusing me of being "too busy" for him.

Who can participate?
Participants will be included in the study primarily because of their history with DDA in a heterosexual romantic relationship. Specifically, participants must (1) identify as having been in a heterosexual romantic relationship that they identify as having contained DDA, (2) be willing to participant in the study to share their experiences, (3) be willing to document their story using photographs, and (4) own or can access a digital camera or camera phone.

NOTE: Women must identify as having been in a relationship containing DDA. Women who identify as currently being in a relationship with DDA characteristics will not be included in the study. Instead, these women will be referred to the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline at 1-866-331-9474**.**

What do I have to do?
1. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to spend approximately one hour attending a training session on the photovoice method that will be used to collect data in this study.

Photovoice is a phenomenological approach used to study the communicative experiences of diverse nondominant group members, as a way to capture the "lived" experiences of abused women. Through photovoice, participants use cameras to take pictures that document various aspects of their daily lives. These photographs then become artifacts around which an in-depth interview and/or focus group is centered. Thus, participants are able to "tell their story straight" in order to help scholars and activists better understand the dimensions of social issues such as digital dating abuse (DDA; i.e., unwanted and/or repeated calls/text/email messages, breaking into social networking accounts, pressure to share embarrassing or private pictures/videos).

2. You will then be asked to spend approximately one hour in an in-depth interview with me in order to discuss your photographs and your lived experience(s) as they pertain to DDA. Throughout this process all information will be kept confidential, meaning your name or any other identifiable information will not be linked to your photographs or interview transcript.

What will I get for participating?
There are no penalties for choosing not to participate. However, if you choose to participant and fully complete the study you will be given monetary compensation ($30 US).

How do I sign up to participate?
 [Pass out "screening form" to all female students]
If you would like to participate, we ask that you check the corresponding box on the form and also include your name and email address (or best source of contact information) so that the training information can be sent to you. If you would not like to participate in this study, simply check the corresponding box on the form and do NOT include any identifying information, as you will not be contacted with information regarding the training session.

APPENDIX C

Screening Form

A Feminist Vision of Empowerment through Photovoice: Portraits of Digital Dating Abuse

Part I
Have you experienced <u>digital drama</u> in a dating relationship? Please indicate if your partner:
□ Has checked your cell phone to see who you are talking to or texting
□ Has sent you repeated text or online messages asking where you are or what you're doing
□ Has sent you persistent, unwanted text or online messages
□ Has spread rumors or has posted negative comments about you online
□ Has created a Facebook or MySpace group that posts negative information about you online
□ Has posted private information, photos, or videos of you online without your permission
□ Has accessed your online accounts without your permission
□ Has sent you threatening or harassing text or online messages
□ Has sent you sexually harassing messages online or via a cell phone
□ Used GPS technology to track your location without permission
Other:_____
_____

Part II
If you have experienced <u>digital drama</u> in a romantic relationship, please provide a short story about one of the incidents, listed above, that has impacted you the most.

Please share an explicit description of how you responded to this <u>digital drama</u> incident.

The next phase of this study will use digital photographs to document your lived experiences regarding digital drama in romantic relationships. Please indicate your willingness to participate in this part of the project by placing a checkmark next to one of the options below.

_____**Yes**, I identify as <u>having been in</u> (NOT currently) a heterosexual romantic relationship that contained <u>digital drama</u> and am willing to participate in this study to share my experiences with you through the use of digital photographs.

- ■ I agree to participate in one (1) training session (approximately 15 minutes) and one (1) scheduled interview (approximately one hour).

- ■ I understand that I can withdrawal from this study at anytime. However, compensation of $40 will only be given upon my full completion of the research study.

Please print your name (or fictitious name) and best form of contact to receive information regarding the training session (e.g., email address, cell phone number, etc.). _____
_____

_____I have a *digital camera* that I can use to take pictures with.
_____I have a *camera phone* that I can use to take pictures with.
_____I am female and between the ages of 18-23 years old.

_____**Yes**, I identify as <u>having been in</u> (NOT currently) a heterosexual romantic relationship that contained <u>digital drama</u>, however, I do NOT wish to share my story with you at this time. Please do NOT include your name or any other identifying information on this form.

_____**Yes**, I identify as <u>currently being in</u> a heterosexual romantic relationship that contains <u>digital drama</u>, therefore I am not eligible to participate in this study. Please do NOT include your name or any other identifying information on this form.

_____**No**, this has not happened to me before, and therefore I do not have a story to share with you at this time. Please do NOT include your name or any other identifying information on this form.

Thank you for completing this form.

If you feel that you are currently in a relationship that has characteristics of digital drama please seek help at the National Teen Dating Abuse 24 hour helpline at 1-866-331-9474.

APPENDIX D

Training Session Agenda

A Feminist Vision of Empowerment through Photovoice: Portraits of Digital Dating Abuse

I. Introduction
A research team at George Mason University is conducting a study in order to assess individuals' experiences related to digital dating abuse (DDA). Specifically, we are hoping to capture your unique perspectives and experiences associated with DDA.
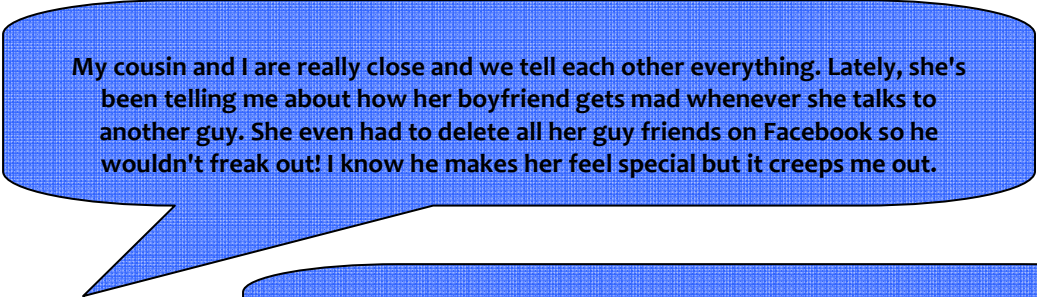
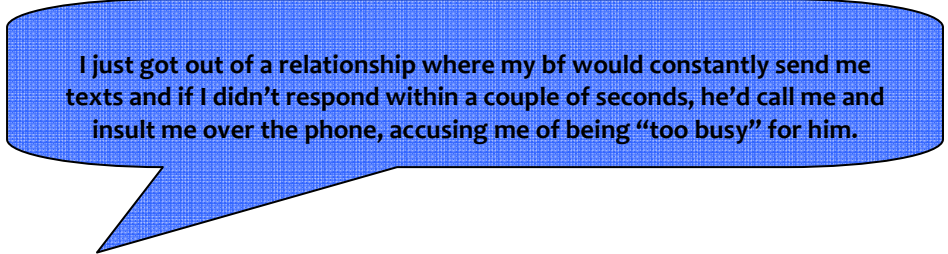A little bit about me…

II. What is Digital Dating Abuse?
Digital dating abuse is a form of non-traditional abuse when someone repeatedly controls, pressures, or threatens someone they're seeing or dating, through their phone or online. For example:
4. Unwanted and/or repeated calls/text messages
   a. About 1 in 3 teens said partner had text messaged them up to 30 times/hour to check on what they were doing, where, and who with
   b. 65% of teens say this is a serious problem
5. Breaking into social networking account
6. Pressure to share embarrassing or private pictures/videos
   a. More than 1 in 10 teens reported that a partner has shared private or embarrassing pictures/videos of them
   b. 68% of teens say this is a serious problem

What does DDA look like?

> My cousin and I are really close and we tell each other everything. Lately, she's been telling me about how her boyfriend gets mad whenever she talks to another guy. She even had to delete all her guy friends on Facebook so he wouldn't freak out! I know he makes her feel special but it creeps me out.

> I just got out of a relationship where my bf would constantly send me texts and if I didn't respond within a couple of seconds, he'd call me and insult me over the phone, accusing me of being "too busy" for him.

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III. What do I have to do?
Taking Photographs

You will be asked to use the photovoice method to take pictures of your "lived experience(s)" related to DDA. Photovoice is a phenomenological approach used to study the communicative experiences of diverse nondominant group members, as a way to capture the "lived" experiences of abused women. Through photovoice, participants use cameras to take pictures that document various aspects of their daily lives. These photographs then become artifacts around which an in-depth interview and/or focus group is centered. Thus, participants are able to "tell their story straight" in order to help scholars and activists better understand the dimensions of social issues such as digital dating abuse (DDA; i.e., unwanted and/or repeated calls/text/email messages, breaking into social networking accounts, pressure to share embarrassing or private pictures/videos).

Any photographs including persons will be kept confidential and will not be used when reporting the findings of this study in presentations or publications of any kind.

The Big Picture: What is your mental representation of DDA? What did you think? How did you feel? What did you do? What did you do when experiencing DDA? What did you do to cope with DDA? What does it mean to be a victim of DDA?

Questions to consider when taking photographs:
1. Describe your experience(s) of being a woman in a digitally abusive relationship.
2. What issues affect you in this relationship?
3. How did you become aware of these issues?
4. How did others contribute to your understanding of these issues?
5. Describe an experience in which you had a heightened sense of awareness that you were being abused?
6. How did that experience make you feel?
7. What did the experience make you think?
8. How did that experience make you act?
9. How have your experiences changed over time?

In-depth Interview

You will then be asked to spend approximately one hour in an in-depth interview with me in order to discuss your photographs and your lived experience(s) as they pertain to DDA. Throughout this process all information will be kept <u>confidential</u>, meaning your name or any other identifiable information will not be linked to your photographs or interview transcript.

IV. FAQs
Where do I get a camera?
You will use your own digital camera or camera phone to take the pictures.

What is a good photo?
[Show example of good vs. bad photo] Camera phone may not be the best option, depending on quality.

What can/cannot take pictures of?
You can take pictures of ANYTHING that describes your lived experience(s) related to DDA. However, try to focus on objects instead of on portraits of individuals. It will probably feel natural for you to want to take a picture of your best friend who helped you through this relationship. Instead, try to take pictures that illustrate HOW your friend helped you, or HOW your friend made you feel during your experience.

Additionally, given the nature of this topic, you are strongly encouraged to avoid pictures that will endanger yourself or others. While taking your pictures do not put yourself in a situation in which you (or others) feel uncomfortable or endangered in ANY way. If such a feeling is realized, remove yourself (and others) from the situation immediately, and (if needed) contact emergency services such as 911, George Mason University's Counseling Center at 703-993-2380, or their Sexual Assault Services Office at 703-993-9999 (Fairfax campus), 703-993-8186 (Arlington campus), 703-993-9448 (Prince William campus), or 703-380-1434 (emergency cell phone).

How do I get the photos to the researcher?
Once you have taken enough pictures to tell your story (approximately 18), you will then transfer them to a flash drive (that I will provide) and turn that into me.

When are pictures due?
Pictures are due as soon as you have taken enough pictures to tell your story, not to exceed 2 weeks from today (i.e., training session).

Will my name be linked to my story or my photographs?
No. All information is strictly confidential, meaning that only the researcher will be able to link the photographs and interview recordings to the participants' identity.

V. When will I be compensated?
Compensation will be given AFTER the final interview is complete ($30 US). Remember, you can withdrawal from this study at any time, however, if you do not fully complete the study no compensation will be given.

VI. Questions?

APPENDIX E

Informed Consent Form

A Feminist Vision of Empowerment through Photovoice: Portraits of Digital Dating Abuse

RESEARCH PROCEDURES
This research is being conducted to assess individuals' experiences related to digital dating abuse (DDA). Digital dating abuse is a form of non-traditional abuse when someone repeatedly controls, pressures, or threatens someone they're seeing or dating, through their phone or online. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to share your experience(s) of DDA through documentary photography and in-depth interview.

Specifically, you will be asked to spend approximately one (1) hour attending a training session on the photovoice method that will be used to collect data in this study, as well as attend a one (1) hour audio taped in-depth interview in order to discuss your photographs and lived experience(s) as they pertain to DDA. The time that is spent taking the photographs will vary on an individual basis. At a minimum, you should expect to devote 2-3 hours of your time participating in this study.

Given the nature of this topic, you are strongly encouraged to avoid pictures that will endanger yourself or others.

Any photographs including persons will be kept confidential and will not be used when reporting the findings of this study in presentations or publications of any kind.

RISKS
There are no foreseeable physical, social, or legal risks to participants. Possible psychological risks are discussed below.

The photovoice method and in-depth interview may illicit both positive and negative accounts of DDA in a heterosexual romantic relationship. Such information may be deemed sensitive and could cause feelings of discomfort. However, similar questions and practices have been used in other recent investigations without any adverse incidents. Nevertheless, we believe some possibility exists for psychological discomfort during this study. If the questions or photovoice methodology should cause feelings of discomfort, we would encourage participants to call the National Teen Dating Abuse 24 hour helpline at 1-866-331-9474. Again, though we would note that the data-collection measures should not exacerbate that likelihood and they are self-report in nature.

BENEFITS
There are no direct benefits to participants.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The data in this study will be confidential. Participant names will be matched with an identifying number code that will be reported on the photographs and interview recordings. Through the use of an identification

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key, the researchers will be able to link the photographs and interview recordings to the participants' identity. Only the principal researcher will have access to the identification key.

To ensure that all of the participants' names will be kept confidential all forms and assessments will be kept in a locked cabinet during the study, with only the principal investigator having access to the data. The research data will be used for evaluation and future research purposes only. No identifiable information will be included in the study. All forms and assessments will be destroyed after the completion of the study.

Names will be changed and pseudonyms will be used for all data reported in published manuscripts, conference papers, etc. to maintain participant confidentiality.

PARTICIPATION
Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

Given the amount of time participants will be asked to devote to this study, individuals will be compensated monetarily ($30 US) upon full completion of the study. If participants withdrawal and do not fully complete the project, no monetary compensation will be given.

CONTACT
This research is being conducted by Dr. Melinda Villagran and Melinda Weathers, M.A. in the Department of Communication at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. They each may be reached at 703-993-1090 for questions or to report a research-related problem. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Subject Protections at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

For information on counseling and sexual assault services, you may contact George Mason University's Counseling Center at 703-993-2380 and their Sexual Assault Services Office at 703-993-9999 (Fairfax campus), 703-993-8186 (Arlington campus), 703-993-9448 (Prince William campus), or 703-380-1434 (emergency cell phone).

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT
I have read this form and agree to participate in this study.

_____
Name

_____
Date of Signature

APPENDIX F

Interview Schedule

Demographic Items
- Okay, let's begin with some information about you.
  - Age
  - Race
  - Education Level (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior)
  - Socio-economic status (low, middle, high)
  - Length of digitally abusive relationship (weeks, months, years)

Relationship Experience
- Start off by telling me about your relationship (that contained digital dating abuse).
  - How did you meet?
  - How did you start dating?
  - Why did you like him?

- Okay, so now tell me about the relationship and when the digital abuse started to occur?
  - What happened?
  - What did he do?
  - What is your experience with digital abuse?
    - What forms did the digital abuse take (email, text, social networks)?
  - How did you become aware that this was an issue?
  - How did others contribute to your understanding of these issues?
  - How did that experience make you feel?

Health
- Okay, now let's talk about how this experience made you feel… your health.
  - How did digital abuse affect your physical health?
  - How did digital abuse affect your mental health?
  - Did digital abuse affect your health in any other way?

Communication
- Okay, now I want to talk about your communication regarding your experiences with digital dating abuse.
  - In the past, do you recall any experiences that have helped shape and prepare you for how to communicate in abusive relationships?
  - Describe how you communicate in your abusive relationship and socially (with family, friends).
    - Tell me a story or provide me with examples of the way you communicate. (Probe to find out differences between relationship and social communication. May use list of strategies to guide this part of the interview).

- In your digitally abusive relationship, have you ever felt that your communication was constrained?
- Have you ever felt that you had to adjust your communication style in your digitally abusive relationship? (Probe if they indicate they have had to adjust and get details about why and how they adjusted).
- In your digitally abusive relationship, would you say that you have determined methods of communication that are effective and those that are ineffective?
    - How were you able to determine what worked and what didn't work?

Health
- Okay, now let's talk about how this experience made you feel… your health.
    - When you communicated a certain way, did it make you feel better physically?
        - What ways would you communicate that made you feel better physically?
    - When you communicated a certain way, did it make you feel better mentally?
        - What ways would you communicate that made you feel better mentally?
    - Did your communication affect your health in any other way?

Photograph Questions
- Finally, I'd like to take a look at your pictures so that you can tell me about them.
    - What do you <u>S</u>ee here?
    - What's really <u>H</u>appening here?
        - What were you trying to say about digital abuse with this photograph?
    - How does this relate to <u>O</u>ur lives?
    - <u>W</u>hy does this problem or strength exist?
    - What can we <u>D</u>o about this?
    - Where was it taken? When?

General Questions
- To conclude, I have just a few more general questions for you. I'd like to hear your thoughts regarding digital dating abuse.
    - What advice do you have for other women who suffer from digital abuse?
        - Are there warming signs that you would give to other women?
    - What can be done to reduce instances of digital abuse in heterosexual romantic relationships?
    - What are your goals for future romantic relationships?
        - How do you plan to achieve them?
    - While you were in your digitally abusive relationship, is there anything you wish you would have done differently?
    - Do you have anything else to add?

APPENDIX G

Sample Contact Summary Form
Miles and Huberman (1994)

1.   What did you learn from this contact?

2.   Summarize the major perspective/information, as seen by the co-researcher.
        (Include reference to the location of comments in your journal)

3.   Unusual, interesting, or surprising aspects of the person's perspective.

4.   Summarize the significance and implications of this information for your research.

5.   Based on this information, what new ideas, concepts, or questions do you need to explore?

6.   What information is missing that you need to follow-up on at a later date?

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Melinda R. Weathers earned her B.A. in Speech Communication from Texas A&M University and completed her M.A. in Health Communication at the University of Houston, where her thesis focused on exploring communication competence, social support, perceived coping, and religious coping among Hispanic family members caring for loved ones with Alzheimer's disease. She has taught courses for nine separate lower and upper division communication courses in interpersonal, small group, and intercultural communication at George Mason University since 2008. Her research explores interpersonal and intercultural messages within relational, institutional, societal, and health contexts in order to, ultimately, better understand how effective communication relates to the mental and physical health and wellbeing of persons and society. Her work has been published in journals such as *Patient Education and Counseling, Journal of Participatory Medicine,* and *Communication Education,* and has been presented at twelve separate national and international conferences that span multiple disciplines, from communication to marketing to public policy.