

# ONLINE HARASSMENT, DIGITAL ABUSE, AND CYBERSTALKING IN AMERICA

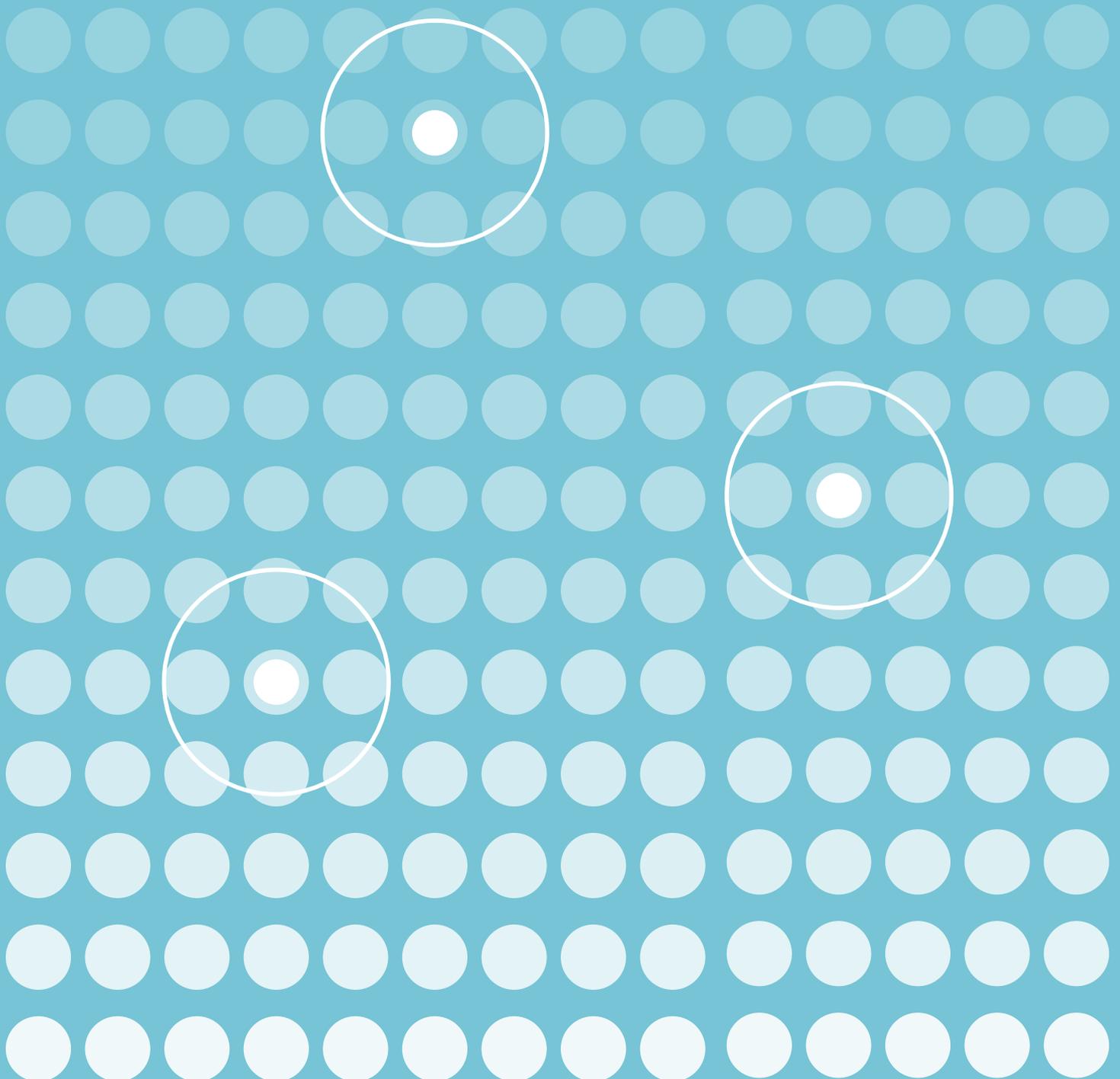
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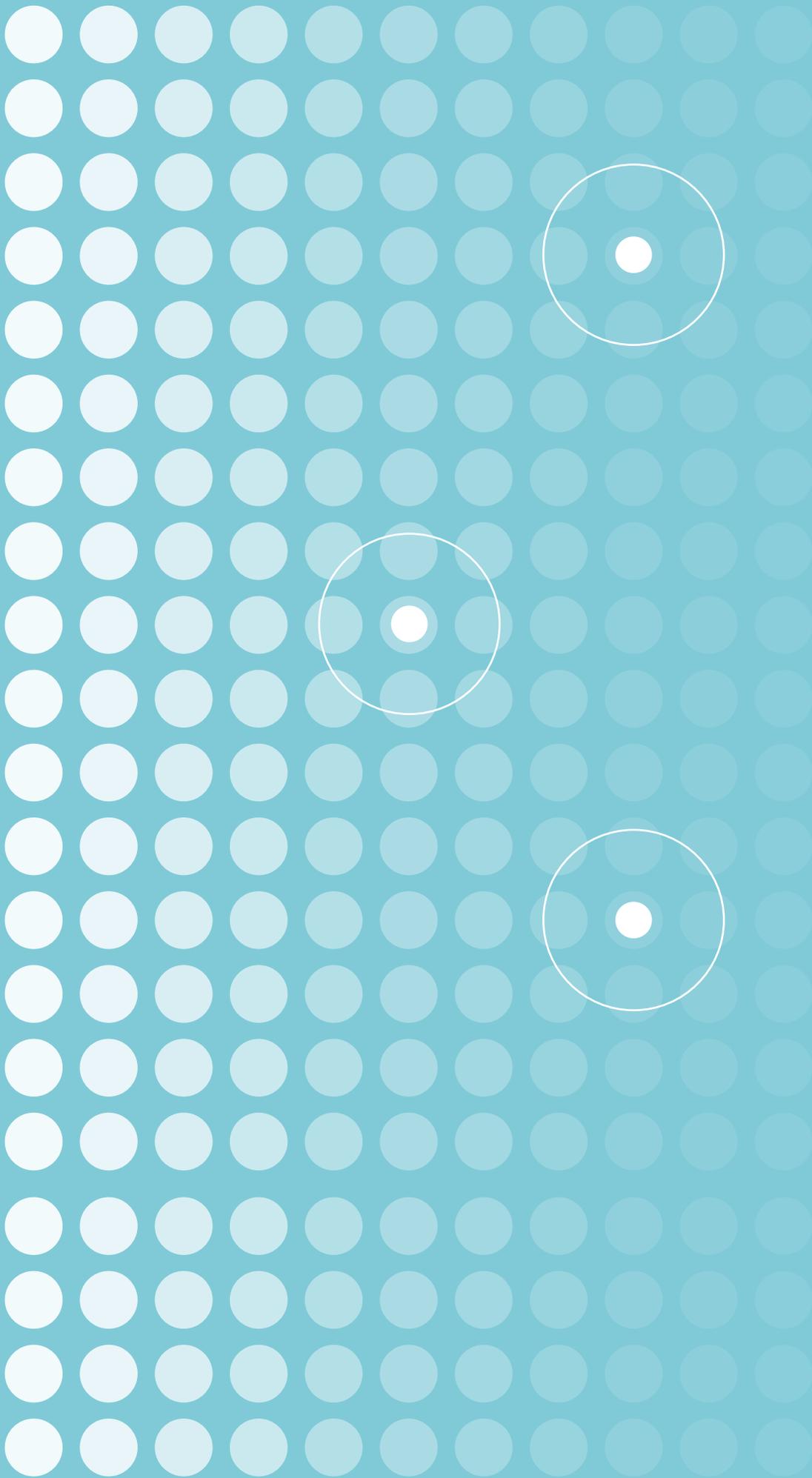
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## Summary of Findings

The internet and digital tools play an increasingly central role in how Americans engage with their communities: How they find and share information; how they connect with their friends, family, and professional networks; how they entertain themselves; how they seek answers to sensitive questions; how they learn about—and access—the world around them. The internet is built on the ideal of the free flow of information, but it is also built on the ideal of free-flowing discourse.

However, one persistent challenge to this ideal has been online harassment and abuse—unwanted contact that is used to create an intimidating, annoying, frightening, or even hostile environment for the victim and that uses digital means to reach the target. As with their traditional expressions, online harassment and abuse can affect many aspects of our digital lives. Even those who do not experience online harassment directly can see it and respond to its effects; even the threat of harassment can suppress the voices of many of our citizens.

In order to explore these issues and the ways that online environments affect our experiences online, this report examines American teens' and adults' experiences with witnessing, experiencing, and responding to the aftermath of online harassment and abuse. Its findings are based on the results of a nationally representative survey of 3,002 Americans 15 and older conducted from May 17th through July 31st, 2016. Respondents were contacted by landline and cell phone, and interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

### 47% of internet users have experienced online harassment or abuse

In order to examine the types of harassment and abuse that Americans have personally experienced, we asked internet users about 20 harassing behaviors over the course of the survey. Overall, almost half (47%) of Americans have personally experienced one of the harassing behaviors we asked about. The types of harassing behaviors we studied fall into three broad categories:

- **Direct harassment** refers to things that people do directly to one another. Examples include: being called offensive names, being threatened physically, and being stalked. **36% of internet users have experienced this type of harassment.**
- **Invasion of privacy** refers to harms done to the victim through the unauthorized access to and exposure or spreading of information beyond the owner's control. Experiences include: being hacked, having information about or images of the person exposed online without their permission, being impersonated, being monitored, and being tracked online. **30% of internet users have experienced this type of harassment.**
- **Denial of access** occurs when someone uses the features of the technology or platform to harm the victim, usually by preventing access to essential digital tools or platforms. Examples include: sending a very large number of unwanted messages, rendering the account unusable; misuse of reporting tools so that the person is blocked from using a platform; and technical attacks that overwhelm a device, site, server or platform and prevent access to it. **17% of internet users have experienced this type of harassment.**

Overall, almost three-quarters (72%) of American internet users have witnessed online harassment or abuse, and almost half (47%) of Americans have personally experienced one of the harassing behaviors we asked about.

## Men and women are equally likely to face harassment, but women experience a wider variety of online abuse, including more serious violations. Young people and sexual minorities are also more likely to experience online harassment or abuse—and more likely to be affected by it

A common theme throughout our findings is that young people under age 30 and sexual minorities (respondents who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual) were generally more likely to witness and/or experience online harassment or abuse. Black, sexual minority, and young Americans—especially young women—are also less likely than others to say that people are mostly kind to each other online, and more likely to say they self-censor what they post online in order to avoid harassment.

## Men are substantially less likely than women to describe what they experienced as harassment

Internet users who have experienced harassing behaviors differ as to whether they think their experience constitutes ‘harassment’ or not. We found that women who have experienced the behaviors we asked about were substantially more likely than men who have experienced the same behaviors to say that they thought their experience constituted ‘harassment or abuse’ (53% of women who experienced harassing behaviors vs. 40% of men).

Some behaviors were also more consistently considered ‘harassment’ by their targets. For instance, more than eight in ten people who experienced cyberstalking, sexual harassment, or persistent harassment agreed that their experiences constituted ‘online harassment or abuse,’ while fewer than six in ten people who experienced offensive name-calling said the same.

## Women were more likely than men to be angry, worried, or scared as a result of online harassment and abuse

Among those who did say that what they experienced was online harassment and abuse, women were almost three times as likely as men to say the harassment made them feel scared, and twice as likely to say the harassment made them feel worried. Meanwhile, men who said they had been harassed were more likely than women to say they were ‘not bothered’ by the experience. However, almost all of those who were ‘not bothered’ also reported feeling another emotion (annoyed, worried, etc.) as well.

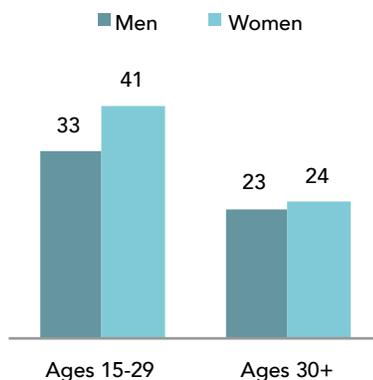
## 27% of all American internet users self-censor their online postings out of fear of online harassment

More than a quarter of Americans (27%) say they have at some point decided not to post something online for fear of attracting harassment. While many internet users who have *not* encountered harassment still say they have self-censored to avoid potential harassment, people who have seen or experienced harassment online are much more likely to self-censor for this reason than those who have not.

Looking at men and women of different age groups, we find that younger women are most likely to self-censor to avoid potential online harassment: 41% of women ages 15 to 29 self-censor, compared with 33% of men of the same age group and 24% of internet users ages 30 and older (men and women).

## Four in ten young women say they have self-censored to avoid harassment online

Among all internet users, the % in each group who say they have decided not to post something online because they were worried they would be harassed



Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

## 72% of internet users have witnessed at least one harassing behavior online

Almost three-quarters (72%) of internet users have witnessed online harassment. The most pronounced differences are by age and sexual identity: Internet users under age 30 and those who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual are more likely to witness all the core harassment behaviors we asked about. Black internet users are also more likely than White internet users to have witnessed online harassment.

In addition, the type of harassment Americans see can vary by subgroup. For example, although men and women are equally likely to see online harassment overall, women are more likely than men to have seen certain behaviors, such as cyberstalking.

## A majority of witnesses have responded to harassment they saw

Many witnesses take steps to support, report, and stand up for the targets of the harassment they see.

Overall, 65% of those who witnessed online harassment reported taking at least one of these three actions:

- 45% of witnesses said something to the person targeted by the aggressor.
- 40% said something to the aggressor.
- 38% said they reported the behavior through the reporting tools available on the online platform where it took place.

## More than four in ten victims of online harassment have changed contact information to escape their abuse

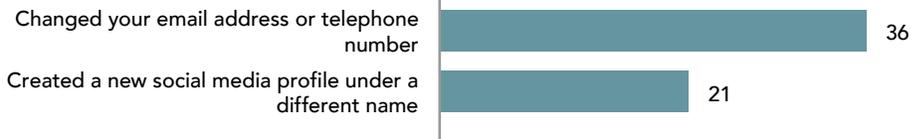
We asked internet users who have experienced online harassment and abuse what, if any, measures they have taken to protect themselves from further harassment. Taken together, 65% of victims of online harassment have used at least one of these types of protective strategies:

- 43% changed their contact information by changing their email address or phone number, or by creating a new social media profile under a different name.
- 33% asked for help from a friend or family member, law enforcement, or domestic violence resources.
- 27% reported or flagged content that was posted about them without their permission.
- 26% disconnected from online networks and devices by abandoning social media, the internet, or their cell phone.

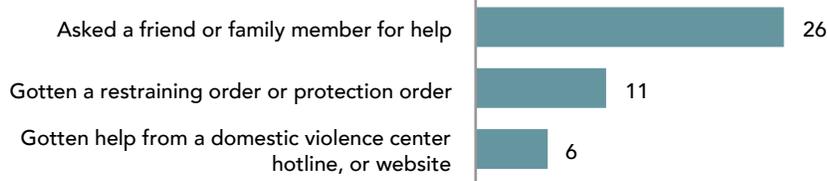
## 65% of victims of online harassment have used at least one protective strategy

Among victims of online harassment, the % who say they have done the following things to protect themselves from online harassment

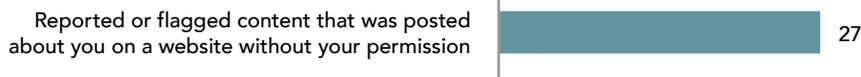
### 43% changed contact information



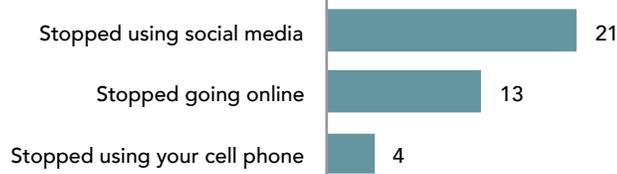
### 33% asked for help



### 27% reported content



### 26% disconnected from online networks or devices



Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older including n=673 victims of online harassment).

## Many victims disconnect from support networks and information as a side effect of online harassment and abuse

Online harassment and abuse can cause victims to experience increased isolation or disconnection from their communities, whether because of the strain the harassment has put on their close relationships, or because their harassment has made them feel more cut off from avenues for communication and information-seeking. We found that 40% of victims say they experienced at least one of these types of isolation or disconnectedness due to the online harassment they experienced:

- 27% of victims experienced trouble in a relationship or friendship because of something that was posted about them online.
- 20% had to shut down an online account or profile because of online harassment or abuse.
- 13% of victims felt less connected to information and 13% felt less connected to friends or family because their cell phone or internet use was limited because of harassment or abuse.

## **In sum, nearly half of Americans have been digitally harassed, and a substantial majority have witnessed it. And, among those who have seen or experienced online harassment, a large number have been negatively affected by the experience**

This report shows that overall, about half of Americans have experienced online harassment and about half have not. At the same time, a substantial majority have seen harassment perpetrated by others online. The presence of online harassment and abuse can affect our sense of the tenor and climate of the internet as a place for civic discourse and conversation, as well as the health and well-being of those who are targeted for harassment. Just as with other spaces and places that we need to navigate each day, the internet is both a place for renewal, rejuvenation, and support; and for abuse and harm. Our findings suggest that we must collectively work to combat online harassment if we want to see the internet live up to its potential.

## **Acknowledgements**

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

## **About Data & Society**

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

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

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

## **About the Digital Trust Foundation**

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

## Introduction

As digital devices become ever more valuable tools for interpersonal communication and connection, they have also become potential avenues through which harassment and abuse can be perpetrated. Many traditional forms of harassment and abuse can be replicated online, and conventional forms of abuse—stalking, sexual harassment, discrimination, defamation, bullying, intimate partner violence, etc.—have all found digital expressions. As a result, various types of online discussion spaces, from news organizations to social media sites, have struggled with how to encourage open discussion on their platforms without enabling cybeuse on their users. At the same time, the connectivity of networked spaces has cultivated new forms of harassment and abuse that primarily take place online. Both celebrities and non-celebrities alike have had their sensitive photos hacked and exposed online, and state legislatures across the country are wrestling with “revenge porn” laws to address this technologically-mediated form of harassment.<sup>1</sup> As digital tools become more interwoven into Americans’ personal and professional lives, understanding the spread and impact of cyberabuse is of increasing importance to researchers, policymakers, businesses, and consumers.

## Defining online harassment and abuse

Harassment can encompass a wide range of unwanted contact that is used to create an intimidating, annoying, frightening, or even hostile environment for the victim.<sup>2</sup> Online harassment is generally recognized as referring to this type of negative and unwanted contact using digital means. Online harassment can be a brief occurrence or a sustained campaign of abuse and attacks;<sup>3</sup> the perpetrator (or perpetrators) might be intimately known to the victim, or a stranger in another state or country. Online harassment is defined less by the specific behavior than its intended effect on and the way it is experienced by its target.

While some forms of online harassment are quite similar to their “offline” equivalents, the internet can make other forms of harassment easier to accomplish.<sup>4,5</sup> In terms of cyberstalking, for instance, stalkers can monitor and contact their victims through a number of digital channels. Digital tools also allow for new types of harassment that were either not previously possible or take on a fundamentally different character in an online context. As danah boyd has outlined, certain characteristics of networked online spaces change the dynamics of interaction on these platforms. For example, the ability to post comments anonymously versus having to take ownership of one’s ideas can affect the culture and context of the online space. Moreover, the persistence and searchability of online environments means that many forms of online harassment can remain online indefinitely, accessible and connected with the victim. Meanwhile, the replicability and scalability of networked spaces can make it easier for strangers to join in on the abuse.<sup>6,7</sup>

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1. As of November 2016, 34 states and the District of Columbia have passed legislation relating to non-consensual image sharing or “revenge porn.” “34 States + DC Have Revenge Porn Laws.” Cyber Civil Rights Initiative. <https://www.cybercivilrights.org/revenge-porn-laws/>.

2. Examples: EEOC, University of Michigan; Cyberbullying.org

3. Our definition departs from the legal definition in the legal definition requires the abuse to be “systematic and/or continued.” We asked about whether respondents have ever experienced these things, but due to space constraints did not ask follow-up questions about frequency or amount—and people frequently don’t know who is harassing them in the first place.

4. C. Southworth et al., “Intimate Partner Violence, Technology, and Stalking,” *Violence Against Women* 13, no. 8 (2007): 842-856.

5. J. Strawhun, N. Adams, and M.T. Huss, “The Assessment of Cyberstalking: An Expanded Examination Including Social Networking, Attachment, Jealousy, and Anger in Relation to Violence and Abuse,” *Violence and Victims* 28, no. 4 (2013): 715-730.

6. d. boyd, *Taken Out of Context: American Teen Sociality in Networked Publics*. ProQuest (2008).

7. M. Duggan, “Online Harassment,” (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2014).

## The existing landscape of research around online harassment

Data from organizations as diverse as the Department of Justice, the Centers for Disease Control, the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research/MTV, the National Network to End Domestic Violence, and the Pew Research Center have laid the groundwork for quantifying abuse, stalking, and online harassment. Their findings together show that technology has unequivocally changed the landscape of harassment and abuse.

Online harassment affects more and more people as the internet has become increasingly integrated with—and central to—Americans' personal and professional lives. Online harassment appears to be most frequently experienced by younger people, whose lives are highly intertwined with the internet and digital tools: Roughly 70% of young adults and 40% of adults have experienced online harassment or abuse.<sup>8</sup> In addition, 16% of U.S. women and 5% of men have been stalked,<sup>9</sup> a quarter to over three-quarters of whom may have been cyberstalked.<sup>10,11</sup> Previous research shows that most commonly utilized channels for cyberstalking appear to be emails, text messages, calls, and voicemails.<sup>12,13</sup>

Research suggests that women and racial/ethnic minorities—particularly women who also identify with a racial/ethnic minority group—are most frequently targeted for certain types of online harassment, as are sexual and gender minority adolescents.<sup>14,15</sup> Men also experience online abuse, but may be less likely to label it as such, and less likely to have their experiences seen as abuse by others.

Online harassment can have serious effects on the lives of its victims. Over half (53%) of young people who have experienced online harassment report their experience to be deeply upsetting, and 37% of adults who experienced severe online harassment describe being “extremely” or “very” upset by it.<sup>16,17</sup> Online harassment is also associated with psychological harms. Adolescent victims of digital abuse are more likely to show signs of depression than those who have never been victimized online. They are also more likely to require mental health treatment and to have considered suicide within the previous year.<sup>18,19</sup>

Additionally, as with abuse in other realms, digital abuse can lead to withdrawal by the victim, narrowing their world and reducing engagement with family and friends. Among adult victims, digital abuse can also harm the victim's career through damage to their online reputation or by forcing them to disengage from platforms and networks necessary for their professional advancement.<sup>20</sup>

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8. Ibid.

9. M. C. Black et al., “The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report.” Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 75 (2011).

10. Ibid.

11. K. Baum et al., “National Crime Victimization Survey: Stalking Victimization in the United States,” (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 2009).

12. Black et al.

13. Baum et al.

14. Duggan.

15. GLSEN, CiPHR, & CCRC. “Out online: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth on the Internet.” New York: GLSEN (2013).

16. Duggan.

17. Executive Summary: 2011 AP-MTV Digital Abuse Study. The Associated Press, MTV (2011)

18. K.J. Mitchell, M. Ybarra, D. Finkelhor, “The Relative Importance of Online Victimization in Understanding Depression, Delinquency, and Substance Use.” *Child Maltreatment* 12, no. 4 (2007): 314-24.

19. AP-MTV Digital Abuse Study.

20. D.K. Citron, *Hate Crimes in Cyberspace*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014.

## The scope of this report

Because of the potential impact of online harassment and the rapidly changing nature of digital technologies, it is important to quantify how widespread these behaviors are and to understand how they impact internet users of all ages. It is in this complex landscape of data, awareness, and challenge that we conducted this study.

This report aims to extend the existing research by providing a rigorous and comprehensive picture of the prevalence of technologically-mediated forms of harassment, abuse, and stalking in a nationally-representative survey. The study begins by exploring the types of harassment and abuse internet users say they have witnessed in online spaces, and what, if any, types of actions they took in response. This study also examines if simply witnessing online harassment, with no personal experience, and the perceived threat of it leads to self-censoring in online spaces among internet users. We also asked internet users about their own experiences with online harassment, abuse, and cyberstalking, and how those experiences made them feel. We then asked victims about potential negative consequences they may have experienced as a result of their online harassment or abuse in addition to any privacy practices they have used to protect themselves from harassment.

## About this survey

The data in this report were collected through a nationally representative telephone survey of 3,002 American internet users ages 15 and older. The survey was fielded from May 17 to July 31, 2016, and was conducted on cell phones and landlines. Interviews were administered by Princeton Data Source in English and in Spanish. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is  $\pm 2.0$  percentage points. For more detail, please see the separate Methods section available at <http://www.datasociety.net/pubs/oh/methods.pdf>.

The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI) and funded by the Digital Trust Foundation. Survey design and data analysis were executed by staff at the Data & Society Research Institute and the Center for Innovative Public Health Research.

## A note on terms used in this report

Throughout the report, the terms “Americans,” “respondents,” or “internet users” are used to refer to internet-using Americans ages 15 and older. The term “youth” refers to teens and adults ages 15 to 29, and the term “young adults” refers to those ages 18 to 29. In this study, we use the terms “LGB” or “sexual minorities” to refer to respondents who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or “other” when asked their sexual identity. The survey did not include a question about gender identity, so this report cannot examine experiences of transgender Americans specifically.

## Chapter 1. Witnessing Online Harassment

Some 87% of Americans go online, and 68% have a smartphone that connects to the internet.<sup>1</sup> As these devices, and the platforms and networks that use them, become more integrated into our daily lives, they provide important spaces for interacting with others and learning new things. As with all places and arenas where people come together, there is the potential for positive and supportive interactions, and also for negative and harmful experiences online. In order for online spaces to facilitate the free flow of information and the exchange of ideas, everyone must feel comfortable inhabiting and interacting in those spaces.

To better understand these experiences, we need to know more about the tenor of social life online: Do people think of the internet as a space for mostly positive or negative interactions? What types of harassing behaviors do they see? Does witnessing harassment or abuse affect how people think about the online environment? In this chapter, we explore individuals' experiences with witnessing online harassment: if they have ever witnessed online harassment and what form it has taken, what they did as a result of having witnessed it, and how it made them feel about the kindness of online spaces more generally.

### The harassment that Americans see online

#### Witnessing specific types of abuse towards another person online

We asked internet users about whether they had ever witnessed several types of online harassment, ranging from seeing someone being called offensive names to seeing someone being stalked. Almost three in four (72%) internet users have witnessed at least one of the seven behaviors asked, and one in twenty (5%) have witnessed all of them. This is in line with previous research by the Pew Research Center, which found that 73% of internet users have witnessed one of six harassing activities.<sup>2</sup>

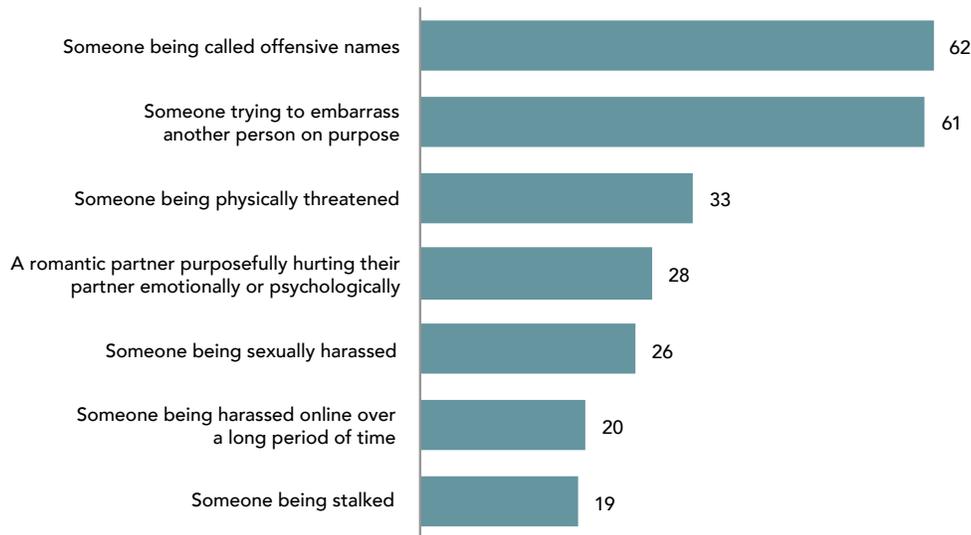
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1. 87% of American adults use the internet as of January 2014. "Internet Use Over Time." Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech, January 2, 2014. <http://www.pewinternet.org/data-trend/internet-use/internet-use-over-time/>. 68% of American adults own a smartphone as of July 2015. "Device Ownership Over Time." Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech, November 13, 2013. <http://www.pewinternet.org/data-trend/mobile/device-ownership/>.

2. "Online Harassment." Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech, October 22, 2014. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/10/22/online-harassment/>.

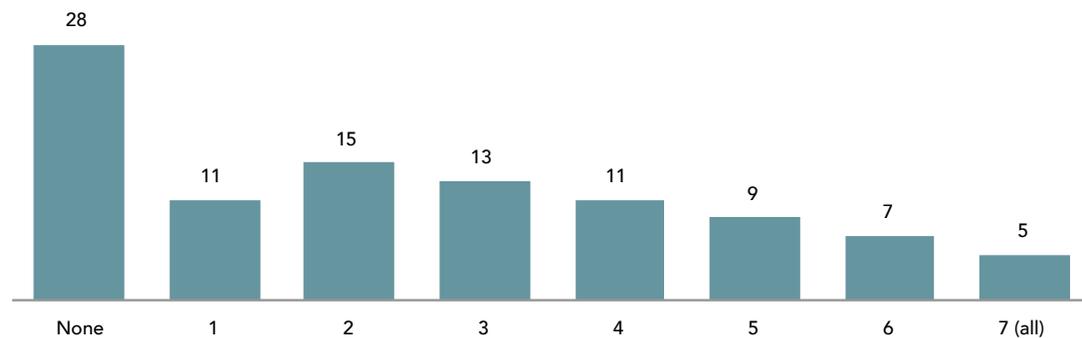
## 72% of internet users have witnessed at least one harassing behavior online

Among all internet users, the % who say they have ever witnessed any of the following behaviors directed at a particular person online



## Number of harassment or abuse behaviors witnessed online

Among all internet users



Source: Data & Society / CIPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

Being called offensive names and being embarrassed were by far the most common forms of digital harassment witnessed by Americans. They were reported twice as often as the other five forms queried. Seeing someone being stalked or someone being harassed for an extended period were the least common forms reported, although even here, one in five Americans said they had seen someone else online be targeted for this type of abuse.

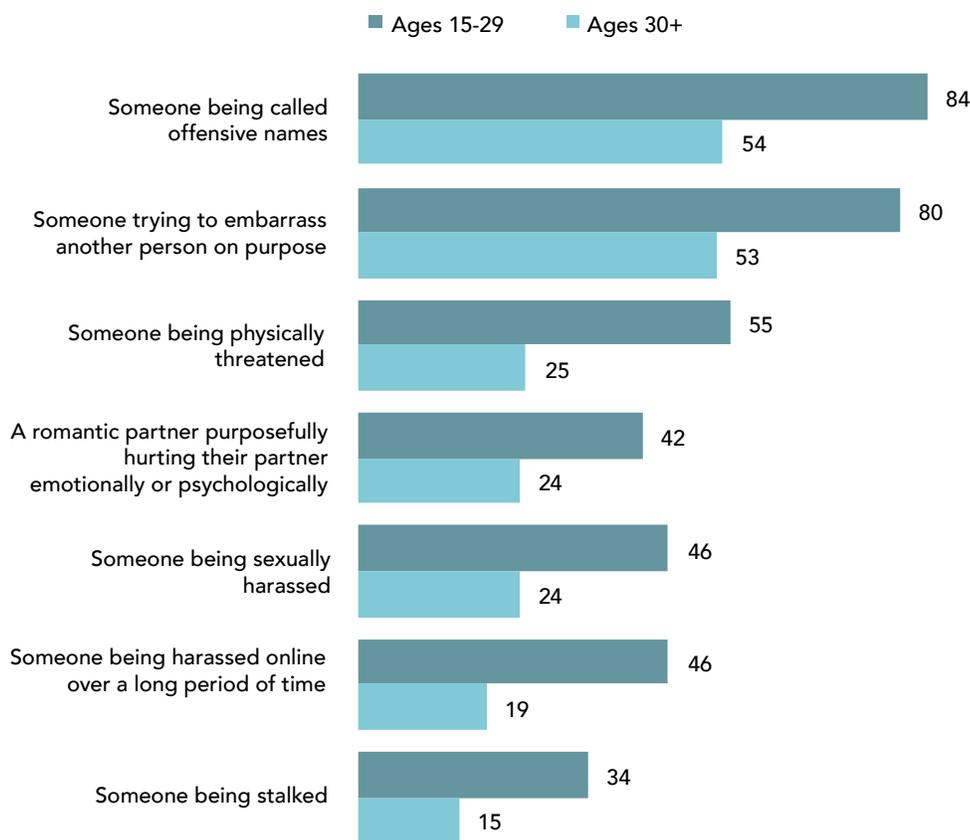
The most pronounced differences in witnessing harassment and abuse online are by age and sexual identity: Younger internet users and those who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) are most likely to witness each form of online harassment discussed in this study. Women and Black internet users are also more likely than men and White internet users to witness certain forms of harassment.

## Younger internet users are more likely than older adults to witness all forms of online harassment

As a group, younger internet users engage with dramatically different online environments than older internet users. Younger age groups are far more likely than older age groups to use social media, online discussion sites, and multiplayer video games, and harassing behaviors are more commonly seen on these platforms. Nonetheless, even after taking into account the different platforms that people engage with, younger Americans are still more likely to say they have witnessed abuse online.

### Young people under 30 are much more likely to witness nearly all types of online harassment

Among all internet users, the % who say they have ever witnessed any of the following behaviors directed at a particular person online



Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).



These differences in rates of witnessing online harassment widen dramatically between the youngest and oldest age groups: While almost all internet users under age 30 have seen at least one of the seven harassing behaviors asked about (90%), most internet users 65 and older have not seen any (9%).

### Younger age groups are much more likely to witness nearly all types of online harassment

Among all internet users, the % who say they have ever witnessed any of the following behaviors directed at a particular person online

|  | a                 | b                  | c                | d               | e         |
|--|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------|
|  | 15-17             | 18-29              | 30-49            | 50-64           | 65+       |
| Someone being called offensive names   | 83 <sup>cde</sup> | 84 <sup>cde</sup>  | 66 <sup>de</sup> | 49 <sup>e</sup> | 29        |
| Someone trying to embarrass another person on purpose                                | 78 <sup>cde</sup> | 81 <sup>cde</sup>  | 66 <sup>de</sup> | 49 <sup>e</sup> | 27        |
| Someone being physically threatened  | 50 <sup>cde</sup> | 56 <sup>cde</sup>  | 38 <sup>de</sup> | 17 <sup>e</sup> | 7         |
| A romantic partner purposefully hurting their partner emotionally or psychologically | 28 <sup>de</sup>  | 45 <sup>bcde</sup> | 33 <sup>de</sup> | 19 <sup>e</sup> | 7         |
| Someone being sexually harassed  | 38 <sup>cde</sup> | 48 <sup>bcde</sup> | 26 <sup>de</sup> | 15 <sup>e</sup> | 8         |
| Someone being harassed online over a long period of time                             | 1 <sup>cde</sup>  | 35 <sup>cde</sup>  | 20 <sup>de</sup> | 12 <sup>e</sup> | 6         |
| Someone being stalked  | 33 <sup>cde</sup> | 31 <sup>cde</sup>  | 20 <sup>de</sup> | 11 <sup>e</sup> | 4         |
| <b>Any of these</b>  | <b>88</b>         | <b>91</b>          | <b>77</b>        | <b>61</b>       | <b>40</b> |

Columns marked with a superscript letter (\*) indicate a statistically significant difference at the 95% level between that column and the column designated by that superscript letter.

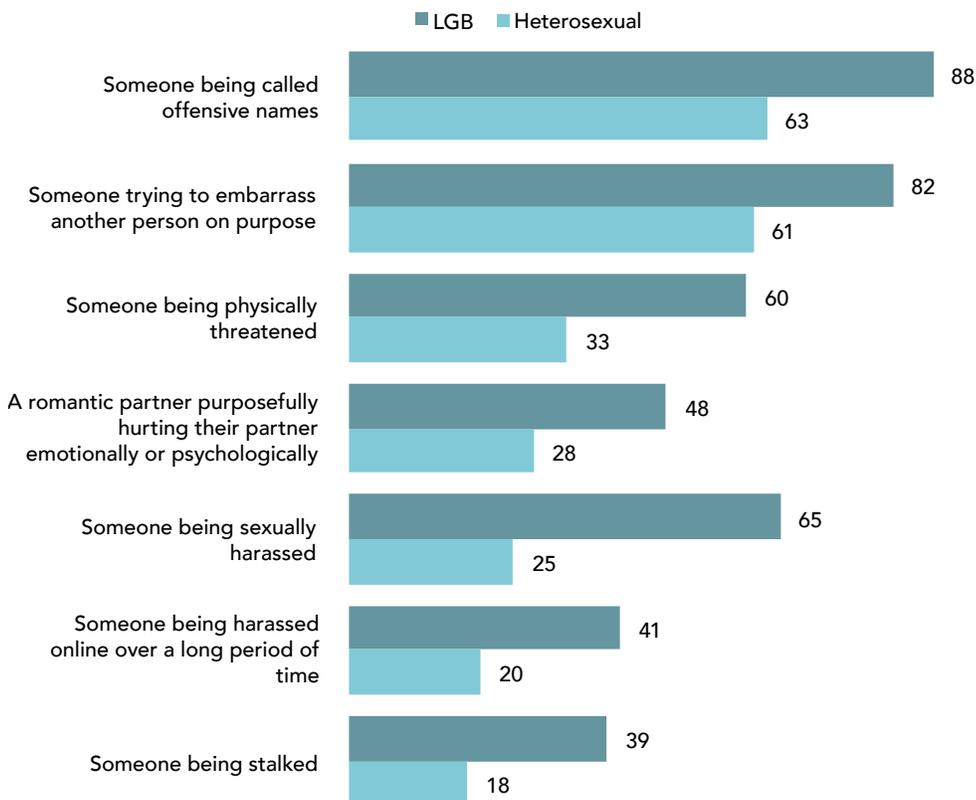
Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

Once we account for the use of social media, discussion sites, and multiplayer video games, along with other demographic and household factors, younger age groups remain more likely to witness all types of harassment.

Taken together, 92% of internet users who identify as LGB have seen at least one of the seven behaviors queried compared with 73% of non-LGB internet users, and 18% of LGB internet users have witnessed all seven. Differences in rates of harassment exposure persist for most types of harassment even when other factors, such as demographics and the use of different types of online platforms, are taken into account.

### LGB internet users are more likely to witness all forms of online harassment

Among all internet users, the % in each group who say they have ever witnessed any of the following behaviors directed at a particular person online



Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older, including 151 LGB internet users).

### Men and women were equally likely to witness at least one type of online harassment, but differed in the specific type of online harassment they witnessed

Overall, men and women were equally likely to witness most of these behaviors online. One significant difference was noted in reports of stalking: 20% of women compared to 17% of men have seen someone stalked online, a difference which persists even after underlying factors are taken into account. And once we take into account the different types of digital spaces that men and women visit (i.e. women slightly more likely to use social media, men much more likely to use discussion sites and multiplayer video games), as well as demographic and household differences, women are also more likely than men to see someone being harassed online over a long period of time, and to see someone harming their romantic partner emotionally or psychologically.



## The likelihood of witnessing online harassment varies by race/ethnicity

Black internet users are significantly more likely than White or Hispanic internet users to have, overall, witnessed at least one of the harassing and abusive behaviors asked about in the survey. Black internet users were also more likely than White internet users to have witnessed many of the specific harassing behaviors asked about in the survey. For instance, almost half (46%) of Black internet users have seen someone being physically threatened online, compared with less than a third of White (31%) and Hispanic (33%) internet users—a difference that persists after accounting for platform use and other underlying factors. Additionally, once other factors are accounted for, Hispanic internet users appear to be *less* likely than White internet users to have witnessed harassment, specifically physical threats and calling someone offensive names.<sup>3</sup>

### Black internet users are more likely to witness many forms of online harassment than White or Hispanic internet users

*Among all internet users, the % who say they have ever witnessed any of the following behaviors directed at a particular person online*

|  | a         | b                | c               |
|--|-----------|------------------|-----------------|
|  | White     | Black            | Hispanic        |
| Someone being called offensive names   | 62        | 69 <sup>ac</sup> | 60              |
| Someone trying to embarrass another person on purpose                                | 60        | 68 <sup>a</sup>  | 60              |
| Someone being physically threatened  | 31        | 46 <sup>ac</sup> | 33              |
| A romantic partner purposefully hurting their partner emotionally or psychologically | 26        | 38 <sup>a</sup>  | 32 <sup>a</sup> |
| Someone being sexually harassed  | 24        | 29               | 31 <sup>a</sup> |
| Someone being harassed online over a long period of time                             | 19        | 27 <sup>a</sup>  | 22              |
| Someone being stalked  | 18        | 22               | 19              |
| <b>Any of these</b>  | <b>71</b> | <b>78</b>        | <b>69</b>       |

Columns marked with a superscript letter (a) indicate a statistically significant difference at the 95% level between that column and the column designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each subgroup.

Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

<sup>3</sup> These factors include sex, age, race/ethnicity, household income, and the respondent's education levels, in addition to whether the respondent used social media, discussion sites, or multiplayer video games.

## How people who witness harassment respond

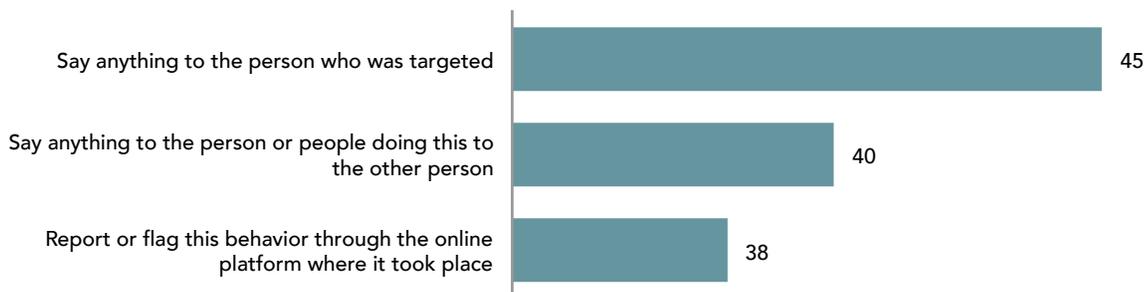
One of the key elements in understanding and helping to combat online harassment are bystanders – people who are seeing the harassment but are not directly targeted by the aggressor. Do the bystanders take action? What specific actions are they taking? This study asks those who have witnessed online harassment what, if any, action they took in response.

### A majority of witnesses to online harassment have done something about it

Overall, 65% of those who witnessed online harassment reported taking at least one of these three actions: 45% said something to the person targeted; 40% of witnesses said something to the aggressor; and 38% reported the behavior through the reporting tools available on the online platform where it took place.

### The most common response bystanders had when they witnessed online harassment was to say something to the victim

*Among internet users who have witnessed online harassment, the % who say they have done the following things after witnessing harassment behaviors directed at a particular person online*



Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older, including n=2,014 witnesses).

It is important to note that we do not have information on whether the witnesses knew the person they saw being harassed, nor do we know the context of the harassing behavior. Furthermore, whether or not someone does something is potentially influenced by many things. For example, witnesses may not have felt like it was their place or that it was safe to comment publically, especially by responding directly to the harasser; some might fear becoming a target themselves. Finally, not all platforms have reporting mechanisms that apply to all these situations. These issues, while not asked about in the survey, may help explain variation in bystander behavior we see across different groups.

## Among those who witnessed online harassment, youth, LGB respondents, and women were more likely to respond

Younger witnesses and LGB witnesses of harassment were more likely than older witnesses or heterosexual witnesses to report responding to harassment they saw in any of the three ways we asked about in our study. And women who witnessed harassment were more likely than men to say something to the person who was targeted and to flag the offending behavior.

### Differences in response to harassment by different groups of bystanders

*Among all internet users who have witnessed online harassment or abuse*

#### **Women who witness harassment are more likely than men to:**

- Say something to the target (49% of women who witnessed harassment vs. 42% of men who witnessed harassment)
- Flag or report the harassment they witnessed (42% of women who witnessed harassment vs. 33% of men who witnessed harassment)

#### **White and Hispanic witnesses are more likely to:**

- Say something to the target (47% of White and Hispanic witnesses vs. 33% of Black witnesses)

#### **Black, Hispanic and White witnesses are equally likely to:**

- Say something to the aggressor (40% of all witnesses)
- Flag or report the harassment they witnessed (38% of all witnesses)

#### **LGB witnesses are more likely than heterosexual witnesses to:**

- Report or flag the harassing behavior they witnessed (66% of LGB witnesses vs. 36% of heterosexual witnesses)
- Say something to the target (64% of LGB witnesses vs. 44% of heterosexual witnesses)
- Say something to the aggressor (45% of LGB witnesses vs. 40% of heterosexual witnesses)

#### **Witnesses ages 15-29 are more likely than witnesses ages 30 and older to:**

Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

## White and Hispanic witnesses are more likely to say something to target

People across racial/ethnic lines were equally likely to say something to the aggressor when they saw online harassment, and report or flag offending behavior online. However, almost half (47%) of White internet users and Hispanic internet users who witnessed harassment said something to the targeted person, compared with a third (33%) of Black internet users.

## How people perceive others' level of kindness on the internet

Because so many types of online harassment occur in public or networked spaces, seeing the abuse can potentially influence anyone who witnesses it, not only the original target. Does witnessing harassment play a role in what Americans think about the internet as a space for interaction and community? Put another way, does witnessing online harassment and abuse lead internet users to think of their fellow online denizens as generally kind, or generally not?

### **Most internet users say people are mostly kind to one another online**

Broadly, a majority of internet users (62%) say that in their experience, people are mostly kind to one another online. Almost one in four (23%) disagree, saying that people are mostly unkind online; 8% said that "it depends." Older age groups—particularly older women—were more likely than younger internet users to say people are mostly *kind* online. Black internet users and LGB respondents were more likely to say people are mostly *unkind* online.

## A majority of internet users say that, in their experience, people are mostly kind to one another online

Among all internet users, the % who say people are mostly kind/unkind online

|  | Mostly kind       | Mostly unkind     | It depends (vol)  |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Total</b>                             | <b>62</b>         | <b>23</b>         | <b>8</b>          |
| <b>Age and sex</b>                       |                   |                   |                   |
| a Men ages 15-29                         | 51                | 34 <sup>cd</sup>  | 11 <sup>d</sup>   |
| b Women ages 15-29                       | 56                | 29 <sup>cd</sup>  | 14 <sup>cd</sup>  |
| c Men ages 30+                           | 61 <sup>a</sup>   | 19                | 9 <sup>d</sup>    |
| d Women ages 30+                         | 69 <sup>abc</sup> | 20                | 4                 |
| <b>Sex</b>                               |                   |                   |                   |
| a Men                                    | 58                | 23                | 9 <sup>bd</sup>   |
| b Women                                  | 66 <sup>a</sup>   | 22                | 7                 |
| <b>Age</b>                               |                   |                   |                   |
| a 15-17                                  | 58                | 28 <sup>de</sup>  | 10 <sup>e</sup>   |
| b 18-29                                  | 53                | 33 <sup>cde</sup> | 13 <sup>cde</sup> |
| c 30-49                                  | 62 <sup>d</sup>   | 24 <sup>de</sup>  | 8 <sup>e</sup>    |
| d 50-64                                  | 69 <sup>abc</sup> | 16                | 6 <sup>e</sup>    |
| e 65+                                    | 67 <sup>b</sup>   | 13                | 3                 |
| <b>Race/ethnicity</b>                    |                   |                   |                   |
| a White (non-Hispanic)                   | 64                | 21                | 7                 |
| b Black (non-Hispanic)                   | 57                | 30 <sup>a</sup>   | 9                 |
| c Hispanic                               | 62                | 24                | 11 <sup>a</sup>   |
| <b>Household income (among ages 18+)</b> |                   |                   |                   |
| a < \$30,000                             | 61                | 26 <sup>d</sup>   | 8                 |
| b \$30,000 - \$49,999                    | 61                | 24                | 11 <sup>de</sup>  |
| c \$50,000 - \$74,999                    | 63                | 24                | 7                 |
| d \$75,000 - \$99,999                    | 69 <sup>ab</sup>  | 20                | 6                 |
| e \$100,000+                             | 64                | 22                | 6                 |
| <b>Education (among ages 18+)</b>        |                   |                   |                   |
| a Less than high school                  | 69 <sup>b</sup>   | 18                | 4                 |
| b High school graduate                   | 58                | 25 <sup>d</sup>   | 9                 |
| c Some college                           | 60                | 24 <sup>d</sup>   | 9                 |
| d College graduate                       | 67 <sup>bc</sup>  | 20                | 6                 |
| <b>Sexual identification</b>             |                   |                   |                   |
| a LGB                                    | 57                | 35 <sup>b</sup>   | 6                 |
| b Heterosexual                           | 62                | 23                | 8                 |

Rows marked with a superscript letter (°) indicate a statistically significant difference at the 95% level between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each subgroup.

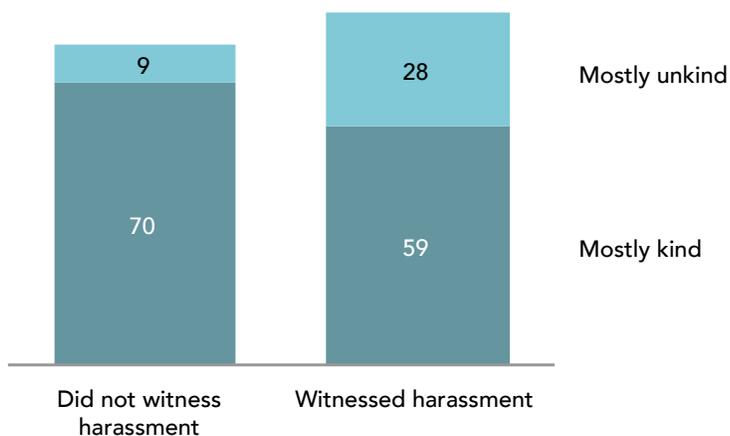
Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberstalking Abuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

### Witnesses to digital abuse are more likely to say that people are unkind online in general

Thinking that the internet is a negative space or not appears to be related to whether the respondent has witnessed online harassment and abuse, although we do not know the order in which these two things happened. Internet users who have witnessed any type of online harassment are more likely than those who have not witnessed online harassment to say that people on the internet are “mostly unkind” to each other, even after controlling for other factors.

### People who have witnessed harassment are less likely to say that people are mostly kind online

% among internet users in each subgroup



Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).



# Chapter 2: Digital Harassment and Abuse

## Introduction

The term online harassment describes a wide range of different experiences. In this study, we asked about 20 different types of online harassment and abuse, including cyberstalking and sexual harassment. Our list is not an exhaustive list; when humans wish to harm one another, we can be endlessly creative. It does, however, reflect a wide range of negative experiences that people are having online.

We organized online harassment experiences into three groups: direct harassment, invasion of privacy, and denial of access:

**Direct harassment** refers to things that people do directly to one another. Examples include: being called offensive names, being threatened physically, and being stalked.

**Invasion of privacy** refers to harm to the victim through the unauthorized access to and exposure or spreading of information beyond the owner's control. Experiences include: being hacked, having information about or images of the person exposed online without their permission, being impersonated, being monitored, and being tracked online.

**Denial of access** occurs when someone uses the features of the technology or platform to harm the victim, usually by preventing access to essential digital tools or platforms. Examples include: sending a very large number of unwanted messages, rendering the account unusable; misuse of reporting tools so that the person is blocked from using a platform; and technical attacks that overwhelm a device, site, server or platform and prevent access to it.

Overall, 47% of American internet users have experienced any of these 20 types of digital harassment. About 15% of internet users have experienced one type of online harassment, another 15% have experience two or three types of online harassment, and 17% have endured four or more types of online harassment.

It is critical to note that not all online harassment stays online: 12% of victims of online harassment—or 3% of all internet users—report that their abuser attempted to harm them in-person after harassing them online.

In this chapter, we will first examine who is experiencing direct harassment, invasion of privacy, and denial of access-type harassment, and then we will dive deeper into the context: Who was the harasser, how would the person being targeted by harassment define their experience, and did the online experience bleed into the offline world?

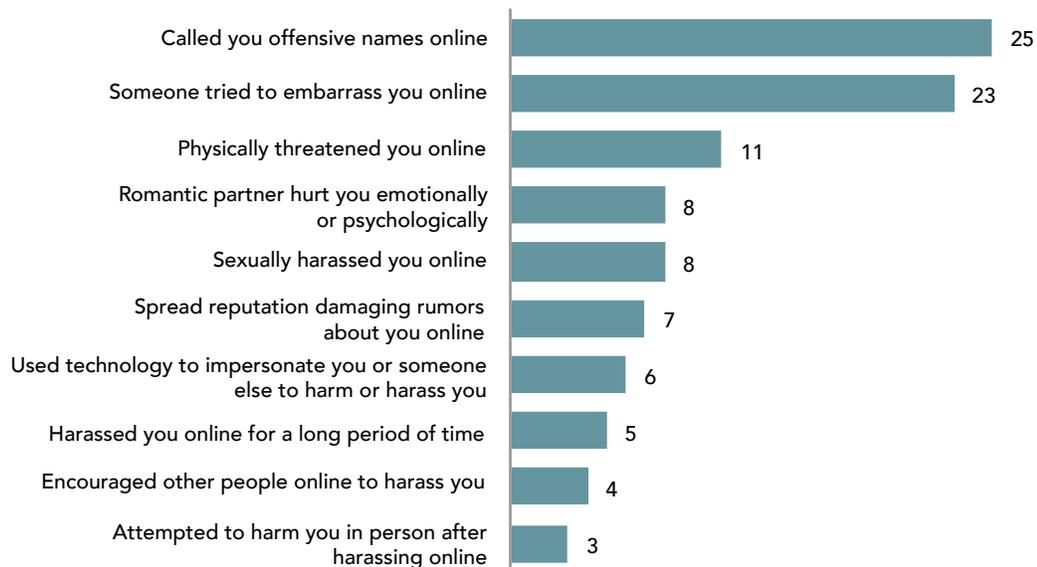
## One third of Americans have experienced direct online harassment

Direct harassment, under our definition, involves ten behaviors: Being called offensive names, being embarrassed online, being physically threatened online, being sexually harassed online, being harassed over a long time, being hurt online by a romantic partner, being impersonated, spreading damaging rumors online, encouraging others to harass you online, and attempting to hurt the victim in person after online harassment.

One third (36%) of American internet users ages 15 and older have experienced at least one of these behaviors. About 12% say they have experienced one type of direct harassment, 14% say they've experience two or three types of harassment, and 10% say they have experienced four or more types of direct harassment.

### 36% of internet users have experienced some type of direct online harassment

Among all internet users, the % who have experienced the following types of online harassment



Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

## **The most common types of direct online harassment mirror verbal harassment: Being called offensive names, someone trying to embarrass you, being physically threatened, and being sexually harassed**

The most common types of direct harassment involve digital analogs of verbal abuse: One quarter (25%) of internet users say that they have been called offensive names online. Additionally, about one quarter of internet users (23%) have had someone try to embarrass them on purpose online. Just over one in nine internet users (11%) have been physically threatened online, and one in twelve (8%) have been sexually harassed online. And one in twenty internet users (5%) say that they have been harassed online over a long period of time.

## **7% of internet users have had false rumors spread about them**

Rumor-mongering is a time-honored tactic among harassers, and the digital world can provide a potent megaphone for broadening the reach and persistence of false statements. Among internet users, 7% say they have had someone spread rumors about them online.

## **6% of American internet users have been harassed through impersonation**

Impersonation is a mode of harm that has been made more accessible by the identity-masking features of newer technologies: It is relatively easy to create a new email address or social media profile, or to employ even more sophisticated methods for pretending to be someone else online. Among Americans, 6% say they have been impersonated or that someone has pretended to be someone else using digital technology as a way to harm or harass them.

## **4% of internet users have been a target of “brigading,” where someone encourages others to harass the victim**

Another method that online abusers employ is to use the broad public nature and connective networks of our digital landscape to encourage and enable others to harass the victim, a technique called “brigading.” Among all Americans, 4% report that someone has incited others to harass them online.

## **When the threats move from digital to physical: 3% of American internet users say an online abuser tried to harm them in person**

One of the powers of digital harassment is the possibility that the threats and harms exacted online will be realized in person. For a small group of internet users, this possibility becomes a reality. Among those who have been harassed online, 12% report that their abuser attempted to harm them in person after harassing them online. This amounts to 3% of all Americans.

### Direct online harassment summary table (part 1 of 2)

% among all internet users (n=3,002)

|  |                       | Called offensive names | Tried to embarrass you | Physical threats   | Sexually harassed   | Romantic partner hurt you |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Total</b>                             |                       | <b>25</b>              | <b>23</b>              | <b>11</b>          | <b>8</b>            | <b>8</b>                  |
| <b>Age and sex</b>                       |                       |                        |                        |                    |                     |                           |
| a  | Men ages 15-29        | 47 <sup>cd</sup>       | 39 <sup>cd</sup>       | 24 <sup>acd</sup>  | 7 <sup>c</sup>      | 14 <sup>cd</sup>          |
| b  | Women ages 15-29      | 42 <sup>cd</sup>       | 39 <sup>cd</sup>       | 19 <sup>cd</sup>   | 20 <sup>acd</sup>   | 17 <sup>cd</sup>          |
| c  | Men ages 30+          | 20 <sup>d</sup>        | 19 <sup>d</sup>        | 8                  | 4                   | 6                         |
| d  | Women ages 30+        | 14                     | 14                     | 6                  | 7 <sup>c</sup>      | 5                         |
| <b>Sex</b>                               |                       |                        |                        |                    |                     |                           |
| a  | Men (all ages 15+)    | 28 <sup>b</sup>        | 25 <sup>b</sup>        | 13 <sup>b</sup>    | 5                   | 8                         |
| b  | Women (all ages 15+)  | 22                     | 21                     | 10                 | 10 <sup>b</sup>     | 9                         |
| <b>Age</b>                               |                       |                        |                        |                    |                     |                           |
| a  | 15-17                 | 49 <sup>cde</sup>      | 38 <sup>cde</sup>      | 15 <sup>de</sup>   | 10 <sup>de</sup>    | 10 <sup>de</sup>          |
| b  | 18-29                 | 43 <sup>cde</sup>      | 39 <sup>cde</sup>      | 23 <sup>acde</sup> | 14 <sup>cde</sup>   | 17 <sup>acde</sup>        |
| c  | 30-49                 | 23 <sup>de</sup>       | 22 <sup>de</sup>       | 12 <sup>de</sup>   | 9 <sup>de</sup>     | 8 <sup>de</sup>           |
| d  | 50-64                 | 12 <sup>e</sup>        | 13 <sup>e</sup>        | 4 <sup>e</sup>     | 3 <sup>e</sup>      | 4 <sup>e</sup>            |
| e  | 65+                   | 7                      | 7                      | 2                  | 1                   | 1                         |
| <b>Race/ethnicity</b>                    |                       |                        |                        |                    |                     |                           |
| a  | White (non-Hispanic)  | 24                     | 22                     | 11                 | 7                   | 8                         |
| b  | Black (non-Hispanic)  | 24                     | 23                     | 12                 | 9                   | 8                         |
| c  | Hispanic              | 25                     | 21                     | 11                 | 9                   | 10                        |
| <b>Household income (among ages 18+)</b> |                       |                        |                        |                    |                     |                           |
| a  | < \$30,000            | 32 <sup>cde</sup>      | 27 <sup>cde</sup>      | 15 <sup>cde</sup>  | 14 <sup>bccde</sup> | 13 <sup>cde</sup>         |
| b  | \$30,000 - \$49,999   | 27 <sup>c</sup>        | 27 <sup>cde</sup>      | 13 <sup>de</sup>   | 8 <sup>d</sup>      | 11 <sup>cde</sup>         |
| c  | \$50,000 - \$74,999   | 20                     | 18                     | 9                  | 6                   | 7                         |
| d  | \$75,000 - \$99,999   | 22 <sup>ab</sup>       | 19                     | 9                  | 4                   | 6                         |
| e  | \$100,000+            | 22                     | 22                     | 10                 | 5                   | 6                         |
| <b>Education (among ages 18+)</b>        |                       |                        |                        |                    |                     |                           |
| a  | Less than high school | 17                     | 15                     | 8                  | 7                   | 7                         |
| b  | High school graduate  | 26 <sup>ad</sup>       | 24 <sup>ad</sup>       | 14 <sup>d</sup>    | 7                   | 11 <sup>d</sup>           |
| c  | Some college          | 27 <sup>ad</sup>       | 25 <sup>ad</sup>       | 12 <sup>d</sup>    | 9 <sup>d</sup>      | 9 <sup>d</sup>            |
| d  | College graduate      | 18                     | 18                     | 8                  | 7                   | 6                         |
| <b>Sexual identification</b>             |                       |                        |                        |                    |                     |                           |
| a  | LGB                   | 61 <sup>b</sup>        | 49 <sup>b</sup>        | 31 <sup>b</sup>    | 33 <sup>b</sup>     | 28 <sup>b</sup>           |
| b  | Heterosexual          | 23                     | 22                     | 10                 | 6                   | 7                         |

Columns marked with a superscript letter (\*) indicate a statistically significant difference at the 95% level between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each subgroup.

Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).



## Direct online harassment summary table (part 2 of 2)

% among all internet users (n=3,002)

|  |                       | Brigading         | Attempt to harm in person after online | Harassed over long period of time | Impersonated you/someone else | Damaging rumors   |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------|--|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Total</b>                             |                       | <b>4</b>          | <b>3</b>                               | <b>5</b>                          | <b>6</b>                      | <b>7</b>          |
| <b>Age and sex</b>                       |                       |                   |  |                                   |                               |                   |
| a  | Men ages 15-29        | 7 <sup>cd</sup>   | 3                                      | 5                                 | 8 <sup>cd</sup>               | 11 <sup>cd</sup>  |
| b  | Women ages 15-29      | 10 <sup>cd</sup>  | 6 <sup>cd</sup>                        | 13 <sup>acd</sup>                 | 10 <sup>cd</sup>              | 17 <sup>acd</sup> |
| c  | Men ages 30+          | 2                 | 2                                      | 3                                 | 4                             | 4                 |
| d  | Women ages 30+        | 3                 | 2                                      | 5 <sup>c</sup>                    | 5                             | 5                 |
| <b>Sex</b>                               |                       |                   |  |                                   |                               |                   |
| a  | Men (all ages 15+)    | 4                 | 2                                      | 4                                 | 5                             | 6                 |
| b  | Women (all ages 15+)  | 5                 | 3 <sup>a</sup>                         | 7 <sup>a</sup>                    | 6                             | 8 <sup>a</sup>    |
| <b>Age</b>                               |                       |                   |  |                                   |                               |                   |
| a  | 15-17                 | 5 <sup>e</sup>    | 5 <sup>de</sup>                        | 9 <sup>de</sup>                   | 6                             | 11 <sup>de</sup>  |
| b  | 18-29                 | 9 <sup>acde</sup> | 4 <sup>de</sup>                        | 9 <sup>cde</sup>                  | 10 <sup>de</sup>              | 15 <sup>cde</sup> |
| c  | 30-49                 | 4 <sup>de</sup>   | 3 <sup>de</sup>                        | 6 <sup>de</sup>                   | 7 <sup>de</sup>               | 7 <sup>de</sup>   |
| d  | 50-64                 | 1                 | 1                                      | 3 <sup>e</sup>                    | 3                             | 2                 |
| e  | 65+                   | 1                 | 1                                      | 1                                 | 3                             | 1                 |
| <b>Race/ethnicity</b>                    |                       |                   |  |                                   |                               |                   |
| a  | White (non-Hispanic)  | 4                 | 3                                      | 5                                 | 5                             | 7                 |
| b  | Black (non-Hispanic)  | 4                 | 3                                      | 6                                 | 7                             | 9                 |
| c  | Hispanic              | 5                 | 2                                      | 5                                 | 7                             | 8                 |
| <b>Household income (among ages 18+)</b> |                       |                   |  |                                   |                               |                   |
| a  | < \$30,000            | 7 <sup>cde</sup>  | 5 <sup>cde</sup>                       | 8 <sup>cde</sup>                  | 7                             | 11 <sup>cde</sup> |
| b  | \$30,000 - \$49,999   | 5 <sup>d</sup>    | 4 <sup>cd</sup>                        | 8 <sup>cde</sup>                  | 8 <sup>cde</sup>              | 8                 |
| c  | \$50,000 - \$74,999   | 3                 | 1                                      | 3                                 | 5                             | 5                 |
| d  | \$75,000 - \$99,999   | 2                 | 1                                      | 3                                 | 4                             | 6                 |
| e  | \$100,000+            | 4                 | 2                                      | 4                                 | 5                             | 6                 |
| <b>Education (among ages 18+)</b>        |                       |                   |  |                                   |                               |                   |
| a  | Less than high school | 3                 | 4                                      | 4                                 | 4                             | 4                 |
| b  | High school graduate  | 6 <sup>d</sup>    | 3                                      | 6                                 | 6                             | 7                 |
| c  | Some college          | 5 <sup>d</sup>    | 2                                      | 6 <sup>d</sup>                    | 7                             | 9 <sup>ad</sup>   |
| d  | College graduate      | 3                 | 2                                      | 4                                 | 5                             | 5                 |
| <b>Sexual identification</b>             |                       |                   |  |                                   |                               |                   |
| a  | LGB                   | 18 <sup>b</sup>   | 12 <sup>b</sup>                        | 18 <sup>b</sup>                   | 13 <sup>b</sup>               | 24 <sup>b</sup>   |
| b  | Heterosexual          | 4                 | 2                                      | 5                                 | 6                             | 6                 |

Columns marked with a superscript letter (°) indicate a statistically significant difference at the 95% level between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each subgroup.

Source: Data & Society / CIPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

### 30% of Americans have experienced harassment through invasion of privacy

Harms from harassment are not only through direct action. Other harms come from the loss of privacy and control over your personal information—whether it’s your bank accounts, your doctor visits, or your current physical location. Invasion of privacy as a form of harassment occurs in two main ways—losing control over private personal information and being watched or tracked.

### 30% of Americans have had information stolen or shared and/or their personal messages, experiences, and locations surveilled by an online harasser

Among all internet users, the % who have experienced the following types of online harassment



Source: Data & Society /CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

Roughly three in ten internet users have had their privacy invaded, here defined as having had someone: misuse information they found on your social media profile; hack your online accounts and steal sensitive information; expose sensitive personal information that impacted you personally, financially or professionally; steal or coerce passwords; read messages without permission; monitor; or track you.



## Loss of privacy of information

Most Americans value their digital privacy to some degree. However, with the advent of newer technologies that facilitate personal expression (e.g., creating photo collages) and bring people closer together (e.g., geolocation), not only are Americans storing sensitive information online, but also sharing their personal information with others online. In so doing, these technologies carry the potential for increased digital privacy invasion. Among all Americans 15 and older, 13% say that someone has hacked into their online account or computer and stolen sensitive personal information, 5% of whom say that someone has exposed sensitive personal information about them online that was damaging personally, professionally, or financially. While a relatively small proportion of all Americans (5%) report that someone has used information posted to their social media profile in a way that made them feel uncomfortable, this has happened to, one in four (25%) cyberabuse victims.

Stealing passwords is a common way that those who wish to hurt or harm others online can get access to an individual's online profiles and communications platforms and either modify them, steal information, or change the password to block the creators access to their own profile or account. About 5% of Americans 15 years of age and older report that someone has stolen their password or has forced them to reveal their passwords.

## Surveillance and loss of privacy for the self

Not only do our favorite social media platforms, apps, and mobile phones allow us to learn and communicate with others, they also offer the opportunity to display or track our movements and daily lives as well as the movements and lives of others. Apps and features intended to allow for the sharing of your physical location with friends and family can also be used by abusers intent on watching the movements of their victims. Harassers can also harness tools like GPS-enabled devices or video cameras to encroach on the privacy of the victim through surveillance. Reading email, text messages, and following or breaking into a social media account can provide further insight for the abuser into the more private parts of the lives and movements of their victim. The main types of experiences that fall under surveillance are:

**Monitoring**, which includes reading messages without permission and someone monitoring your phone or online activity without your permission.

**Tracking**, when someone uses social media, GPS, or other technologies to track your location when you did not want them to do so.

Some 14% of internet users say that they have had someone monitor their online or phone activity without their permission. Fully 7% of Americans have had someone read their texts or email messages without their permission and 9% of Americans have had someone use social media, GPS, or other technological tools to track their location when they did not want them to do so.

## Invasions of privacy summary table (part 1 of 2)

% among all internet users (n=3,002)

|  |                       | Hacked your accounts and stole info | Used social media info and made you feel uncomfortable | Stolen or coerced password | Damaging Exposure of sensitive information |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|--|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Total</b>                             |                       | <b>13</b>                           | <b>5</b>   | <b>5</b>                   | <b>5</b>                                   |
| <b>Age and sex</b>                       |                       |                                     |  |                            |  |
| a  | Men ages 15-29        | 16                                  | 6 <sup>d</sup>   | 8 <sup>c</sup>             | 5  |
| b  | Women ages 15-29      | 13                                  | 10 <sup>cd</sup>                                       | 8 <sup>c</sup>             | 10 <sup>acd</sup>                          |
| c  | Men ages 30+          | 13                                  | 3  | 4                          | 4  |
| d  | Women ages 30+        | 13                                  | 4  | 5                          | 4  |
| <b>Sex</b>                               |                       |                                     |  |                            |  |
| a  | Men (all ages 15+)    | 14                                  | 4  | 5                          | 4  |
| b  | Women (all ages 15+)  | 13                                  | 6 <sup>a</sup>   | 6                          | 6 <sup>a</sup>                             |
| <b>Age</b>                               |                       |                                     |  |                            |  |
| a  | 15-17                 | 12 <sup>e</sup>                     | 7 <sup>de</sup>  | 6 <sup>de</sup>            | 7 <sup>de</sup>                            |
| b  | 18-29                 | 15 <sup>d</sup>                     | 9 <sup>de</sup>  | 8 <sup>de</sup>            | 7 <sup>de</sup>                            |
| c  | 30-49                 | 16 <sup>d</sup>                     | 6 <sup>de</sup>  | 8 <sup>de</sup>            | 6 <sup>de</sup>                            |
| d  | 50-64                 | 9                                   | 2  | 1                          | 2  |
| e  | 65+                   | 13                                  | 1  | 2                          | 2  |
| <b>Race/ethnicity</b>                    |                       |                                     |  |                            |  |
| a  | White (non-Hispanic)  | 14                                  | 4  | 5                          | 5  |
| b  | Black (non-Hispanic)  | 13                                  | 5  | 6                          | 3  |
| c  | Hispanic              | 11                                  | 5  | 7                          | 4  |
| <b>Household income (among ages 18+)</b> |                       |                                     |  |                            |  |
| a  | < \$30,000            | 15                                  | 6 <sup>d</sup>   | 8 <sup>cde</sup>           | 6 <sup>d</sup>                             |
| b  | \$30,000 - \$49,999   | 15                                  | 6 <sup>d</sup>   | 8 <sup>cde</sup>           | 7 <sup>d</sup>                             |
| c  | \$50,000 - \$74,999   | 13                                  | 5  | 4                          | 4  |
| d  | \$75,000 - \$99,999   | 12                                  | 3  | 4                          | 3  |
| e  | \$100,000+            | 15                                  | 5  | 5                          | 5  |
| <b>Education (among ages 18+)</b>        |                       |                                     |  |                            |  |
| a  | Less than high school | 11                                  | 3  | 7                          | 2  |
| b  | High school graduate  | 11                                  | 4  | 4                          | 5 <sup>a</sup>                             |
| c  | Some college          | 14                                  | 5  | 6                          | 5 <sup>a</sup>                             |
| d  | College graduate      | 15 <sup>b</sup>                     | 5  | 5                          | 4  |
| <b>Sexual identification</b>             |                       |                                     |  |                            |  |
| a  | LGB                   | 17                                  | 18 <sup>b</sup>  | 15 <sup>b</sup>            | 20 <sup>b</sup>                            |
| b  | Heterosexual          | 13                                  | 4  | 5                          | 4  |

Columns marked with a superscript letter (°) indicate a statistically significant difference at the 95% level between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each subgroup.

Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

## Invasions of privacy summary table (part 2 of 2)

% among all internet users (n=3,002)

|  |                       | Monitored your online or phone activity | Read messages without permission | Tracked your location |
|--|-----------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Total</b>                             |                       | <b>14</b>                               | <b>7</b>                         | <b>9</b>              |
| <b>Age and sex</b>                       |                       |   |                                  |                       |
| a  | Men ages 15-29        | 16 <sup>d</sup>                         | 11 <sup>cd</sup>                 | 11 <sup>d</sup>       |
| b  | Women ages 15-29      | 17 <sup>d</sup>                         | 13 <sup>cd</sup>                 | 11                    |
| c  | Men ages 30+          | 14 <sup>d</sup>                         | 5                                | 8                     |
| d  | Women ages 30+        | 11                                      | 6                                | 7                     |
| <b>Sex</b>                               |                       |   |                                  |                       |
| a  | Men (all ages 15+)    | 15                                      | 7                                | 9                     |
| b  | Women (all ages 15+)  | 13                                      | 8                                | 8                     |
| <b>Age</b>                               |                       |   |                                  |                       |
| a  | 15-17                 | 11 <sup>e</sup>                         | 12 <sup>de</sup>                 | 11 <sup>de</sup>      |
| b  | 18-29                 | 18 <sup>ade</sup>                       | 12 <sup>de</sup>                 | 11 <sup>de</sup>      |
| c  | 30-49                 | 18 <sup>ade</sup>                       | 10 <sup>de</sup>                 | 11 <sup>de</sup>      |
| d  | 50-64                 | 10 <sup>e</sup>                         | 3                                | 5 <sup>e</sup>        |
| e  | 65+                   | 5                                       | 2                                | 3                     |
| <b>Race/ethnicity</b>                    |                       |   |                                  |                       |
| a  | White (non-Hispanic)  | 14                                      | 7                                | 8                     |
| b  | Black (non-Hispanic)  | 18                                      | 7                                | 9                     |
| c  | Hispanic              | 13                                      | 8                                | 10                    |
| <b>Household income (among ages 18+)</b> |                       |   |                                  |                       |
| a  | < \$30,000            | 19 <sup>cde</sup>                       | 10 <sup>d</sup>                  | 13 <sup>cde</sup>     |
| b  | \$30,000 - \$49,999   | 15                                      | 11 <sup>d</sup>                  | 10                    |
| c  | \$50,000 - \$74,999   | 12                                      | 8                                | 6                     |
| d  | \$75,000 - \$99,999   | 13                                      | 5                                | 8                     |
| e  | \$100,000+            | 13                                      | 6                                | 8                     |
| <b>Education (among ages 18+)</b>        |                       |   |                                  |                       |
| a  | Less than high school | 10                                      | 8                                | 7                     |
| b  | High school graduate  | 15                                      | 7                                | 9                     |
| c  | Some college          | 17 <sup>ad</sup>                        | 9 <sup>d</sup>                   | 9                     |
| d  | College graduate      | 12                                      | 6                                | 7                     |
| <b>Sexual identification</b>             |                       |   |                                  |                       |
| a  | LGB                   | 28 <sup>b</sup>                         | 19 <sup>b</sup>                  | 13                    |
| b  | Heterosexual          | 13                                      | 7                                | 9                     |

Columns marked with a superscript letter (°) indicate a statistically significant difference at the 95% level between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each subgroup.

Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

## 17% of internet users experience denial of access to essential digital platforms

**Denial of access** is another set of harassing practices which prevent an individual from accessing essential digital tools like text messaging, social media accounts, websites, and servers. These practices include message bombing, misuse of online reporting tools to prevent access to online accounts, and technical attacks like Denial of Service (DoS) attacks. Nearly 17% of internet users have experienced these practices, with 12% experiencing one, and 4% encountering two or all three of these behaviors.

One common method for limiting access to phones or other communications platforms is to flood an individual's text, chat, or email account with innumerable, unwanted messages, often called "message bombing." Such a large number of messages, especially in a relatively short period of time, can render a person's account unusable. About one in nine Americans (12%) have had their communication platforms flooded with unwanted messages.

A small percentage of internet users report that someone has misused online reporting tools as a way to prevent them from using an online account. Through false accusations or repeatedly flagging an account as problematic, online reporting tools can be used as a way of preventing legitimate use of an online account, even as they serve as an important conduit for reporting inappropriate or abusive behavior. Three percent (3%) of Americans report that someone repeatedly, inappropriately flagged them on an online platform to keep them from accessing their account.

Abuse and attacks that deny or limit the use of internet and mobile-enabled platforms and devices are another type of digital harassment. Denial of Service attacks can overwhelm websites, platforms, and communication avenues, making them unusable. Fully 7% of Americans report that they have experienced a technical incursion like a Denial of Service attack that intentionally kept them from using online accounts, their computer, or their mobile phone.

## Denial of access summary table

% among all internet users (n=3,002)

|  |                       | Message bombing   | Denial of service attacks | Misused reporting tool to prevent use of online account |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|---|
| <b>Total</b>                             |                       | <b>12</b>         | <b>7</b>                  | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Age and sex</b>                       |                       |                   |                           |   |
| a  | Men ages 15-29        | 16 <sup>cd</sup>  | 9 <sup>b</sup>            | 3   |
| b  | Women ages 15-29      | 25 <sup>acd</sup> | 4                         | 4   |
| c  | Men ages 30+          | 7                 | 9 <sup>bd</sup>           | 3   |
| d  | Women ages 30+        | 10                | 6                         | 3   |
| <b>Sex</b>                               |                       |                   |                           |   |
| a  | Men (all ages 15+)    | 10                | 9 <sup>b</sup>            | 3   |
| b  | Women (all ages 15+)  | 14 <sup>a</sup>   | 6                         | 3   |
| <b>Age</b>                               |                       |                   |                           |   |
| a  | 15-17                 | 16 <sup>de</sup>  | 6                         | 4   |
| b  | 18-29                 | 21 <sup>cde</sup> | 7                         | 3 <sup>de</sup>   |
| c  | 30-49                 | 12 <sup>de</sup>  | 9 <sup>d</sup>            | 4 <sup>de</sup>   |
| d  | 50-64                 | 7 <sup>e</sup>    | 6                         | 1   |
| e  | 65+                   | 2                 | 6                         | 1   |
| <b>Race/ethnicity</b>                    |                       |                   |                           |   |
| a  | White (non-Hispanic)  | 11                | 7                         | 3   |
| b  | Black (non-Hispanic)  | 15                | 9                         | 5   |
| c  | Hispanic              | 14                | 6                         | 2   |
| <b>Household income (among ages 18+)</b> |                       |                   |                           |   |
| a  | < \$30,000            | 17 <sup>cde</sup> | 8                         | 4   |
| b  | \$30,000 - \$49,999   | 15 <sup>de</sup>  | 6                         | 4   |
| c  | \$50,000 - \$74,999   | 12                | 8                         | 3   |
| d  | \$75,000 - \$99,999   | 10                | 5                         | 2   |
| e  | \$100,000+            | 10                | 9 <sup>d</sup>            | 2   |
| <b>Education (among ages 18+)</b>        |                       |                   |                           |   |
| a  | Less than high school | 8                 | 8                         | 4   |
| b  | High school graduate  | 12                | 6                         | 3   |
| c  | Some college          | 14 <sup>ad</sup>  | 9 <sup>d</sup>            | 4 <sup>d</sup>  |
| d  | College graduate      | 9                 | 7                         | 2   |
| <b>Sexual identification</b>             |                       |                   |                           |   |
| a  | LGB                   | 33 <sup>b</sup>   | 14 <sup>b</sup>           | 8 <sup>b</sup>  |
| b  | Heterosexual          | 11                | 7                         | 3   |

Columns marked with a superscript letter (\*) indicate a statistically significant difference at the 95% level between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each subgroup.

Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

## 8% of American internet users have been cyberstalked

The forms of online harassment and abuse that we asked about in this study reflects a wide range of experiences. At the far and most serious end of the spectrum is cyberstalking – when someone is repeatedly contacted online in a way that makes them feel afraid or unsafe. Overall, 8% of American internet users say they have been cyberstalked to the point of feeling unsafe or afraid.

## Who experiences what types of harassment?

Not only is it important to understand how many Americans are affected by digital harassment, but also what groups of Americans are more or less likely to be targeted.

### **Men and women are equally likely to experience any harassment, but each sex is more likely to experience different types of harassment**

Two of the most important factors that predict a person's likelihood of experiencing particular types of harassment are an individual's sex and age. Overall, men and women are equally likely to experience at least one type of the harassing behaviors we queried, but the specific experiences a person is likely to have varies considerably by the individual's sex. The differences between young and older Americans are sometimes even more striking – younger people under age 30 are much more likely to experience a majority of harassing experiences than older Americans; again, the patterns differ for younger men and younger women.

Looking at the differences between men and women broadly, we find that men are more likely to experience certain forms of direct and technical attacks. Women are more likely to experience low incidence forms of direct harassment, including harassment of long duration, sexual harassment, and cyberstalking. Women are also more likely to experience invasion of privacy through the exposure of sensitive personal information, and to be denied access to messaging platforms through enormous numbers of unwanted messages. Practices most likely to affect both sexes equally are mostly invasion of privacy-related harms like hacking, tracking, impersonation, stolen passwords, and the less direct (but not less potent) forms of direct harassment such as brigading, rumor spreading and harm from a romantic partner.

## Differences in online harassment experiences between women and men

Among all internet users (n=3,002)

### Men are more likely to:

#### Direct harassment

- Be called offensive names (28% of men vs. 22% of women)
- Say someone has tried to embarrass them online (25% of men vs. 21% of women)
- Have been physically threatened online (13% of men vs. 10% of women)

#### Direct harassment

- Experience technical attacks like Denial of Service attack (9% of men vs. 6% of women)

### Women are more likely to:

#### Direct harassment

- Be sexually harassed online (10% of women vs. 5% of men)
- Have rumors spread about them (8% of women vs. 6% of men)
- Be harassed over a long period of time (7% of women vs. 4% of men)
- Be stalked online (10% of women vs. 5% of men)
- Have someone try to harm them in person after harassing them online (3% of women vs. 2% of men)

#### Invasion of privacy

- Have sensitive personal information exposed in a way that harmed them personally, professionally, or financially (6% of women vs. 4% of men)
- Have information posted to social media used in a way that made you uncomfortable (6% of women vs. 4% of men)

#### Denial of access

- Be overwhelmed by unwanted messages (14% of women vs. 10% of men)

### Women and men are equally likely to:

#### Direct harassment

- Have a romantic partner hurt you emotionally or psychologically online (8% of all internet users)
- Have someone encourage others to harass you, aka "brigading" (4% of all internet users)

#### Invasion of privacy

- Be monitored (14% of all internet users)
- Be hacked (13% of all internet users)
- Have location tracked (9% of all internet users)
- Have someone read texts or emails without permission (7% of all internet users)
- Be harassed through impersonation (6% of all internet users)
- Have passwords stolen or coerced (5% of all internet users)

#### Denial of access

- Experience misuse of online reporting tools (3% of all internet users)

Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

## Younger internet users much more likely to experience 9 of 20 types of online harassment than older users

For nearly half of the harassment items surveyed in this study, young people ages 15 to 29 are more likely to experience them than adults ages 30 and older. Many of these items are elements of direct harassment—e.g. being called offensive names, being embarrassed online, or experiencing physical threats. Message bombing, a denial of access-type attack is also much more common among young internet users than old. Also, a handful of privacy-related harms are also substantially more likely to be deployed as tactics against 15 to 29 year olds than older adults, including impersonation and reading messages without permission.

### Youth are substantially more likely to experience many types of online harassment than older adults

Among all internet users (n=3,002)

#### Internet users ages 15-29 are more likely than older adults to:

##### Direct harassment

- Be called offensive names (44% vs. 17%)
- Say someone has tried to embarrass them online (39% vs. 16%)
- Have someone encourage others to harass victim aka "brigading" (26% vs. 15%)
- Have been physically threatened online (21% vs. 7%)
- Had a romantic partner hurt you emotionally or psychologically (21% vs. 7%)
- Have rumors spread about them (14% vs. 4%)\*
- Be sexually harassed online (13% vs. 5%)
- Be harassed through impersonation (9% vs. 5%)

##### Invasion of Privacy

- Had someone monitor your online or phone activity without permission (17% vs. 13%)
- Have someone read texts or emails without permission (12% vs. 6%).
- Have someone misuse content from social media account in an uncomfortable way (8% vs. 4%)
- Have passwords stolen or coerced (8% vs. 4%)
- Be monitored (7% vs. 5%)\*\*

#### All ages are equally likely to:

##### Denial of access

- Be overwhelmed by unwanted messages (20% vs. 9%)

##### Invasion of privacy

- Experience misuse of online reporting tools (3% of all internet users)
- Be hacked (13% of all internet users)

#### There are no harassment experiences more likely to be experienced by adults 30 and older

\*Drilling down on this data, age is a driver of the likelihood of having these experiences, but ultimately young women 15 to 29 are more likely than any other group to experience this behavior.

\*\*Older women are the least likely to be monitored.

Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

## Younger women are more likely to be stalked, sexually harassed, and harassed online over a long period of time compared to men and older women

Often when we drill down into the data, we find that the story the data tells is as much about age as it is about sex. Young women ages 15 to 29 bear a particular brunt of online harassment over young men and all older adults, especially direct harassment of a sexual or physical nature, or that occurs over a long period of time. Young women are also especially likely to be harassed through the exposure of sensitive personal information that has professional, personal, or financial consequences.

One in five (20%) women under 30 report being sexually harassed online, along with 7% of women ages 30 and older and 5% of men. And while 5% of all internet users have experienced persistent harassment, 13% of women under age 30 have experienced persistent online harassment, significantly more than men (4%) or older women (5%).

Women are twice as likely as men to say they've been cyberstalked, with 10% of female internet users reporting that they have been repeatedly contacted in a way that makes them feel afraid or unsafe compared with 5% of male internet users. Young people, particularly women under 30, are especially likely to be targets of cyberstalking; 14% of internet users under 30 year of age have been cyberstalked, including 20% of women under 30.

Age is a major factor in who has had someone attempt to harm them in person after online harassment, with twice as many people under 30 years old reporting that someone has tried to harm them this way. This is especially true for young women—6% of women under 30 report in-person attempts at harm after online harassment, compared with 3% of similarly-aged men and 2% of older men and women.

Women under 30 years of age are also the major targets of the release of sensitive personal information, with 10% of American women under 30 reporting that their sensitive personal information was exposed online in a way that was damaging to them personally, professionally, or financially, compared with 5% of young men and 4% of all adults (both men and women) ages 30 and older.

### Differences in online harassment experiences between younger women, younger men and all other users

Among all internet users (n=3,002)

#### What young women ages 15 to 29 are more likely to experience than younger men or older adults:

##### Direct harassment

- Be sexually harassed online
- Have someone try to harm them in person after harassing them online
- Harassed over a long period of time online
- Stalked online

##### Invasion of privacy

- Have sensitive personal information exposed in a way that harmed them personally, professionally, or financially

#### There are few harassment experiences more likely to be found exclusively among younger men or older adults.

Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

## LGB Americans are more likely to have experienced multiple forms of harassment and are substantially more likely to experience half of harassing behaviors queried in this study

As found in previous research, lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals are substantially more likely to report experiencing harassment, and this report confirms that those findings apply equally to the digital realm. More than half of LGB internet users have experienced more than one type of harassment, the largest percentage of any demographic group.

Among specific harassment types, LGB people are much more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to experience nine of the 20 types surveyed. These experiences cross the three types of harassment studied and include direct harassment, invasion of privacy, and denial of access to essential digital devices and platforms.

### Differences in online harassment experiences between LGB and heterosexual individuals

Among all internet users (n=3,002)

#### LGB individuals are more likely to:

##### Direct harassment

- Be called offensive names (61% of LGB internet users vs. 23% of heterosexual internet users)
- Say someone has tried to embarrass them online (49% vs. 22%)
- Be sexually harassed online (33% vs. 6%)
- Have been physically threatened online (31% vs. 10%)
- Have a romantic partner hurt them emotionally or psychologically online (28% vs. 7%)
- Have someone encourage others to harass victim aka "brigading" (18% vs. 4%)
- Have someone try to harm them in person after harassing them online (12% vs. 2%)
- Be harassed over a long period of time (18% vs. 5%)
- Have rumors spread about them (24% vs. 6%)
- Be stalked online (31% vs. 7%)

##### Invasion of privacy

- Be harassed through impersonation (13% vs. 6%)
- Used information posted social media posted in way that made them uncomfortable (18% vs. 4%)
- Have passwords stolen or coerced (15% vs. 5%)
- Have sensitive personal information exposed in a way that harmed them personally, professionally, or financially (20% vs. 4%)
- Be monitored (28% vs. 13%)
- Have someone read texts or emails without permission (19% vs. 7%)

#### LGB and heterosexual individuals are equally likely to:

##### Invasion of privacy

- Be hacked (13% of all internet users)
- Have location tracked (9% of all internet users)

**There are no harassment experiences that are more likely to be experienced by heterosexual individuals than LGB individuals.**

Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

Almost half (49%) of LGB internet users say someone has tried to embarrass them online, more than twice the rate of heterosexual internet users (22%). Fully 18% of LGB individuals report that someone has encouraged others to harass them online, compared with just 4% of those who are not LGB.

LGB Americans are also more likely to be targets of cyberstalking than their heterosexual counterparts: LGB individuals are almost four times as likely (31%) to report experiencing repeated online contact that made them feel afraid or unsafe, compared with 7% of heterosexual individuals.

LGB internet users are five times as likely to report the detrimental exposure of sensitive personal information than heterosexual respondents: 20% of lesbian, gay, or bisexual, individuals reported such exposure, compared with 4% of heterosexuals. Additional analyses further suggest that a person's sex and sexual orientation are the strongest predictors of a person's likelihood of being harmed by the exposure of sensitive information.

And 19% of LGB internet users say someone has read their text or email messages without permission while 7% of heterosexual internet users say the same. A similar percent (18%) report misuse of information on social media platforms compared to 4% of heterosexual Americans. Harmful impersonation is also reported to a higher degree among LGB (13%) than non-LGB Americans (6%).

LGB respondents are more likely to report technical attacks that prevented them from using their online accounts, with twice as many (14%) of LGB respondents reporting such attacks when compared with heterosexual respondents (7%). Moreover, LGB individuals are substantially more likely to report being overwhelmed with a flood of messages, with one in three reporting this experience compared with about one in ten (11%) heterosexuals.

### **Lower and middle income adults are more likely to report being victimized by message bombing and attempts to harm in person after online harassment**

Sixteen percent of people living in households earning less than \$50,000 annually report a flood of unwanted messages to online accounts compared to one in ten (10%) living in households earning more report the same. Lower and middle income Americans are also more likely than their wealthier counterparts to report that someone tried to harm them in person after online harassment. Among households earning less than \$50,000 annually, 5% report in person harm or attempted harm, while 2% of those earning more than \$50,000 per year report in-person abuse.

### **Divorced or never married individuals more likely to have been tracked online**

Fully 13% of divorced or separated Americans have been tracked online, as have 10% of those who have never been married, compared to 7% of those who are married or living as married report these experiences. No other differences in experiences with harassment by relationship status were noted.

## Platforms matter, with online gameplay conferring risk for harassment in some cases

Among gamers who play online with others, 13% have been tracked against their will, while 7% of those who don't game with others say the same. Internet users who play networked games with others online are also more likely to report a technical attack (10% of games vs. 6% of non-gamers).

Overall, users of social media sites, online discussion boards, and multiplayer video games are significantly more likely to have been called offensive names online once demographic and related factors are controlled for. Use of social media sites, online discussion boards, and multiplayer video games also explains much of the difference between men and women, and older and younger youth in terms of being called offensive names and being threatened online.

## Many Americans experience multiple forms of harassment

More than 32% of Americans said they have experienced two or more types of digital harassment asked about in the survey. Younger internet users ages 15 to 29, lower income users, divorced or separated Americans, and LGB internet users are more likely to say that they have experienced at least four forms of online harassment.<sup>5</sup>

### LGB people, young adults, divorced or separated individuals, and those in lower-income households are more likely to experience multiple forms of online harassment

Among American internet users, the % who either experienced none, one, two to three, or four or more of the measured online harassment behaviors

|  |                              | No online harassment | One form of online harassment | Two or three form of online harassment | Four or more forms of online harassment |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Age</b>                               |                              |                      |                               |  |   |
| a  | 15-29                        | 34                   | 16                            | 21 <sup>b</sup>                        | 30 <sup>b</sup>                         |
| b  | 30+                          | 60 <sup>a</sup>      | 15                            | 13                                     | 13                                      |
| <b>Education (among ages 18+)</b>        |                              |                      |                               |  |   |
| a  | High school graduate or less | 52                   | 14                            | 15                                     | 19 <sup>c</sup>                         |
| b  | Some college                 | 49                   | 14                            | 17                                     | 20 <sup>c</sup>                         |
| c  | College graduate             | 56 <sup>ab</sup>     | 16                            | 14                                     | 13                                      |
| <b>Household income (among ages 18+)</b> |                              |                      |                               |  |   |
| a  | < \$30,000                   | 46                   | 13                            | 16                                     | 24 <sup>b</sup>                         |
| b  | \$30,000+                    | 54 <sup>a</sup>      | 16                            | 15                                     | 16                                      |
| <b>Sexual identification</b>             |                              |                      |                               |  |   |
| a  | LGB                          | 24                   | 10                            | 24 <sup>b</sup>                        | 43 <sup>b</sup>                         |
| b  | Heterosexual                 | 53 <sup>a</sup>      | 16                            | 15                                     | 17                                      |
| <b>Marital Status</b>                    |                              |                      |                               |  |   |
| a  | Married/Living with partner  | 60 <sup>cd</sup>     | 16 <sup>c</sup>               | 12 <sup>b</sup>                        | 12 <sup>b</sup>                         |
| b  | Widowed                      | 70 <sup>abc</sup>    | 13                            | 5                                      | 11                                      |
| c  | Divorced/Separated           | 49 <sup>d</sup>      | 14                            | 15 <sup>b</sup>                        | 22 <sup>ab</sup>                        |
| d  | Never married                | 40                   | 15                            | 21 <sup>abc</sup>                      | 25 <sup>abc</sup>                       |

Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).



## Current and former friends and romantic partner are the most common perpetrators of online harassment or abuse; strangers also make up a sizeable portion of harassers

Respondents who reported they had experienced at least one of eight types of harassment<sup>6</sup> were asked to describe their relationship to their harasser. While an important and sizeable proportion of internet users who experienced harassment said that they did not know who was harassing them, a majority had at least a general idea of who was harassing them, although the perpetrator or perpetrators may not have been known to them personally. Friends and romantic partners were the most frequently cited harassers, together accounting for up to half of the instances for some types of harassment. Others mentioned a wider range of sources of harassment, including family members, work contacts (boss, coworker, customer), classmates, competitors, and online connections.

Responses also varied based on each type of harassment. For instance, in cases where the respondent was embarrassed on purpose online, the perpetrator was mostly known to their target, with 30% of those who experienced this type of harassment saying that it was a current or former friend. Yet among those who experienced of online sexual harassment, almost half (46%) said they did not know who was harassing them.

### Who perpetrated the online harassment and abuse?

*% among internet users who experienced each type of online harassment*

|  | Current or former romantic partner | Friend or former friend | Other | Don't know | More than one person |
|--|------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------|------------|----------------------|
| Been called offensive names online (n=643)   | 13                                 | 25                      | 29    | 29         | 2                    |
| Had someone try to embarrass you on purpose online (n=596)   | 18                                 | 30                      | 30    | 18         | 2                    |
| Been physically threatened online (n=281)  | 12                                 | 15                      | 35    | 35         | 2                    |
| Been sexually harassed online (n=190)  | 16                                 | 8                       | 25    | 46         | 3                    |
| Been harassed online over a long period of time (n=135)  | 26                                 | 9                       | 32    | 30         | 2                    |
| Monitored your online or phone activity (n=361)  | 39                                 | 8                       | 34    | 14         | 2                    |
| Exposed other sensitive personal information that was personally, professionally or financially damaging (n=122) | 23                                 | 27                      | 31    | 12         | 4                    |
| Stalked you online (n=191)   | 32                                 | 14                      | 29    | 20         | 3                    |

Note: This question was not asked as a follow up for every harassment question we asked.

Source: Data & Society / CIPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

5. Please note that this count refers only to the number of types of harassment asked about in the study; it does not in any way correspond to the number of particular instances of harassment experienced by respondents, or the length or severity of the type of harassment

6. The eight types of online harassment where we queried the target's relationship to the perpetrator are: been called offensive names, embarrassed on purpose, physically threatened, sexually harassed, harassed over a long period of time, monitored online or phone activity, exposed other sensitive personal information that was personally damaging and been stalked online.

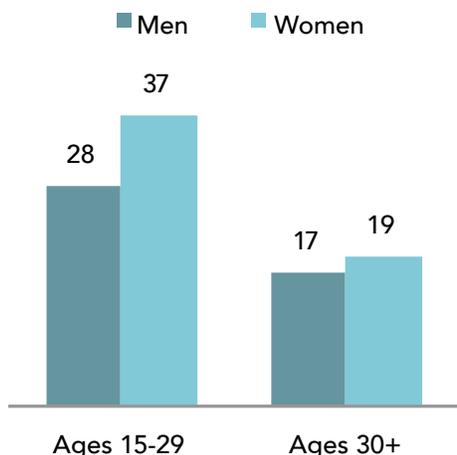
## What do you call it? How people differ in whether they call something online harassment or abuse or not

We asked respondents who said yes to any of 11 of the 20 harassment experiences<sup>7</sup> whether they agreed that what they had experienced was 'online harassment or abuse.' Of the 47% of Americans who answered yes to one of these experiences, a little less than half (46%) believed that what they had experienced was harassment and abuse, and 52% said they did not. Overall, 22% of all American internet users 15 and older both reported experiencing online harassment or abuse and defined it as such when asked.

Women who experienced online harassment are more likely than men who have reported the same types of experiences to say what they experienced constituted harassment or abuse (53% of women who have experienced harassment compared with 40% of men). Combined with the higher rate of harassing behaviors experienced by younger internet users, the result is that 37% of all American women between 15 and 29 report that they have experienced what they would call online abuse or harassment:

### 37% of all American women under age 30 have experienced what they would call online abuse or harassment

Among all internet users, the % in each group who said they have experienced harassment or abuse



Source: Data & Society/CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

7. The 11 experiences include: Being embarrassed online, called names, sexually harassed, harassed over a long period of time, threatened online, monitored online, or hurt online by a romantic partner, being threatened with or having sexual photos or videos shared online, being stalked online or having sensitive personal information exposed in a way that hurt them personally, professionally, or financially. Non-consensual image sharing will be addressed in later report.

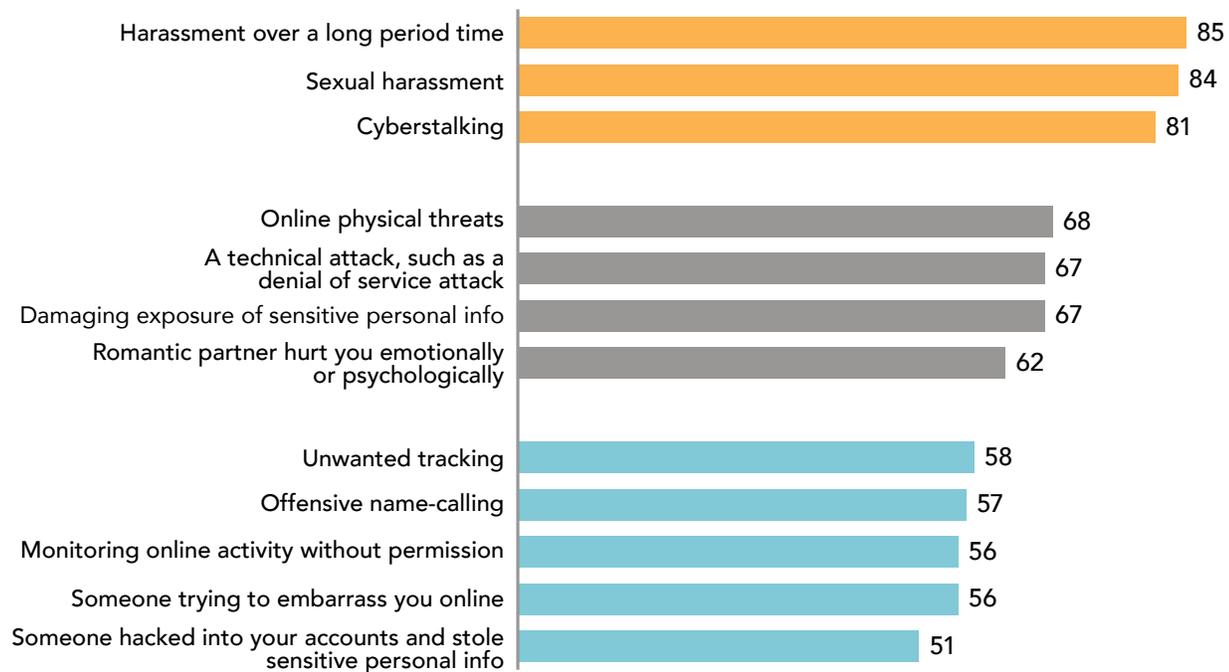
LGB individuals are also more likely than heterosexual respondents to experience harassing behaviors, and to report that what they experienced online was harassment or abuse: 51% of all LGB internet users say they have experienced what they consider to be harassment or abuse, compared with 21% of heterosexual individuals.

### Those who have experienced persistent harassment, sexual harassment and cyberstalking are most likely to describe their experiences as harassment or abuse

More than eight in ten people who have experienced cyberstalking, sexual harassment, and persistent harassment say that any of their experiences constituted online harassment or abuse.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, between 60% and 70% of those who experienced physical threats, technical attacks, exposure of sensitive personal information also described what they experienced as harassment or abuse. People who experienced other types of digital harassment were less likely to consider themselves victims of harassment, although even here, between 50% and 60% agreed that this term described their experience.

#### More than 8 in 10 people who have experienced cyberstalking, sexual harassment, and persistent harassment describe what they experienced as harassment or abuse

Among internet users who experienced each type of harassing behavior, the % who said that they would describe what they experienced as harassment or abuse



Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older including n=673 victims of harassment, defined here as respondents who said yes to one of 11 harassment items and then responded that their experiences were harassment and abuse from their perspective).

8. Note that, because of how the question was asked, we do not know how many experiences they've had or the specifics of all their harassment experiences – so we cannot say definitively whether the respondent was referring to this specific experience of harassment, or another of the harassing behaviors they experienced, or all their experiences together when they described what they had experienced personally as harassment or not.

Many of this latter group of harassing behaviors—tracking, offensive name-calling, monitoring, being embarrassed online, and hacking—can happen in other contexts besides that of specifically targeted harassment. For example, some might consider the compromising of a credit card number in a retailer data breach to be exposure of sensitive information and unwanted monitoring and tracking can be done by businesses and governments; hacking and attacks could be an unpleasant side effect of internet use, rather than a concerted effort to consistently target or attempt to intimidate someone. Or, as we learned while pre-testing the survey instrument, the norms of an online space and the people who frequent it could mean that offensive language or other digital verbal assaults are meant and taken as a joke, or simply not perceived by an individual, whether because of context or social norms, as harassment.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For more information about the pre-testing of the survey instruments and the choices made in the language used in the survey, please see the Methods section at <http://www.datasociety.net/pubs/oh/methods.pdf>.

# Chapter 3: Post-Digital Abuse: Harms and Protective Tactics

## The impact of digital harassment

Research has shown that digital abuse can have an emotional impact: 53% of young people in a 2011 national AP-NORC survey reported that their experience with online harassment was deeply upsetting,<sup>10</sup> and 37% of adults who experienced severe online harassment described being “extremely” or “very” upset by it.<sup>11</sup>

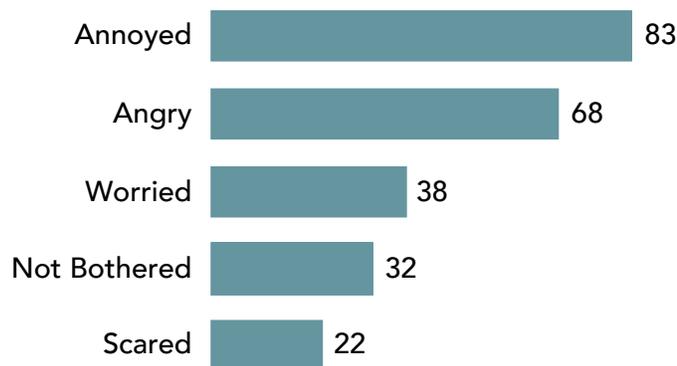
We asked victims about their emotional reactions to their most recent experience with harassment or abuse online. We especially wanted to know if their experiences left them feeling annoyed, angry, worried, scared, or even not bothered at all.

### 3 out of 5 victims of online harassment and abuse were worried, scared, angry, and/or annoyed

In the survey, victims were asked about a series of potential reactions they might have had to their most recent experience with online harassment and abuse. They could select as many as they felt applied to their experience.

#### The most common reactions to online harassment and abuse are annoyance, anger

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



Source: Data & Society /CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older, including n=673 victims of harassment).

10. Executive Summary: 2011 AP-MTV Digital Abuse Study. The Associated Press, MTV (2011).

11. M. Duggan. "Online Harassment." Pew Research Center, October 22, 2014. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/10/22/part-4-the-aftermath-of-online-harassment/>.

### Although one-third of victims report being “not bothered” by the harassment they experienced, they also almost always reported other emotions

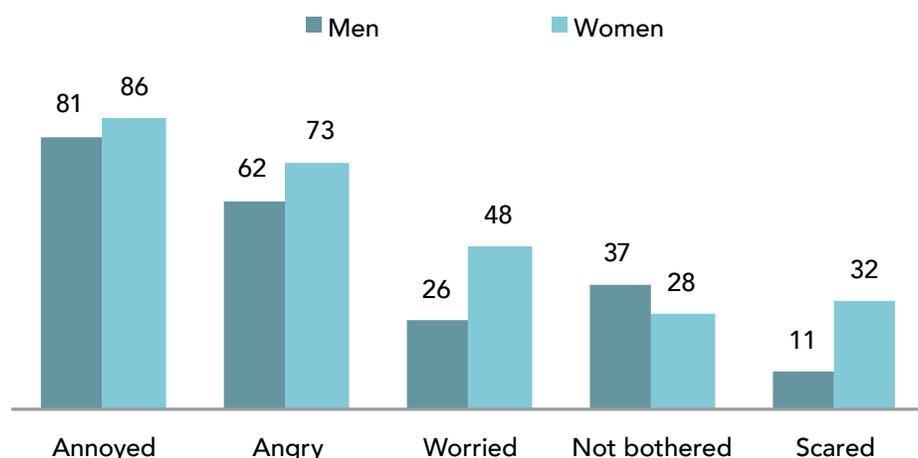
Of the more than eight in ten (88%) victims who said they were not bothered and also had other feelings about the digital abuse they experienced: Most (81%) were also annoyed by the harassment, 54% were also angry, 23% were also worried, and 12% were also scared. And 4% of respondents only selected not bothered to describe how they felt about the harassment they experienced.

### Among victims, women were more likely than men to be angry, worried, and scared as a result of online harassment and abuse

Among victims, men and women were equally likely to say that they were annoyed by the online harassment they experienced. Women who were victims of online harassment or abuse were almost three times as likely to be scared and twice as likely to feel worried compared to men, however. For their part, men who experienced online harassment or abuse were more likely than women to not be bothered by the behavior.

#### Among victims, women more likely than men to be angry, worried, or scared as a result of online harassment and abuse

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



Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older, including n=673 victims of harassment).



## Victims ages 30 or older were more likely to be angry as a result of online harassment or abuse, whereas those ages 15-29 were more likely to say they were not bothered by it

People young and old were equally likely to be annoyed, worried, and scared as a result of their harassment or abuse online. However, victims 30 and older were more likely to be angered by it while younger victims, 15-29 years old, were more likely to say they were not bothered by it – despite the fact that they experience more digital harassment overall. Although the current data cannot speak to why this is, the lack of impact for young people may stem from desensitization to certain kinds of harassment from those who experience more of it, different social norms of interaction, or different contexts in which the harassment exists for different age groups.

### Harms from harassment

People targeted by online harassment and abuse were asked whether they have been harmed in particular ways as a result of their online experiences, as far as they were aware. Responses could range from experiencing trouble in a relationship or friendship because of online material to losing a job or educational opportunity.

#### Harms resulting from online harassment

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



Source: Data & Society / CIPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older including n=673 victims of online harassment).

## Four in ten victims say the digital harassment has made them feel disconnected from people and information, and created difficulties in their relationships

Online harassment and abuse can impact the relationships that victims have with friends, family, and work. Digital disruptions and abuse can yield a sense of increased isolation or disconnection from their communities for victims, whether because of the strain the harassment has put on their close relationships, or because their harassment has made them feel more cut off from avenues for communication and information-seeking. Overall, 40% of victims <sup>12</sup> experienced at least one of these types of disconnectedness that they could attribute to their online harassment:

- **Difficulty in a relationship or friendship:** 27% of victims, which translates to 11% of all internet users, experienced trouble in a relationship or friendship because of something that was posted about them online. Victims under age 30, in lower-income households, and those identifying as LGB were significantly more likely to have experienced relationship or friendship trouble.
- **Shut down an online account or profile:** 20% of victims, or 5% of all internet users, had to shut down an online account or profile because of the online harassment or abuse they experienced. LGB victims were significantly more likely than non-LGB victims to have shut down an account.
- **Felt less connected to information:** 13% of victims, which amounts to 3% of all internet users, have felt less connected to information because their cell phone or internet use was limited because of harassment or abuse. Victims who were Black were less likely than victims who were White to say this, while those who identified as LGB were significantly more likely than heterosexual victims to say they felt disconnected from needed information.
- **Felt less connected to friends and family:** 13% of victims, or 3% of all internet users, have felt less connected to friends and family because their cell phone or internet use was limited due to the harassment or abuse they were experiencing. Victims who identified as LGB were significantly more likely to have felt disconnected from family and friends than non-LGB victims.

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12. Throughout this section, “victims of harassment [or abuse]” (n=673) refers to those who self-ID as VICTIM and/or those who experienced any Q6 abuse, as well as those who were not asked QHAR\_1.

## Almost one in four victims have experienced reputational harms due to their harassment or abuse

Because of the public nature of many forms of online harassment and abuse, one potential harm is damage to the victim's reputation. This damage can often persist online for years and in some cases surface with a simple search query. Some 23% of victims of online harassment or abuse say they have experienced some sort of reputation harm as a result of their harassment:

- **Had their reputation damaged:** 20% of victims of online harassment, which translates to 6% of all internet users, say they have had their reputation damaged because of things posted online about them. Victims under age 30, those in households earning less than \$50,000 per year, and those who identify as LGB were significantly more likely to than their counterparts to have had their reputation damaged by online harassment and abuse.
- **Evidence of harassment appears in search results:** 8% of victims of online harassment, or 2% of all internet users, report that they have had evidence of their harassment appear in searches for their name. Those in households earning less than \$50,000 per year were significantly more likely to have experienced this harm once other factors were controlled for.

## One in twenty victims have experienced professional harms due to their harassment or abuse

In addition to personal or private harms, 6% of victims, which translates to 2% of all internet users, say that they **have had difficulty finding a job or have lost an educational opportunity** because of something that was posted about them online. Men and women, older and younger, higher and lower income, and LGB and non-LGB victims were equally likely to have had their job or educational opportunities affected.

## How victims protect themselves from online harassment

Victims of online harassment and abuse often take steps to protect themselves from the harms that may come as a result of their online harassment. We asked internet users who have experienced online harassment and abuse what, if any, measures they have taken to defend against further harassment. Options ranged from changing their contact information to avoiding internet use or cell phones entirely. Overall, 65% of victims of online harassment have used at least one of these protective strategies; 35% have not.

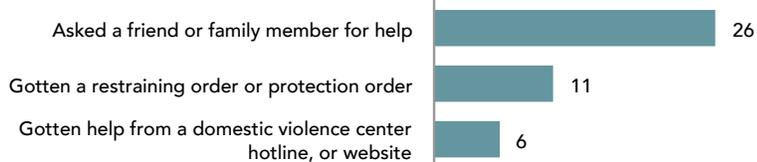
### 65% of victims of online harassment have used at least one protective strategies

Among victims of online harassment, the % who say they have done the following things to protect themselves from online harassment

#### 43% changed contact information



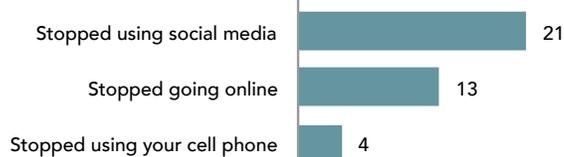
#### 33% asked for help



#### 27% reported content



#### 26% disconnected from online networks or devices



Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older including n=673 victims of online harassment).



## Over four in ten victims of harassment have changed their contact information

Among victims of online harassment, 43% have changed their email address or telephone number, or created a new social media profile under a different name—including 12% of victims who say they have done both of these things.

- **Changing your email address:** Among those who have been digitally harassed or abused, women and individuals living in households earning less than \$50,000 per year were more likely than men and people living in higher income households to change their email.
- **Creating a new social media profile:** LGB victims (36%) were more likely than heterosexual victims (19%) to have changed or created a new social media profile. On the other hand, college graduates were less likely to change their social networking profile than those with less education, once other factors were taken into account.

It is possible that more people choose to change their email address than their social media profile because of the relative ease of the former versus the latter. Sites that allow non-identifying usernames, such as Twitter and Instagram, make it easy to transition to a new profile; other platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn, which strongly encourage (or functionally require) the use of users' "real names," make this a much more difficult task.

## One in three victims have asked for help

About a third (33%) of online harassment victims have sought assistance from an outside source in response to their harassment, including those who have asked a family or friend for help; gotten help from a domestic violence center, hotline, or website; or gotten a restraining order or protection order.

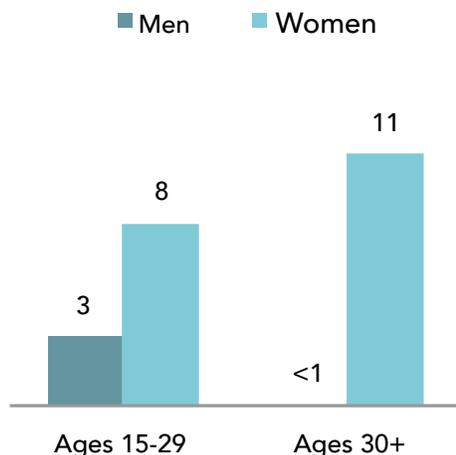
- **Asking a friend or family member for help:** Roughly one in four (26%) of those who have experienced online harassment—or 6% of all internet users—have asked a friend or family member for help protecting themselves from further harassment. Young women in particular are more likely to reach out to family and friends: Among victims of online harassment, 45% of women under age 30 have asked friends or family for help protecting themselves, compared with 17% of men under age 30 and 27% of women ages 30 and older. White victims and LGB victims of online harassment are also more likely than Black and heterosexual victims, respectively, to have asked for this type of support.<sup>15</sup>
- **Gotten help from a domestic violence center, hotline, or website:** Some 6% of those who have experienced online harassment (1% of all internet users) have gotten help from a domestic violence center, hotline, or website to protect themselves from further online harassment. Both older and younger women who were victims of online harassment or abuse were more likely to turn to domestic violence centers than their same aged male victim peers.

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15. Among victims of harassment and abuse, bases for subgroups are often close to or less than 100. For Hispanic victims, n=102, and for Black victims, n=73.

### Among victims of online harassment, one in nine women ages 30 and older have received help from a domestic violence center, hotline, or website

Among victims of online harassment, the % in each group who say they have gotten help from a domestic violence center, hotline, or website



Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older including n=673 victims of online harassment).

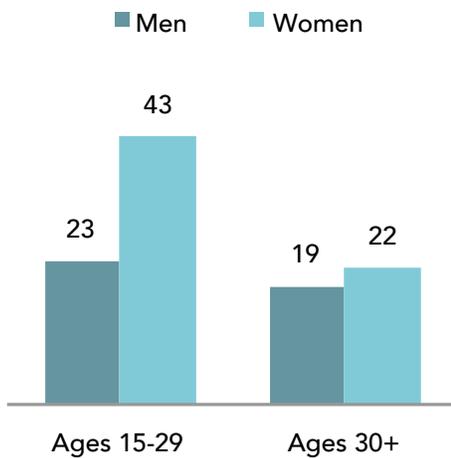
- **Getting a restraining order:** Among those who have experienced online harassment, about one in nine (11%) have gotten a restraining or protection order in response. Women are three times as likely as men to have gotten a restraining or protection order. Those living in lower-income households (15%) were also more likely than those living in higher-income households (7%) to have gotten a restraining order or protection order. Victims of harassment who identify as LGB were also twice as likely as victims who do not identify as LGB to get a restraining or protection order in response to their harassment (19% vs. 9%).

### Almost three in ten victims have reported or flagged content posted without permission

Some 27% of those who have experienced online harassment, or 7% of all internet users, say that they have reported or flagged content that was posted about them to a website without their permission.

## Young women are more likely than other groups to have reported or flagged information about themselves posted online

Among victims of online harassment, the % in each group who say they have reported or flagged content that was posted about them on a website without their permission



Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older including n=673 victims of online harassment).

Among victims of online harassment or abuse, young women are most likely to have flagged information: 43% of women under age 30 who have experienced harassment say that they have done this, a significantly higher rate than men who have experienced this, both young and older, and women over 30. Victims of online harassment living in lower-income households are also more likely to have flagged content than those living in higher-income households (31% compared with 23%, respectively). In addition, LGB victims (49%) are twice as likely as heterosexual victims (24%) to have reported or flagged information posted about them without their permission.

## One in four victims have disconnected from social media, the internet, or their phone

A little over a quarter (26%) of victims of online harassment have responded to their experience by disconnecting from their online networks or communication devices in some manner, whether by avoiding social media, avoiding using the internet entirely, or by ceasing to use a cell phone.

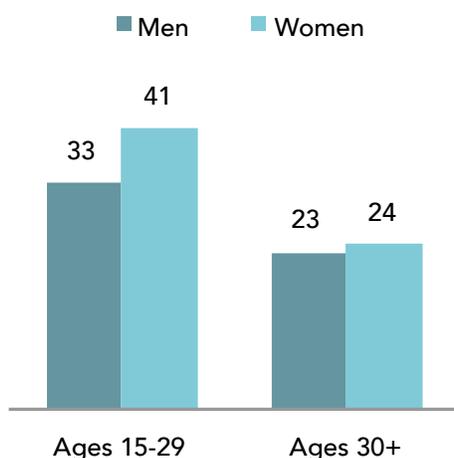
- **Stopped using social media:** About 21% of those who have experienced online harassment, or about 5% of all internet users, have stopped using social media altogether in order to protect themselves from further harassment. There were no significant differences by sex, age, race/ethnicity, or between any of the other subgroups in our analysis.
- **Stopped going online:** About 13% of those who have experienced online harassment, or 3% of all internet users, have stopped going online in order to protect themselves. Hispanic victims (23%) were more than three times as likely to stop going online altogether compared with White victims (9%). Among victims, there were no significant differences between men and women, or between younger and older victims.
- **Stopped using their cell phone:** Among those who have experienced online harassment, 4% say they have stopped using their cell phone in order to protect themselves from further online harassment. There were no statistically significant differences between any of the subgroups in our analyses.

## Silencing of voices and suppression of speech

One of the many potential effects online harassment can have on the cyber climate is creating places and spaces where people are self-censoring and not posting things that they otherwise would to reduce the likelihood of a cyberattack. It is important to note that this can be an issue for all internet users, not only those who have personally experienced or witnessed online harassment; even those who have never encountered online harassment themselves may be aware of the threat and adjust their behavior accordingly.

### Four in ten young women say they have self-censored to avoid harassment online

Among all internet users, the % in each group who say they have decided not to post something online because they were worried they would be harassed



Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

Overall, 27% of all internet users have decided not to post something online because they were worried that they would be harassed because of it. Younger women are most likely to say they have self-censored in this way compared to older women and men. Black, LGB individuals, and people living in higher income households are also more likely than White, non-LGB, and lower income individuals, respectively, to self-censor.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Many of these differences persist even controlling for whether the individual has personally experienced online harassment or abuse using multiple regression analysis: Younger victims are more likely than older victims to self-censor, college graduates are more likely to self-censor than those with less education, and LGB victims are also more likely to self-censor than heterosexual victims of online harassment and abuse. In addition, White victims of online harassment or abuse are more likely to self-censor than other groups when the factors mentioned previously are controlled for

**27% of internet users have decided not to post something online because they were worried that they would be harassed online because of it.**

Among all internet users (n=3,002)

| <b>Total</b>                             |                       | <b>27%</b>        |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Age and sex</b>                       |                       |                   |
| a  | Men ages 15-29        | 33 <sup>cd</sup>  |
| b  | Women ages 15-29      | 41 <sup>acd</sup> |
| c  | Men ages 30+          | 23                |
| d  | Women ages 30+        | 24                |
| <b>Sex</b>                               |                       |                   |
| a  | Men                   | 26                |
| b  | Women                 | 29                |
| <b>Age</b>                               |                       |                   |
| a  | 15-17                 | 32 <sup>de</sup>  |
| b  | 18-29                 | 38 <sup>cde</sup> |
| c  | 30-49                 | 29 <sup>de</sup>  |
| d  | 50-64                 | 22 <sup>e</sup>   |
| e  | 65+                   | 13                |
| <b>Race/ethnicity</b>                    |                       |                   |
| a  | White (non-Hispanic)  | 28                |
| b  | Black (non-Hispanic)  | 23                |
| c  | Hispanic              | 27                |
| <b>Household income (among ages 18+)</b> |                       |                   |
| a  | < \$30,000            | 30                |
| b  | \$30,000 - \$49,999   | 26                |
| c  | \$50,000 - \$74,999   | 27                |
| d  | \$75,000 - \$99,999   | 26                |
| e  | \$100,000+            | 32 <sup>b</sup>   |
| <b>Education (among ages 18+)</b>        |                       |                   |
| a  | Less than high school | 12                |
| b  | High school graduate  | 24 <sup>e</sup>   |
| c  | Some college          | 27 <sup>a</sup>   |
| d  | College graduate      | 32 <sup>abc</sup> |
| <b>Sexual identification</b>             |                       |                   |
| a  | LGB                   | 57 <sup>b</sup>   |
| b  | Heterosexual          | 26                |

Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older).

## **Internet users who have witnessed or experienced online harassment or abuse are significantly more likely to self-censor than those who have not**

Although we do not know what happened first and then second, internet users who have encountered online harassment and abuse, either by witnessing it or experiencing it firsthand, are significantly more likely to also self-censor online than those who have neither witnessed nor experienced these types of harassment. For instance, 34% of those who have witnessed online harassment also say they have self-censored to avoid harassment, compared with 10% of those who have never witnessed online harassment. Those who have personally experienced online harassment or abuse are even more likely to self-censor, with a majority (57%) of internet users who have been stalked online saying they have done this as well.

## **Harassment and privacy practices**

Another way victims can protect themselves from harassment is through digital privacy practices.

One common practice among victims of online harassment is to use privacy settings to limit who can see what they post online. This method is frequently available on social media sites, although the level of specificity or control a user has may vary depending on the platform. Another common method to protect one's privacy online is to change the settings on a search engine or web browser so that it doesn't keep track of your search history. This practice may be of particular importance to victims of harassment who are concerned about having their online actions monitored by someone with physical access to their computer, smartphone, or other device.

On many online platforms, users have the opportunity to block, mute, "unfriend," or otherwise avoid an individual user. However, not all digital abuse takes place on platforms that allow for blocking individual users, and harassers may also be able to create multiple accounts in order to circumvent being blocked. Many online platforms, particularly social media sites, allow users to upload photos and "tag" them with someone's name or username, often so that those photos can be found through search results or so that they will be displayed on the user's profile. Those concerned about privacy can untag these photos to render them more difficult to find or to prevent them from displaying on their own profile.

Many devices, websites, and mobile apps have features that track a user's location in some manner, often to deliver location-based information or services or explicitly to share the user's location with others, which individuals can disable to prevent sharing of their location or movements.

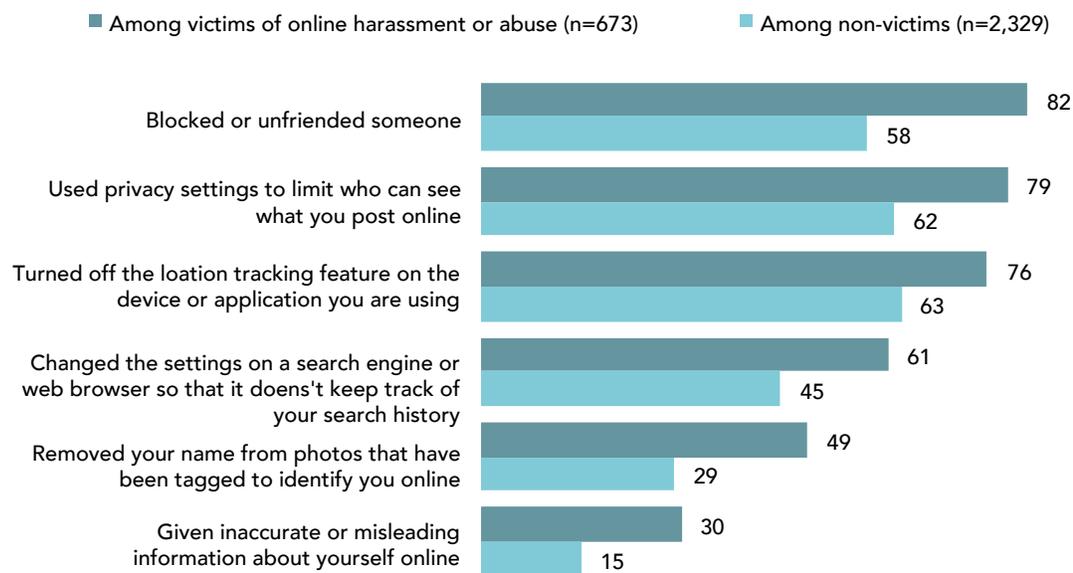
Giving inaccurate or misleading information about oneself online can help users hide their identity in online spaces where they might not want to be identified, or where they might not want to be identified as a member of a particular demographic category or group.

## More than eight in ten (88%) Americans protect their privacy in online spaces

The most common ways Americans protect their privacy are blocking or unfriending someone online, using privacy settings to limit who can see what they post online, and turning off location tracking on their device or on a particular app. A majority have also changed the settings for their browser or search engine so that it won't keep track of their search history, and about half have removed their names from photos tagged of them online. Finally, about three in ten have posted inaccurate or misleading information about themselves online in order to protect their privacy.

### Victims of online harassment or abuse are more likely to use strategies to protect their privacy than the general public

% in each group who say they have ever done any of the following things to help protect their privacy



Source: Data & Society / CiPHR Measuring Cyberabuse Survey, May 17- July 31, 2016. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (total n=3,002 U.S. internet users age 15 and older including n=673 victims of online harassment).

More than 97% of victims of online harassment or abuse have employed at least one of the privacy protective strategies asked about in our study, compared with 85% of non-victims, although it is important to point out that the strategies could have been employed by victims at any time—before their harassment experience, after, or both.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup>These questions were initially asked of all internet users (n=3,002)

## **Younger, LGB, college-educated, and female victims of online harassment are all more likely than others to employ protective online privacy**

*Victims of online harassment who are under age 30 are more likely than older victims to have:*

- Blocked or unfriended someone (91% of younger victims vs. 75% of older victims)
- Used privacy settings (85% of younger victims vs. 74% of older victims)
- Turned off location tracking (84% of younger vs. 70% of older victims)
- Untagged themselves from photos (61% of younger vs. 40% of older victims)

*Women who are victims of online harassment are more likely than men who are victims to have:*

- Used privacy settings than men (85% of female victims vs. 72% of male victims)
- Turned off location tracking than men (80% of female victims vs. 72% of male victims)
- Untagged themselves from photos (55% of female victims vs. 43% of male victims)

*Online harassment victims with college degrees are more likely than victims with lower levels of education to have:*

- Turned off location tracking (81% of victims who are college graduates vs. 74% of those with less education)
- Untagged themselves from photos (55% of victims who are college graduates vs. 43% of those with less education)
- Given inaccurate or misleading information about themselves online (36% of victims who are college graduates vs. 63% of those with less education)
- Changed their settings on a search engine or browser so it does not save search history (67% of college graduates vs. 32% of those with lower levels of education)

*LGB victims are more likely than heterosexual victims to have:*

- Removed their names from photos than heterosexual victims (68% of LGB victims vs. 47% of heterosexual victims)

## Resources

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

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

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

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

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

Speak Up Stay Safe [<https://onlinesafety.feministfrequency.com>]

Working to Halt Abuse [[www.haltabuse.org](http://www.haltabuse.org)]

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

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

GLBT National Help Center [[www.glbthotline.org](http://www.glbthotline.org)]

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

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

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

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

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