

Designing for Affected Individuals: Exploring the Intersection of Privacy, Surveillance, and Intimacy in Technological Devices

Sima Amirkhani^{1,*}, Dave Randall^{2,†} and Gunnar Stevens^{3,†}

¹ Siegen University, Kohlbettstr. 17, 57072, Siegen, Germany

² Siegen University, Kohlbettstr. 15, 57072, Siegen, Germany

³ Siegen University, Kohlbettstr. 15, 57072, Siegen, Germany

Abstract

There is a long tradition to empower end users of technology. In this position paper, we argue to broaden the lens also to empower people affected by technology. From this stance, we aim to look at mobile phone usage, cyber-stalking, and tech-abuse within romantic partnerships, where privacy is a complex issue with far-reaching implications. While the desire for privacy is inherent in romantic relationships, the increasing reliance on mobile devices has introduced new challenges. Instances of partners checking each other's phones or accessing online accounts without consent can lead to intrusive behaviors. Achieving a balance between privacy and openness is crucial in fostering healthy relationships. Moreover, breaches of privacy extend beyond extreme scenarios, highlighting the importance of respecting personal boundaries even in non-abusive contexts. These dynamics underscore the need for nuanced discussions and proactive measures to navigate privacy concerns within romantic partnerships.

Keywords

Privacy, surveillance, Violence, Abuse, IPV, IPA, IPS

1. Introduction: Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) refers to any pattern of behavior within an intimate relationship where one partner seeks to exert power and control over the other through physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological means. This behavior can occur between spouses, cohabiting partners, current or former boyfriends or girlfriends, or heterosexual or same-sex partners. As societal norms and relationship dynamics evolve, the definition of IPV perpetrators has expanded to encompass various types of intimate relationships,

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* Corresponding author.

† These authors contributed equally.

✉ Sima.Amirkhani@uni.siegen.de (S. Amirkhani); Dave.Randall@uni-siegen.de (D. Randall); Gunnar.Stevens@uni-siegen.de (G. Stevens)

🆔 0009-0009-8836-8291 (S. Amirkhani); 0000-0001-8613-3477 (D. Randall); 0000-0002-7785-5061 (G. Stevens)



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reflecting the complexities of what it means to be an affected person within modern partnerships, where divorce, separation, and multiple partnering is prevalence [1].

Privacy within romantic partnerships, especially regarding the usage of mobile phones, is a multifaceted and intricate matter. Intimate partner surveillance (IPS) is a distinct subset of IPV that describes the deliberate surveillance of an intimate partner, with or without their knowledge, via technical and non-technical methods [2]. Intimate partner abusers use digital technologies to surveil their partners, including by installing spyware apps, compromising devices and online accounts, and employing social engineering tactics [2]. Previous study delves into the intricate dynamics of IPS as reported in online forums dedicated to discussions of sexual infidelity [2]. Through qualitative analysis, they reveal how narratives shared in these forums serve as a means of expressing interest in and reporting instances of IPS, as well as providing a platform for offering advice and encouragement to others engaging in or considering such behavior.

The longing for privacy is closely connected to romantic relationships, as highlighted by Ngcongco in 2016 [3]. Although regulations can bolster privacy, the utilization of mobile devices can also become intrusive, especially in situations where individuals check their partner's cellphone or access their online accounts without obtaining consent [4]. This underscores the importance of striking a harmonious equilibrium between privacy and openness within romantic partnerships. Privacy breaches within romantic relationships extend beyond extreme situations, underscoring the significance of valuing personal privacy even in the absence of abusive scenarios [5].

The intensification of privacy apprehensions of people affected by technology usage is correlated with the burgeoning influence of mobile media platforms [6]. Additionally, COVID-19-induced social isolation has been identified as a moderating factor in the realm of privacy management related to sexting, particularly among individuals experiencing low to moderate levels of social isolation [7]. Furthermore, the connection between concerns about privacy and actual privacy protection actions constitutes a pivotal aspect of the ongoing privacy paradox discourse [8]. This emphasizes the intricate nature of privacy apprehensions and the actions taken to safeguard it. Within the realm of romantic partnerships, the handling of confidential information and the exchange of personal data are pivotal facets that can significantly influence the quality of the relationship [9].

Moreover, the determinants of privacy protection behavior strategies employed by affected people on social networking sites have been investigated, providing insights into the influences affecting decisions related to privacy [10]. Last, but not least, digital technologies, such as mobile devices and social networks, have complex implications in intimate partner violence (IPV) situations like domestic abuse and stalking.

Another issue, where we must not only empower end-users, but affected people, is the risk of young people becoming victims of cyber abuse, prompting the development of interventions to protect them from online dangers. The negative impact of mass media on children and youth is evidenced by increased aggression and violence, influenced by exposure to violent content in various media forms, leading to desensitization and modeling of negative behaviors. Additionally, the proliferation of sexual and idealized body images contributes to body dissatisfaction and psychological disorders, exacerbated by socioeconomic disparities. The media's role in shaping societal norms and individual self-

concept necessitates further research and proactive intervention to mitigate detrimental effects on youth development [11].

Based on the provided Cyber sexual solicitation involves adults using electronic platforms like email, cell phones, text messages, and the internet to lure children into performing sexual acts, while cyber pornography encompasses creating, sharing, and viewing explicit sexual content via technology [12]. Cyberbullying in the digital era, is happening for children. Doxing, a form of cyberbullying, is prevalent among adolescents in Hong Kong, with significant gender differences observed in the types and targets of doxing behavior, highlighting the need for collaborative efforts across families, schools, and communities to address this issue [13]. The complexity of cyberspace, coupled with the influx of harmful content, underscores the challenge of young users' unpreparedness [11].

While empowering end-users of technology is a well-established research field, empowering people affected by technology is less prominent. Yet such research is needed to address the broader implications of technology on society and strive to mitigate negative impacts. Closing this gap would require interdisciplinary collaboration between researchers, and technologists, and help organizations to develop targeted interventions that prioritize safety and mitigate the normalization and promotion of abusive behaviors online.

2. Work-In-Progress

To address this gap, we began investigating the issue of privacy and intimate partner surveillance using a Participatory Action Research approach. To facilitate this, we moderated discussions via a Telegram channel's Livestream with its members. During this livestream, 27 active participants discussed and shared their perspectives based on their own experiences and those of others around them. Additionally, we initiated comment conversations under a post discussing mobile device privacy between partners, aiming to delve deeper into the concept of privacy within relationships. This discussion shows the contrast between how individuals perceive their privacy being invaded and how their partners might justify the surveillance of digital devices without being ashamed. This added layer highlights the complex dynamics in intimate relationships regarding privacy and surveillance. Lessons learned from these observations include:

- Firstly, individuals typically do not openly discuss privacy within relationships. In other words, the culture of discussing privacy is not yet widely accepted.
- Secondly, in surveillance, the observer's group may justify their actions and easily position themselves as victims.
- Lastly, individuals affected by surveillance within intimate relationships may find it difficult to extricate themselves from the situation. They may experience repeated victimization without addressing it or receiving assistance.

As a next step, we are planning to conduct narrative interviews with technology users (e.g., mobile device users) with greater care and ethical consideration [14]. This approach aims to gather deeper insights while listening to the stories of technology users [15].

Addressing the security and privacy needs of intimate partner violence (IPV) into context-specific strategies and care models for tech abuse survivors in other geographical locations, including different countries or rural/suburban areas. We suggest that while strategies and care models developed in one location may be effective, they may not fully address the unique challenges and circumstances faced by survivors in diverse settings.

Therefore, there is a critical need for further research to explore how these insights can be adapted and applied to accommodate the specific cultural, social, economic, and infrastructural contexts of different regions. By developing context-specific strategies and care models, stakeholders can better support tech abuse survivors globally and ensure that interventions are relevant, accessible, and effective across diverse geographical and cultural landscapes. As a result, we are eager to go deeper in the topic of IPV, IPAⁱ and IPSⁱⁱ.

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ⁱ Intimate Partner Abuse

ⁱⁱ Intimate Partner Surveillance