Analysis of the presence on the Internet of content that spread systems to cyberstalk women within a couple

Conclusions

The aim of this report is to identify content on video-sharing platforms that normalises cyberstalking by an intimate partner. Cyberstalking is a form of cyberbullying, entailing behaviour that includes continuously tracking a person's online activities, friendships, comments and the photos they share, as well as their location. Amounting to domination and control in an intimate relationship, this behaviour is also found among teenagers and young people.

In our search, 55% of the top 100 videos show methods for cyberstalking

We searched on YouTube for a number of key terms linked to controlling an intimate partner and found that **55%** of the top **100** videos propose ways to stalk somebody online.

When it comes to the content, 43.6% suggest gaining access to another person's private chat applications, 32.7% controlling their social networks, and 21.8% explain how to generally track mobile phone activity. Regarding the cyberstalking methods proposed, 40% of the videos recommend secretly installing an application on the person's phone.

The gender bias in cyberstalking a partner: an online form of gender-based violence

Our analysis of the content of the videos found revealed a gender bias. In 40.5% of the videos, cyberstalking explicitly or implicitly targets women, while in the remainder the person stalked is either an intimate partner or other.

Similarly, the titles of 20% of the videos reveal that the cyberstalking method proposed is aimed solely at women. On the contrary, none of the video titles refer to cyberstalking men exclusively. Furthermore, in 90.9% of the videos, the narrator is a man, either visible on screen or a voiceover.

These data are consistent with various gender studies, which have found that although controlling behaviour is found in both sexes, it is more frequently directed at women. As such, cyberstalking women is an online manifestation of a form of gender-based violence.

Tutorials with hundreds of thousands or millions of views have an account that normalises and justifies cyberstalking an intimate partner

An in-depth analysis of a sample of 12 videos that propose cyberstalking women and that have numerous views (170,000 to 6.6 million) revealed the prevalence of the same format: a tutorial that gives step-by-step explanations on how to enact the proposed method of cyberstalking.

This seemingly neutral rhetoric normalises and justifies controlling behaviour towards an intimate partner.

The rhetoric suggests that cyberstalking an intimate partner is a common and widespread practice and is neither implicitly nor explicitly related to gender-based abuse in the sphere of the couple.

> "Today, WhatsApp and other similar applications are the most popular means of communication in the world. **It is not unusual that some people want to find ways to hack it**, especially when they are thinking about their partner or other people who they are close to."
>
> (*HACKING WHATSAPP only with the phone number, without the person's actual phone - is it possible?*)

The videos construct a rhetoric that justifies cyberstalking for reasons presented as emotional and that are manifest as suspecting that the partner is being unfaithful:

> "It's **IMPORTANT to watch this video** because [...] **you'll be able to find out if your partners are unfaithful so you can end a pointless relationship**. Anyone [...] who **suspects their partner might be cheating on them** should watch it."
>
> (*Track your partner with whatsapp WEB on your Android phone 100% effective*)

The videos often stress how easy, quick and effective the proposed methods are, which puts cyberstalking in the context of optimising technology, thereby reinforcing the message that this type of behaviour is normal:

> "For me, this is definitely **the easiest possible way to track** someone's Whatsapp."
>
> (*Tried and tested! Track and CONTROL*

In addition, although the methods proposed entail an invasion of privacy of the cyberstalked person, 11 of the 12 videos analysed make no reference to the fact that this is illicit.

User comments reinforce the message that cyberstalking audiovisual content is normal and legitimate

The users who have commented on the videos found are predominantly in favour of cyberstalking an intimate partner and the methods shown to do this. Some question how the proposed system works or ask for more information about other possible forms of technological control:

> "Hey but she gets a notification that she's connected to the WhatsApp website..... How can I block that?? Or how do I prevent that notification appearing on her mobile?"

> "What if my girlfriend lives in another country? How do I do it?"
> (*How to See the WhatsApp of your Partner 2019 | 100% real*)

Content that normalise a form of gender-based violence in the media ecosystem in which young people and teenagers are most active

In short, the overarching message in these videos is that cyberstalking women is normal, habitual and legitimate within a couple. This message is explicitly conveyed in tutorials that explain concrete methods, but is also implicit on two levels.

First, there is the quantitative factor: the sheer amount of these videos on online, freely accessible on platforms is a factor that normalises cyberstalking.

Second, there is the technology factor: the audiovisual language in the tutorials on applications puts cyberstalking in a context of simple technology use, which fosters the misleading idea that this practice is not a form of gender-based violence.

The problem posed by content that normalises cyberstalking women is further exacerbated by it being found on the main source of audiovisual consumption for young people and teenagers (video-sharing platforms), and in a register that is habitual and familiar to this age group (the technical tutorial).

As a result, it has an impact on a swathe of the population at a time in their life when models of femininity and masculinity are being defined and that is therefore crucial to fostering equal relations between women and men and avoiding any form of gender-based violence.