Sexual- and Gender-Based Misconduct (SGBM) in the Virtual Environment: Digital Abuse

What is Digital Abuse?

The rise of social media and technology in our daily lives has created more opportunities to commit abuse and violence. These behaviors constitute ***digital abuse***, which refers to "the use of technology to harass or intimidate someone."[i] Digital abuse can happen to anyone at any stage of a relationship (including outside of intimate partnerships), but is most common among teens and young adults who more frequently use technology. Research suggests that digital abuse is an indicator for other types of abuse and rarely occurs in isolation.[ii]

Digital abuse comprises a range of behaviors and may accompany other forms of abuse.[iii] Warning signs may consist of bullying and harassment, monitoring and stalking, sexual coercion, as well as possessiveness and control.

Common examples of digital abuse include: [iv]
- ✓ Non-consensual pornography (AKA "revenge porn")
- ✓ Sextortion
- ✓ Upskirting
- ✓ Location tracking

Digital abuse may also look like: [v]
- ✓ Stealing passwords
- ✓ Sending someone explicit photos/videos without their consent
- ✓ Controlling who someone can message

It is critical to remember that the nature of the violation from digital abuse often revolves around lack of consent. Particularly in cases involving sexually explicit photos/videos, the violation is not the existence of these images (when taken willingly), but rather who shared the images and the intention for doing so.[vi]

I've Heard Some of This Before...

As we continue to learn about digital abuse, you may notice both familiar patterns and unique elements. Digital abuse can overlap with behaviors seen offline in other forms of interpersonal violence, such as emotional and verbal abuse. At the same time, the complexities of digital

abuse are compounded by additional means of access, manipulation, and exploitation. The lists below compare and contrast digital abuse with other methods of abuse:[vii]

Similarities	Differences
✓ Rooted in power and control over another person	✓ Violation is misunderstood and more widely tolerated
✓ Often results in victim-blaming	✓ Technology creates additional tactics to abuse (e.g., altering images, doxing)
✓ Can cause psychological harm	
✓ History of digital abuse spans decades and is not confined to recent uptick in technological advancements	✓ Research is new and limited
	✓ Digital abuse can increase the vulnerability of someone who is already in a disadvantaged position
✓ Other forms of abuse are incorporated into abusive tactics (e.g., economic abuse by way of threatening someone's job)	✓ Abuse may violate ownership rights if images are shared without permission
✓ Sexuality shaming	

What Does This All Mean for the Skidmore Community?

It is important to remember that the College's policy against sexual- and gender-based misconduct also applies to the virtual environment. Forms of digital abuse may fall under the policy's Prohibited Conduct as sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, intimate partner violence, stalking, or retaliation, as well as possible charges under the Student Code of Social Conduct.

Lack of affirmative consent for any act within the Prohibited Conduct categories provides a basis for policy violation. If you or a loved one has experienced digital abuse, there are resources both on and off campus to help determine options and identify supports.

For on-campus and local community resources, please visit
https://www.skidmore.edu/sgbm/contacts.php.

To learn more about digital abuse or to access options and supports off campus, here are some sites to get you started:

Safety Net Project at the National Network to End Domestic Violence (https://www.techsafety.org/)
Love Is Respect (https://www.loveisrespect.org/)
Cyber Civil Rights Initiative (https://www.cybercivilrights.org/)
Online Removal Guide (https://www.cybercivilrights.org/online-removal/)

For any questions, please contact the Title IX Deputy Coordinator, Gabriela Melillo (gmelillo@skidmore.edu), or the Title IX Coordinator, Joel Aure (jaure@skidmore.edu).

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[i] "What Is Digital Abuse? Signs to Watch For and How to Get Help." Joyful Heart Foundation. August 23, 2018. http://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/blog/digital-abuse-signs-and-help.

[ii] Janine M. Zweig, et al. "Technology, Teen Dating Violence and Abuse, and Bullying," (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2013). https://www.urban.org/research/publication/technology-teen-dating-violence-and-abuse-and-bullying/view/full_report

[iii] "What Is Digital Abuse? Signs to Watch For and How to Get Help." Joyful Heart Foundation. August 23, 2018. http://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/blog/digital-abuse-signs-and-help.

[iv] Michelle Issadore, "Decoding Digital Abuse: Prevention Strategies for 2020 and Beyond + Insights on Pending Title IX Regulations," Safe Colleges, April 22, 2020, webinar, https://www.safecolleges.com/decoding-digital-abuse-webinar/.

[v] "What Is Digital Abuse? Signs to Watch For and How to Get Help." Joyful Heart Foundation. August 23, 2018. http://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/blog/digital-abuse-signs-and-help.

[vi] LB Klein, "Addressing 'Revenge Porn' Using a Community Approach," *Prevention Innovations Research Center* (blog), April 14, 2016, https://preventioninnovations.wordpress.com/2016/04/14/addressing-revenge-porn-using-a-community-approach/

[vii] Michelle Issadore, "Decoding Digital Abuse: Prevention Strategies for 2020 and Beyond + Insights on Pending Title IX Regulations," Safe Colleges, April 22, 2020, webinar, https://www.safecolleges.com/decoding-digital-abuse-webinar/.