

Facebook Use, Facebook Jealousy, and Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration

Marie-Ève Daspe, PhD,¹ Marie-Pier Vaillancourt-Morel, PhD,¹
Yvan Lussier, PhD,² and Stéphane Sabourin, PhD³

Abstract

Social networking sites (SNS) are now deeply ingrained in our interpersonal world. Past research has shown various impacts of SNS on intimate relationships, from facilitation of relationship initiation to new sources of conflicts between romantic partners. In two studies, we examined Facebook-related jealousy as a risk factor for the perpetration of intimate partner violence (IPV) in adolescents and young adults. In study 1, 1508 participants completed an online survey assessing Facebook use, Facebook jealousy, and IPV perpetration. Facebook jealousy emerged as a significant mediator of the association between Facebook use and IPV. In study 2, we used a dyadic perspective to investigate the joint contribution of both partners' Facebook jealousy to IPV perpetration. In a sample of 92 youth (46 couples), results showed a significant interaction between own and partner Facebook jealousy. More specifically, own Facebook jealousy was associated with IPV perpetration only at high levels of partner Facebook jealousy. These findings suggest that online behaviors have meaningful implications for offline conflicts and aggression in intimate relationships.

Keywords: social media, social networking sites, jealousy, intimate partner violence

Introduction

THE INCREASING POPULARITY of social networking sites (SNS) has transformed the way we interact with others, including with a romantic partner.¹ Although 71% of 13–17 and 88% of 18–29 year-olds use Facebook,^{2,3} research is just beginning to examine its relevance for youth's romantic relationships. Studies suggest that Facebook use is associated with a variety of positive relationship outcomes, from facilitation of relationship initiation or development to maintenance of long distance relationships.^{4,5} The dark side of SNS has also been examined, with research showing that Facebook use can create conflicts related to cyber infidelity, jealousy, and partner-surveillance behaviors, for instance.^{4,6} However, among the various ways SNS may potentially complicate romantic relationships, the contribution of Facebook use to intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetration remains understudied. The goal of the current research is to explore the role of Facebook use and Facebook jealousy in offline IPV perpetration among adolescents and young adults.

Facebook-related jealousy

Given the amount of information about the romantic partner that is accessible on Facebook, the potential for triggering

suspicion and jealousy is substantial. Witnessing a partner's adding new attractive friends or posts and pictures from past romantic or sexual partners can be interpreted as potential threats to the relationship.^{6,7} Not only is information about the partner easily available through SNS, it is also frequently ambiguous, as comments or pictures can be misinterpreted without the related context.⁶ Muise et al.⁷ found that time spent on Facebook was uniquely associated with Facebook-related jealousy, over and above personality and relationship factors. Using experimental manipulation of SNS parameters, such as privacy settings,⁸ the use of emoticons,⁹ and nonverbal cues (e.g., pictures, capitalization),¹⁰ various online contexts have been shown to differentially elicit jealousy and negative emotions. Previous evidence also has demonstrated that Facebook intrusion (i.e., excessive involvement in Facebook that disrupts daily activities) is associated with higher romantic jealousy.¹¹ Overall, these findings suggest that Facebook can elicit jealousy and that the more time individuals spend on Facebook, the more likely they are to be exposed to content that triggers it.

Facebook jealousy and IPV

A few studies suggest that jealousy is related to partner electronic surveillance,^{12–14} which is susceptible to

¹Department of Psychology, Université de Montréal, Montreal, Canada.

²Department of Psychology, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Trois-Rivières, Canada.

³École de Psychologie, Université Laval, Quebec, Canada.

escalating into more controlling and coercive behaviors.¹⁵ In offline contexts, jealousy can be a precipitant for IPV¹⁶ and is commonly identified by both men and women as a reason to explain aggressive behaviors toward a romantic partner.^{17,18} However, only one study has specifically examined Facebook jealousy as a correlate of IPV perpetration.¹⁵ Findings suggest a positive association between the constructs, through the use of mate-retention tactics. Given that Facebook jealousy is a related but different construct than trait jealousy and other aspects of the general experience of jealousy,⁷ more efforts are needed to clarify its significance, as well as its potential role in explaining some of the negative relational outcomes associated with social media use.

Past studies investigating the link between jealousy and IPV have relied mostly on individual data from only one member of the couple. However, data from one partner is only half the picture, and it is likely that violent behaviors emerge also in response to the partner's feelings of jealousy. Moreover, using data from both partners allows the examination of the interaction between both partners' Facebook jealousy in association with IPV. Accounting for the joint contribution of the Facebook jealousy of both is likely to provide a clearer portrait of the dyadic contexts that fuel IPV in young couples. To our knowledge, this kind of dyadic investigation of Facebook jealousy and IPV perpetration has never been undertaken.

Overview of the present research

The current research expands upon past studies in two ways. In study 1, we examined an integrative model of the mediational role of Facebook jealousy in the association between Facebook use and IPV perpetration. We hypothesized a direct, positive association between Facebook use and IPV (H1a). However, we expected that this association would be mediated by Facebook jealousy (H1b). In study 2, we examined the association between Facebook jealousy and IPV from a dyadic perspective, using data from both romantic partners. We expected that both own and partner Facebook jealousy would be positively associated with own IPV perpetration (H2a) and that both partners' Facebook jealousy would interact to predict IPV perpetration (H2b). More specifically, we expected that the association between own Facebook jealousy and own IPV would be stronger when the partner shows high levels of Facebook jealousy.

Study 1

Method

Participants and procedure. A sample of 3087 adolescents and young adults completed an online survey about social media use. Advertisement was made on Facebook and through flyers in high schools, colleges, and universities in and around a medium-sized city in Canada. Eligible participants were 14–25 years of age, had a Facebook account, and owned a cell phone. Questionnaires were completed through the online platform *FluidSurveys*. This research was approved by the Ethics Board of the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. To be included in this study, participants (1) had to be involved in a romantic relationship (2) with a partner who possessed a Facebook account. These criteria resulted in a final sample of 1508 participants (209 men and 1299 women). Demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Measures. Facebook use was assessed through one item (“How many hours per day do you spend on Facebook and other social media?”) answered on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*Less than an hour*) to 4 (*Five hours or more*). Jealousy with respect to the romantic partner's activities on Facebook was assessed through eight items derived from the Facebook Jealousy Scale⁷ that assessed on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Very often*) the extent to which they endorsed each item (e.g., “I feel jealous when my partner adds a person of the opposite sex to his/her list of Facebook friends,” “I feel jealous when my partner posts a provocative picture (e.g., bikini, naked chest) on his/her Facebook wall”). Items were averaged to compute a total score, with a Cronbach's α of .87. IPV perpetration was assessed using a three-item version of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2).¹⁹ Participants were asked to report the frequency with which they had perpetrated psychological (“Insulted, swore, or shouted”), physical (“shoved, slapped, kicked, or grabbed”), and sexual (“insisted or used threat to have sex”) violence toward their romantic partner during a conflict in the past year on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*More than 11 times*). Global scores of IPV perpetration were computed by averaging scores across the three items. In this study, the ordinal coefficient alpha using polychoric correlations²⁰ was 0.71.

Results

Descriptive analyses

In this study, 61.1% of participants reported having perpetrated psychological IPV in the past year; 11.9% reported having perpetrated physical and 3.9% reported having perpetrated sexual violence. Table 2 presents means and correlations between the study variables. Facebook use positively correlated with Facebook jealousy and IPV and negatively correlated with age and relationship length. Facebook jealousy positively correlated with IPV. Finally, IPV positively

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLES

Variable	Study 1 n = 1508		Study 2 n = 92	
	M	SD	M	SD
Age	20.51 %	2.54 N	20.14 %	2.16 n
Sexual orientation				
Heterosexual	87.5	1319	100.0	92
Gay and lesbian	3.3	50		
Bisexual	7.9	119		
Questioning or asexual	1.3	19		
Relationship status				
Dating	54.6	824	63.0	29
Cohabiting or married	45.4	684	37.0	17
Highest degree (pursued or completed)				
High school	15.5	233	13.0	12
Vocational	5.5	83	5.4	5
Pre-university	44.3	668	43.5	40
Undergraduate	28.9	436	31.6	29
Graduate	5.8	88	6.5	6

TABLE 2. CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS, MEANS, AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR STUDY 1 VARIABLES

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Facebook use	—				
2. Facebook jealousy	0.13***	—			
3. IPV	0.16***	0.34***	—		
4. Age	-0.12***	-0.02	0.06*	—	
5. Relationship length	-0.12***	-0.04	0.11***	0.40***	—
Men					
<i>M</i>	2.20 ^a	1.75 ^a	0.53 ^a	20.53 ^a	23.36 ^a
<i>SD</i>	0.79	0.71	0.66	2.75	24.00
Women					
<i>M</i>	2.48 ^b	1.93 ^b	0.66 ^b	20.50 ^a	27.32 ^b
<i>SD</i>	0.87	0.79	0.74	2.51	26.13

Mean with different subscripts indicate significant differences between men and women.

* $p < 0.05$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

IPV, perpetration of intimate partner violence.

correlated with age and relationship length. Independent-sample *t* tests showed that, compared with men, women spent significantly more time on Facebook, $t(1505) = -4.83$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.34$, reported more Facebook jealousy, $t(1505) = -3.38$, $p = 0.001$, $d = 0.24$, more IPV perpetration, $t(1355) = -2.20$, $p = 0.029$, $d = 0.17$, and a longer relationship duration, $t(1500) = -2.05$, $p = 0.041$, $d = 0.16$.

Facebook jealousy as a mediator of the association between Facebook use and IPV

The hypothesized mediational model was tested using path analyses in *Mplus* version 6.12.²¹ Because IPV is naturally non-normally distributed, we used the Maximum Likelihood Robust method of estimation.²² Missing data on the study variables (ranging from 0.001% to 0.10%) were handled using the Full Information Maximum Likelihood estimation method.²¹ First, to test the direct association between Facebook use and IPV (H1a), a model was conducted without including Facebook jealousy. Because gender and age were not significantly associated with IPV in the path analysis and did not affect the pattern of results, only relationship length was included as a covariate. This saturated

model indicated a positive and significant link between Facebook use and IPV, $\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$. Next, Facebook jealousy was added as a mediator (H1b) to the path analysis model. Again, only relationship length was included as a covariate. As illustrated in Figure 1, the results revealed a direct, although smaller association between Facebook use and IPV. In addition, Facebook use was positively associated with Facebook jealousy, which in turn was positively related to IPV perpetration. Results indicated a significant indirect effect, $b = 0.06$, 95% bootstrap CI [0.04–0.07], with 36.2% of the total effect of Facebook use on IPV going through Facebook jealousy. The following indices were used to identify a well-fitting model: a nonsignificant chi-square,²³ Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) with values of 0.95 or above,²⁴ and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) with a value less than 0.06.²⁴ The current model was well adjusted to the data, $\chi^2(1) = 0.26$, $p = 0.609$, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.02, and RMSEA = 0.00, and explained 14.8% of the variance in IPV perpetration.

The possible contribution of gender was further examined using multigroup analyses. The chi-square difference test comparing the model with parameter constraints across men and women to the freely estimated model was nonsignificant $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 3.37$, $p = 0.338$, and the constrained model was well adjusted to the data, $\chi^2(5) = 6.16$, $p = 0.290$, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 0.99, and RMSEA = 0.02. This gender invariant model suggests no meaningful gender differences in the associations between the study variables.

Study 2

Method

Participants and procedure. The procedure was the same as in Study 1, except that to be included in Study 2, both partners of a romantic couple had to be eligible and consent to participate. Data from Study 1’s participants were not included in Study 2, and vice versa. Romantic partners were matched by an alphanumeric code chosen by the participants when completing the survey. This research was approved by the Ethics Board of the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. A total of 92 participants (46 heterosexual dyads) formed the sample for study 2. Demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1. No differences were found between Study 1 and Study 2 samples regarding demographic variables and IPV perpetration. However, participants in Study 1 ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 0.78$) reported significantly higher scores of

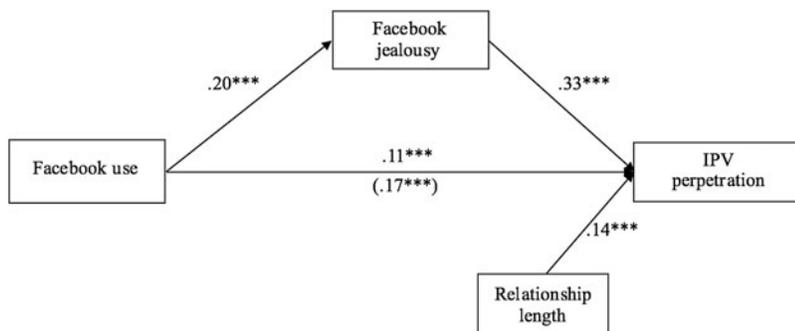


FIG. 1. Mediation model of the role of Facebook jealousy in the association between Facebook use and IPV perpetration. Coefficients are standardized. Coefficient in parenthesis represents the direct effect before the inclusion of the mediator. *** $p < 0.001$. IPV, intimate partner violence.

Facebook jealousy than those in Study 2 ($M=1.66$, $SD=0.63$), $t(1597)=3.47$, $p=0.001$, $d=0.34$.

Measures. Facebook jealousy and IPV perpetration were assessed using the same questionnaires as in Study 1.

Results

Descriptive statistics

A proportion of 52.2% of men and 63.0% of women reported having perpetrated psychological IPV in the past year, 8.7% of men and 21.7% of women reported having perpetrated physical, and 10.9% of men and 6.5% of women reported having perpetrated sexual IPV. Table 3 presents the means and correlations between the study variables. Significant correlations between partners' global scores of IPV and between partners' Facebook jealousy were observed. Facebook jealousy and IPV perpetration were also positively correlated with each other in males as well as across partners. Age and relationship length were not related to Facebook jealousy and IPV. Paired-sample t tests showed one significant within-dyad gender difference for age, $t(45)=3.12$, $p=0.003$, $d=0.45$, with men being older than women.

Actor-partner interdependence model for the links between Facebook jealousy and IPV

Actor-partner Interdependence Models²⁵ were performed using path analysis in *Mplus* version 6.12. All variables were standardized across men and women. We first examined main effects (H2a) for the association between own Facebook jealousy and own IPV perpetration (i.e., actor effect) and the association between partner Facebook jealousy and own IPV perpetration (i.e., partner effect). An omnibus test of distinguishability²⁵ showed that the difference between the model including equality constraints across gender on all variances, residual variances, intercepts, as well as actor and partner effects compared with the freely estimated model was nonsignificant $\Delta\chi^2(5)=5.70$, $p=0.336$, indicating that women and men in this sample were indistinguishable. The model was therefore conducted applying equality constraints across gender, and men and women were labeled as partner 1 and partner 2. Because age and relationship length were not

significantly associated with IPV and did not change the results, they were dropped from the analyses. The results (Fig. 2a) showed significant actor effects, indicating that own Facebook jealousy was positively related to own IPV perpetration. Partner effects were not significant, suggesting that partner Facebook jealousy was not associated with own IPV. This model showed satisfying fit indices, $\chi^2(5)=5.70$, $p=0.336$, CFI=0.97, TLI=0.97, and RMSEA=0.05, and explained 19% of the variance in IPV perpetration.

We next examined whether actor and partner Facebook jealousy interact to predict IPV (H2b). The results (Fig. 2b) showed a significant interaction between actor and partner Facebook jealousy. As displayed in Figure 3, simple slopes indicated that the association between own Facebook jealousy and own IPV was positive and significant at high levels (1 SD above the mean) of partner Facebook jealousy but not at low levels (1 SD below the mean) of partner Facebook jealousy. This model showed satisfying fit indices, $\chi^2(6)=6.45$, $p=0.375$, CFI=99, TLI=98, and RMSEA=0.04, and explained 25.6% of the variance in IPV.

General Discussion

The goal of the current research was to examine the contribution of Facebook use and Facebook jealousy to IPV perpetration in adolescents and young adults. Across two studies, the findings highlight Facebook jealousy as a central factor that can lead to IPV perpetration. In study 1, Facebook jealousy emerged as a significant mediator of the relationship between Facebook use and IPV. In study 2, the findings indicated a significant interaction between both partners' Facebook jealousy, underlining the dyadic context in which Facebook jealousy is most likely to contribute to IPV perpetration in young couples. The findings suggest that the associations between Facebook use, Facebook jealousy, and IPV are similar for both men and women.

Our results are in line with previous findings that demonstrated a meaningful connection between Facebook use and Facebook jealousy.^{7,11} The underlying assumption is that the more time individuals spend on Facebook, the more likely they are to be exposed to content posted by their partner. Because a great deal of ambiguous information is therefore available, feelings of jealousy and powerlessness in the face of real or imagined relationship threats may arise. Our findings

TABLE 3. CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS, MEANS, AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR STUDY 2 VARIABLES

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. M Facebook jealousy	—						
2. M IPV	0.47**	—					
3. M Age	-0.17	-0.21	—				
4. W Facebook jealousy	0.59***	0.51***	-0.05	—			
5. W IPV	0.30*	0.51***	-0.13	0.28	—		
6. W Age	-0.23	-0.26	0.82***	-0.11	-0.25	—	
7. Relationship length	0.08	0.02	0.25	-0.08	-0.04	0.30*	—
<i>M</i>	1.68 ^a	0.54 ^a	20.43 ^a	1.65 ^a	0.73 ^a	19.85 ^b	25.70
<i>SD</i>	0.69	0.74	2.18	0.58	0.68	2.11	24.69

Mean with different subscripts indicate significant differences between men and women on the corresponding variable.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

W, Women; M, Men.

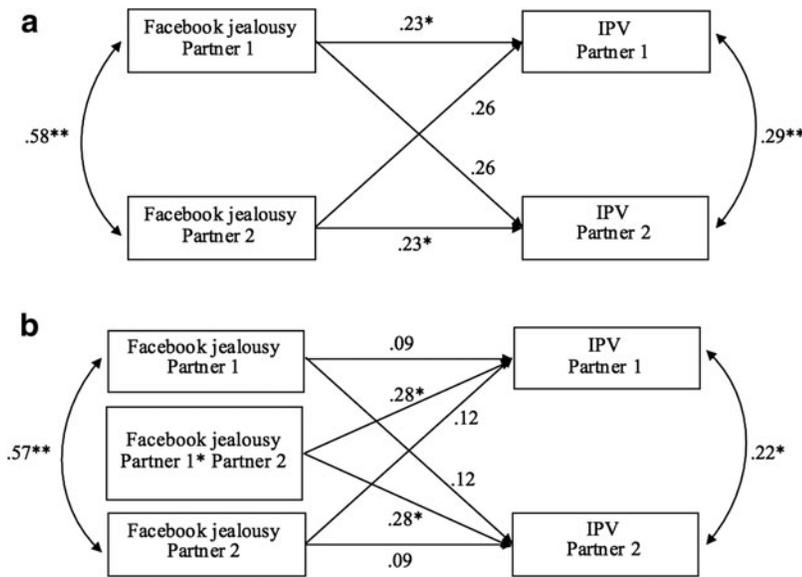


FIG. 2. Actor-Partner Interdependence Models for the associations between Facebook jealousy and IPV perpetration. (a) Presents the main effects for actor and partner Facebook jealousy on IPV. (b) Presents the interaction between actor and partner Facebook jealousy. Coefficients are standardized. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

are also in line with a parallel body of research showing how jealousy, triggered either by online or offline events, elicits mate-retention behaviors that can ultimately escalate into aggression.^{15,16} Prompted by feelings of betrayal and threats to the relationship, violent behaviors may translate into a desire to regain control, regulate proximity with the partner, and reduce distressing affects.²⁶ Electronic-based communications have been shown to be, after infidelity, the most potent jealousy-evoking partner behaviors,²⁷ suggesting that Facebook-related jealousy is likely to elicit strong negative feelings. The current findings are in line with research supporting the significance of this form of jealousy by highlighting its association with IPV perpetration in young couples.

Although our results highlight the central role of Facebook jealousy, the direct link between Facebook use and IPV perpetration remained significant in our integrative model. Because it is unlikely that Facebook use explains by itself IPV

perpetration, other relational risks stemming from Facebook use (e.g., conflicts related to screen time vs. couple time) still need to be examined as potential pathways through which an increased involvement in Facebook can lead to IPV.

A unique aspect of the present research is the dyadic examination of the contribution of both partners' Facebook jealousy to IPV perpetration. Our findings suggest that Facebook jealousy is associated with IPV perpetration only at high levels of partner Facebook jealousy. The dyadic perspective on violence suggests that IPV is an expression of complex interactions jointly created by both partner's emotions, cognitions, and behaviors.²⁸ That is, feelings of jealousy from both partners may lead to particularly heated arguments and escalate into violent behaviors. This could also reflect a negatively charged couple dynamic marked by distrust and suspiciousness between partners and efforts to gain control over the other's social behaviors. This suggests that the impacts of Facebook use and Facebook jealousy on IPV need to be examined within a dyadic framework, as the strength of these associations depend on the contribution of both partners' levels of Facebook jealousy.

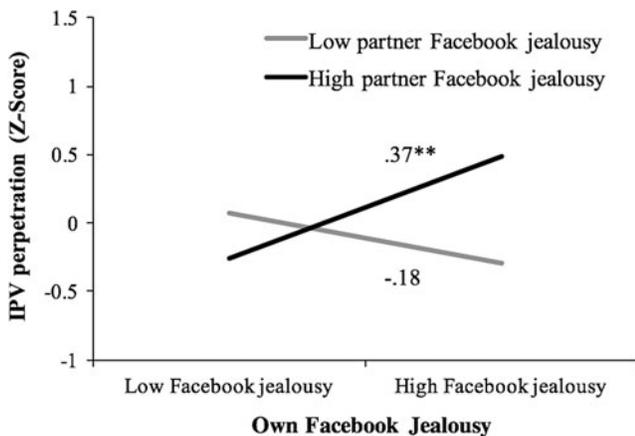


FIG. 3. Interaction between own and partner Facebook jealousy to predict IPV perpetration. High and low values of own and partner Facebook jealousy were plotted at 1 SD above and 1 SD below the mean. ** $p < 0.01$.

Limitations and future research

The current research has some limitations that need to be considered. First, it relies on self-reported measures, which are subject to shared-method variance. Second, we assessed Facebook use with one question and IPV perpetration using a three-item version of the CTS2.¹⁹ This assessment of IPV did not allow an examination of the associations between Facebook use, Facebook jealousy, and each types of violence (psychological, physical, and sexual) separately. Findings should be replicated using a more comprehensive assessment of this construct. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the data prevents any conclusion about causality in the associations examined. Fourth, the sample used in study 1 was composed of a very unequal number of women and men. Although gender did not appear to moderate the current results, they need to be replicated in a representative, more gender-balanced sample. Finally, the sample size for study 2 was

small, consisting of 46 dyads. Our research provides an exploratory dyadic investigation of the links between Facebook jealousy and IPV perpetration, but the results need to be replicated on larger samples before drawing more definitive conclusions.

Conclusion

The pervasiveness of digital technologies and SNS is now a reality. As they continue to become ingrained in our daily lives, it is crucial to develop a deep awareness of the many ways in which they can influence relationships. On the one hand, Facebook use appears to be a normative behavior that can lead to positive relational outcomes. On the other hand, an increasing body of research highlights potential relational issues associated with SNS use.⁶ Our findings provide some insight about how Facebook use and Facebook jealousy can contribute to IPV perpetration in adolescents and young adults. This is highly relevant given that this generation comprises the most common users of SNS^{2,3} at a developmental period in which IPV perpetration reaches its peak.²⁹ The current findings also add to a handful of studies underscoring the contribution of online behaviors to offline conflicts and violence.¹⁵ The body of research examining risk factors for offline IPV¹⁶ generally overlooks the new potential “online” risk factors arising from the increased use of SNS, particularly by youth. The current research suggests that an extensive theoretical understanding of IPV should include online risk factors, such as Facebook-related jealousy, which are not limited to cyber aggression and can also predict offline aggression in adolescents and young adults.

These findings also highlight the need to address SNS-related negative relational outcomes in prevention efforts to promote youth’s healthy and egalitarian relationships. Given the recent and rapid increase in SNS popularity, education about their potential harmful effects, including jealousy and IPV, is much needed. Sensitizing youth to the ways SNS may shape some attitudes and behaviors in their relationships might support informed decisions about the way they use Facebook.

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Author Disclosure Statement

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Address correspondence to:

Dr. Marie-Ève Daspe
Department of Psychology
Université de Montréal
C.P. 6128, Succursale Centre-Ville
Montreal H3C 2J7
Canada

E-mail: marie-eve.daspe@umontreal.ca