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# Intimate abuse through technology: A systematic review of scientific Constructs and behavioral dimensions

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

In the last decade, research related to intimate abuse through technology has increased exponentially, and numerous scientific constructs have been created to define this phenomenon. These constructs tend to be compared or used interchangeably, but several previous studies have emphasized that this multiplurality of constructs could contribute to the existence of constraints in the interpretation and comparison of results between studies. To address these constraints, we undertook a systematic review with the aims of (1) identifying scientific constructs related to intimate abuse through technology and (2) identifying behavioral dimensions developed to analyze this phenomenon. In our review, we included 126 studies and identified 42 constructs and 20 multidimensional behavioral sets related to intimate abuse through technology. On the basis of our analysis, we recommend that future studies adopt the construct of digital dating abuse or the initial theoretical formulation of cyber dating abuse to analyze this phenomenon since they both provide formal definitions and full-spectrum behavioral dimensions; however, these constructs also present some limitations. We also recommend that future studies consider expanding this research field to different configurations of intimate relationships, considering the inclusion of more diverse age groups.

## 1. Introduction

The past decade was a decade of exponential technological developments that contributed to the massification of digital communication. Technological devices (e.g., laptops, mobile phones) are considered an integral part of our lives, facilitating and potentiating communications, especially between intimate partners (Morey, Gentzler, Creasy, Oberhauser, & Westerman, 2013). Intimate partners are individuals that share a close personal relationship, that can be characterized by emotional connectedness, regular contact, ongoing physical contact, sexual behavior and identify as a couple (e.g., dating couples, married couples) (Breiding, Basile, Smith, Black, & Mahendra, 2015). In these relationships, technological developments have contributed to maintain proximity through instant communication and to the consolidation of new relationships (Laliker & Lannutti, 2014; Mosley & Lancaster, 2019; Reed, Tolman, & Ward, 2016). Despite these benefits, scholars have also noticed that these developments may have contributed to a shift in the traditional paradigm of intimate abuse. Before the widespread use of technological devices, intimate abuse tended to occur

when the perpetrator and the victim shared some kind of physical proximity (Zweig, Dank, Yahner, & Lachman, 2013). Since technological devices and applications for instant communication are easy to use, intimate abuse through technology can occur instantaneously because perpetrators and victims are "available" at any moment of the day (Harris & Woodlock, 2019; Melander, 2010).

Intimate abuse through technology is a recent phenomenon and extensive research has been published in the last decade. Nonetheless, one critical theoretical issue remains unresolved: there is a lack of academic consensus on how to conceptualize and define this phenomenon (Brown & Hegarty, 2018; Duerksen & Woodin, 2019a; Lara, 2020). Considering that a recent study identified 30 different constructs, this issue is particularly clear (Fernet, Lapierre, Hébert, & Cousineau, 2019). As highlighted by previous reviews, the existence of multiple constructs and this lack of consensus could contribute to the constraint in the comparison of results between different studies (Brown & Hegarty, 2018; Caridade, Braga, & Borrajo, 2019b; Fernet et al., 2019; Flach & Deslandes, 2017; Gámez-Guadix, Borrajo, & Calvete, 2018). As a consequence, prevalence rates for perpetration tend to fluctuate

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considerably between studies (Brown, Reed, & Messing, 2018; Fernet et al., 2019; Muñoz-Fernández & Sánchez-Jiménez, 2020). As an example, a previous systematic review found that the perpetration rates oscillated between 8.1% and 93.7% (Caridade et al., 2019b). This constraint can also be found in results regarding sex/gender differences since some studies have reported no evidence of sex/gender differences in victimization (Borrajo, Gámez-Guadix, Pereda, & Calvete, 2015c; Hancock, Keast, & Ellis, 2017; Smith et al., 2018; Smith-Darden, Kern-smith, Victor, & Lathrop, 2017; Wright et al., 2015; Wolford-Clevenger et al., 2016), while other studies have reported greater victimization of feminine sex/gender (Dick et al., 2014; Felmlee & Faris, 2016; Hellevik & Øverlien, 2016; Semenza et al., 2019; Yahner et al., 2015; Zweig et al., 2013, 2014) or greater victimization of the masculine sex/gender (Bennett, Guran, Ramos, & Margolin, 2011; Cutbush, Williams, Miller, Gibbs, & Clinton-Sherrod, 2018; Durán & Martínez-Pecino, 2015; Leisring & Giumetti, 2014; García-Sánchez, Guevara-Martínez, Rojas-Solís, Peña-Cárdenas, & González Cruz, 2017; Hinduja & Patchin, 2020b). Since the creation of quantitative self-reporting instruments is tied to the authors' adopted construct and associated behavioral dimensions, a possible explanation for this discrepancy in results could be provided by the instruments developed to measure this phenomenon (Brown & Hegarty, 2018).

Although numerous constructs have been created to define this phenomenon, cyber dating abuse (CDA) tends to be the most prevalent construct in scientific publications (Caridade et al., 2019b). CDA is defined as the "control, harassment, stalking and abuse of one's dating partner via technology and social media" (Zweig, Lachman, Yahner, & Dank, 2014) and originally compromised the behavioral dimensions of sexual cyber abuse (e.g., pressuring a partner to send sexual or naked photos) and nonsexual abuse (e.g., using a partner social networking account without permission) (Zweig et al., 2013). With the development of a quantitative instrument (*Cyber Dating Abuse Questionnaire* - CDAQ), Borrajo et al. (2015c) proposed the behavioral dimensions of direct aggression (e.g., writing a comment on a social network to insult or humiliate a partner) and monitoring/control (e.g., controlling a partner status updates on social networks). Digital dating abuse is another example of a construct developed to define this phenomenon. DDA is defined as "a pattern of behaviors that control, pressure, or threaten a dating partner using a cell phone or the Internet" (Futures Without Violence, 2009; Reed et al., 2016) and considers the behavioral dimensions of digital sexual coercion (e.g., pressuring a partner to sext), digital direct aggression (e.g., sending threatening messages to a partner) and digital monitoring/control (e.g., monitoring the whereabouts and activities of a partner) (Reed, Tolman, & Ward, 2017). Considering the definitions of CDA and DDA, and according to Reed et al.'s (2016) conceptualization of intimate abuse through technology, this phenomenon can be characterized as a triadic phenomenon composed of the following elements: i) a digital element (e.g., encompassing all possible means of digital communication); ii) a dating element (e.g., the behaviors occur in a current or former intimate relationship); and iii) an abusive element (e.g., the existence of behavioral patterns that harm an intimate partner) (Reed et al., 2016). Even though the definitions of CDA and DDA are similar and both constructs analyze the behavioral multidimensionality of this phenomenon, it is possible to identify one conceptual difference in the behavioral dimensions; namely, Borrajo et al. (2015c) multidimensional behavioral set does not consider a dimension related to behaviors of intimate sexual abuse through technology.

Following previous studies' recommendations related to the pertinence of adopting or creating a homogeneous construct to analyze this phenomenon, with this systematic review, we aim to contribute to the solidification of the theoretical knowledge related to intimate abuse through technology. As such, we aim to i) identify and analyze the multiple constructs created to define the phenomenon of intimate abuse through technology and ii) identify and analyze the behavioral dimensions associated with these constructs. Although several reviews were published in the last couple of years, those reviews considered

different objectives, such as describing and reviewing the instruments created to measure intimate abuse through technology (Brown & Hegarty, 2018), analyzing prevalence rates, instruments and risk factors (Calvalcanti & Coutinho, 2019), identifying quantitative study findings and methodological characteristics (Caridade et al., 2019b), analyzing results related to the victimization of individuals of feminine sex/gender (Fernet et al., 2019) and identifying how the literature defined the phenomenon (Flach & Deslandes, 2017). Although the objective of the last cited article resembles our first objective, the authors only focused on summarizing the definitions of the identified constructs.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Search strategies

As search strategy, we outlined combinations of keywords based on pre-established keywords (Table 1). These pre-established keywords are related to the three elements that constitute intimate abuse through technology. The primary keywords are associated with the digital element, the secondary with the dating element and the tertiary with the abusive element.

By combining the pre-established keywords, we obtained a total of 24 combinations of research keywords (e.g., cyber dating abuse, digital intimate aggression, technology intimate violence, digital dating victimization). The bibliographical searches were carried out in three electronic databases (PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science). During the full-text assessment for eligibility, we also reviewed the reference lists of the selected articles to identify additional studies that were not identified during our bibliographical search.

The main search was conducted between January and March 2020. By establishing virtual notifications, we were able to include publications published between April 2020 and February 2021. During March 2021, we realized an additional search with combinations of research keywords related to "technology".

### 2.2. Eligibility criteria

For this review, we considered the following eligibility criteria: i) research publications that adopt constructs strictly related to the phenomenon of abuse through technology in intimate relationships (e.g., dating partners); and ii) publications in English, Spanish and Portuguese. The first criterion is directly tied to the fact that some publications analyze this phenomenon through constructs related to abuse through technology in nonintimate relationships (e.g., cyber aggression, cyber violence). As exclusion criteria, we did not consider studies that i) focused on the phenomenon of abuse through technology in nonintimate relationships (e.g., between friends) or ii) research publications focused on single behavioral dimensions of abuse through technology in intimate relationships (e.g., digital coercive control, sexting coercion). The second exclusion criterion is related to the fact that some publications only analyze single behavioral dimensions. Since intimate through technology is conceptualized as multidimensional, we only included studies that explored this phenomenon's behavioral multidimensionality.

**Table 1**
Pre-established keywords for the bibliographical search.

| Primary keywords | Secondary keywords | Tertiary keywords |
|---|---|---|
| cyber | dating | abuse |
| Digital | intimate | aggression |
| technology | | victimization |
| | | violence |

## 2.3. Data extraction

From the database search, we identified a total of 1482 articles. Through reference checking, we identified 41 additional publications. Between April 2020 and February 2021, we also identified 32 newly published articles. After removing the duplicated articles (n = 1071), we started the screening process, analyzing the titles and abstracts of the articles (n = 484). In this step, we excluded 255 articles that did not meet our eligibility criteria, mainly because those articles were related to different phenomena. During the full-text assessment (n = 229), we also excluded 103 articles that did not meet our eligibility criteria because they analyzed single behavioral dimensions of intimate abuse through technology. After this step, we retained and included 126 publications in our review (Table 2).

To analyze our data, we used the software ATLAS. ti. Selected studies were coded according to the following characteristics: i) reference information (authors, date of publication); ii) publication language; iii) the construct used to analyze the phenomenon of intimate abuse through technology; iv) the definition of the construct; and v) the behavioral dimensions included in the construct.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Scientific constructs

From our review, we were able to identify 42 scientific constructs to analyze and define the phenomenon of intimate abuse through technology (Table 3).

Analyzing our results, it was possible to verify that the constructs of cyber dating abuse (CDA) (n = 43), digital dating abuse (DDA) (n = 15), technology-assisted adolescent dating violence and abuse (TAADVA) (n = 6), cyber dating violence (CDV) (n = 6), cyber intimate partner victimization (CIPV) (n = 4) and ciber-violencia de pareja (CVP) (n = 4) tend to be the most prevalent in scientific publications. The remaining 36 constructs have a considerably lower prevalence, oscillating between one publication and three publications. This result leads us to conclude that despite the high number of identified constructs, the scientific literature tends to adopt predominantly the constructs of CDA and DDA.

Considering the 42 constructs, only 21 constructs provided a definition to contextualize the construct (Table 4). By analyzing the definitions of the constructs, we identified a factor related to the construct definition that qualitatively distinguished them. As such, we observed that the definitions of the constructs could be distinguished with the following criteria: 1) constructs with an original definition; 2) constructs that translated an original definition; 3) constructs that based their

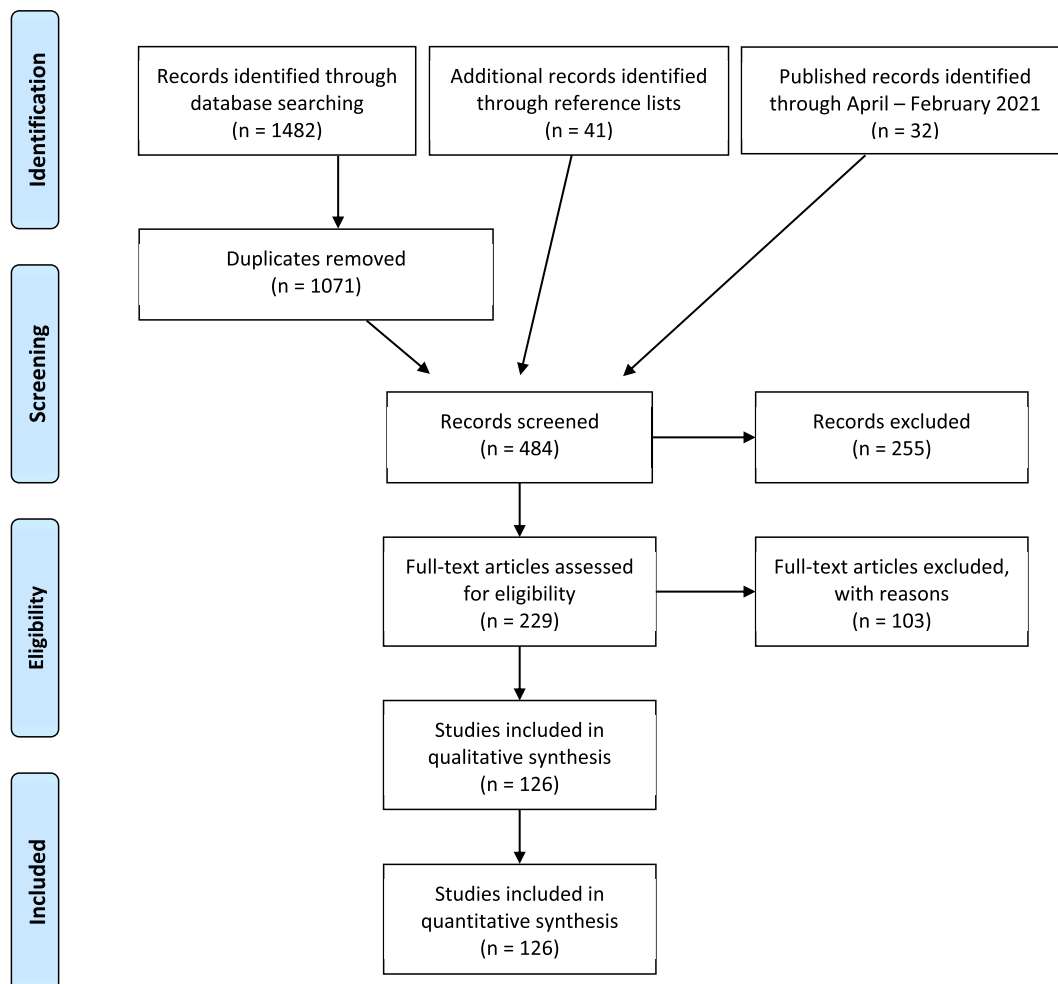**Table 2**
Process of data extraction.

**Table 3**

Constructs related to intimate abuse through technology.

| Construct | Prevalence | Construct | Prevalence |
|---|---|---|---|
| Abuso digital nos relacionamentos amorosos | N = 2 | Cyber intimate partner aggression | N = 2 |
| Abuso íntimo cibernético | N = 1 | Cyber intimate partner violence | N = 1 |
| Abuso online en el noviazgo | N = 2 | Digital dating abuse | N = 15 |
| Cyber intimate partner aggression victimization | N = 1 | Digital intimate partner abuse | N = 1 |
| Cyber-based dating aggression | N = 1 | Digital intimate partner violence | N = 1 |
| Cyber dating abuse | N = 43 | Digital intimate partner violence and abuse | N = 1 |
| Cyber dating aggression | N = 1 | Digitally perpetrated cyber abuse | N = 1 |
| Cyber dating abuse victimization | N = 1 | Electronic adolescent dating aggression | N = 1 |
| Cyber dating violence | N = 6 | Electronic dating aggression | N = 3 |
| Ciberagresión en parejas adolescentes | N = 1 | Electronic dating violence | N = 1 |
| Cyber intimate partner victimization | N = 4 | Electronic teen dating violence | N = 1 |
| Computer-mediated communication based teen dating violence | N = 1 | Intimate partner cyber aggression | N = 1 |
| Cyber partner abuse | N = 3 | Online dating violence | N = 3 |
| Cyber psychological abuse | N = 1 | Online partner abuse | N = 1 |
| Cyber psychological aggression | N = 1 | Partner-directed cyber aggression | N = 1 |
| Ciber-violencia en el noviazgo | N = 1 | Socially interactive technology dating abuse | N = 1 |
| Ciber-violencia de pareja | N = 4 | Technology-facilitated abuse in relationships | N = 1 |
| Technology-facilitated domestic abuse | N = 1 | Technology-assisted adolescent dating violence and abuse | N = 6 |
| Technology-facilitated domestic and sexual violence | N = 1 | Technology-based intimate partner violence | N = 1 |
| Technology-facilitated intimate partner abuse | N = 1 | Technological intimate partner violence | N = 1 |
| Technology-mediated intimate partner violence | N = 1 | Violencia de pareja online | N = 3 |

**Table 4**

Constructs definitions.

| Construct | Definition |
|---|---|
| Abuso digital nos relacionamentos amorosos | Portuguese adaptation of Zweig et al. (2014) CDA construct (Cavalcanti & Coutinho, 2019) |
| Abuso íntimo cibernético | Portuguese adaptation of Zweig et al. (2014) CDA construct (Caridade & Braga, 2019a) |
| Abuso online en el noviazgo | Spanish adaptation of Zweig et al. (2014) CDA construct (Víllora et al., 2019a) |
| Cyber intimate partner aggression victimization | "use of socially interactive Technologies such as mobile phone text messaging and Internet-facilitated social networking (e.g., Facebook) by one individual to engage in controlling or harassing behavior against another" (Melander & Marganski, 2020) |
| Cyber-based dating aggression | "aggression through communication technology within a dating relationship" (Attewell, 2013) |
| Cyber dating abuse | "the control, harassment, stalking, and abuse of one's dating partner via technology and social media (Zweig et al., 2014) |
| Cyber dating abuse victimization | Definition based on the CDA definition (Lu, Van Ouytsel, Walrave, Ponnet, & Temple, 2018) |
| Cyber dating violence | Construct with multiple definitions (Cava et al., 2020a, 2020b; Smith et al., 2018; Stonard, 2020b) |
| Cyber intimate partner victimization | "the use of technological devices (e.g., cellphones, hidden cameras or remote web cameras), online resources (e.g., online social networks, blogs, video sharing websites), software (e.g., emails, geolocation functions) to exert control or surveillance, to humiliate or to isolate a current or a former partner (Fernet et al., 2019) |
| Cyber partner abuse | Definition based on the CDA definition (Stephenson, Wickham, & Capezza, 2018) |
| Cyber psychological aggression | "using technology, such as cell phones, social media, and the internet to harass, embarrass, threaten, monitor, or humiliate another individual (Zapor et al., 2017) |
| Construct | Definition |
| Ciber-violencia de pareja | Spanish construct with multiple definitions based on the CDA definition (Cardenas et al., 2018; Espinobarros et al., 2018; García-Sánchez et al., 2017; Romo-Tobón, Vázquez-Sánchez, Rojas-Solís, & Alvídrez, 2020) |
| Cyber intimate partner aggression | "the use of technology (e.g., phones, email, social media) to perpetrate acts of aggression toward an intimate partner, including threatening or causing physical or emotional harm to intimate partners or controlling partners' behaviors" (Watkins et al., 2018, 2020) |
| Digital dating abuse | "a repeated pattern of digital media use to threaten, harass, pressure, monitor, control, or coerce a dating partner (Reed, Cosgrove, Sharkey, & Felix, 2020; Futures Without Violence, 2009) |
| Digital intimate partner abuse | Definition based on the DDA definition (Weathers & Hopson, 2015) |
| Electronic dating aggression | "psychological and/or sexual abuse perpetrated utilizing electronic devices that may be exercised through electronic means including email, social networking and/or texting" (Thulin, Heinze, Kernsmith, Smith-Darden, & Fleming, 2020) |
| Electronic teen dating violence | Definition based on the CDA definition (Cutbush et al., 2018) |
| Online dating violence | Definition based on the CDA definition (Morelli, Bianchi, Baiocco, Pezzuti, & Chirumbolo, 2016; Semenza, 2019; Stephenson et al., 2018) |
| Online partner abuse | Definition based on the CDA and DDA definition (Gámex-Guadiz et al., 2018) |
| Socially interactive technology dating abuse | "using any form of socially interactive technology to threaten, stalk, demean, or |

definitions on other construct definitions. Regarding the first criterion, we identified 10 constructs that provided an original definition. For the second criterion, we verified that the definitions of five constructs were a direct translation of the formal CDA definition (Zweig et al., 2014) to the Portuguese and Spanish language. For the third criterion, we identified six constructs whose definitions were based on the definitions of other constructs. For example, the definitions of cyber dating abuse victimization, cyber partner abuse, electronic teen dating violence and online dating violence were based on the CDA definition. The remaining 21 constructs did not provide any kind of definition for the adopted constructs.

Despite the high prevalence of publications that adopted the construct of CDA (n = 43), only 15 articles followed the formal definition proposed by Zweig et al. (2014) (Backe, Lilleston, & McCleary-Sills, 2018; Branson et al., 2021; Caridade et al., 2019b; Caridade et al., 2020a; Caridade & Braga, 2020b; Doucette et al., 2018; Hancock et al., 2017; Lara, 2020; Morelli, Bianchi, Chirumbolo, & Baíocco, 2017; Ouytsel et al., 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2017a, 2017b; Temple et al., 2016; Víllora et al., 2019b). Considering the remaining articles, 11 articles resorted to different definitions to define CDA (Brem, Stuart, Cornelius, & Shorey, 2019; Cavalcanti et al., 2020a, 2020b; Deans & Bhogal, 2017; Dick et al., 2014; Lancaster, Seibert, Cooper, May, & Fincham, 2019; Miller et al., 2015; Miller & McCauley, 2013; Murray et al., 2019; Peskin

**Table 4** (*continued*)

| Construct | Definition |
| --- | --- |
| Technology-assisted adolescent dating violence and abuse | control one's dating partner" (Lucero, Weisz, Smith-Darden, & Lucero, 2014)<br>"abusive behavior perpetrated by an intimate partner that is instigated electronically such as repeated texting or posting sexual pictures of a partner online and may occur between a current or former dating partner (Stonard, 2020a) |

et al., 2017; Toplu-Demirtas, Akcabozan-Kayabol, Araci-Lyiaydin, & Fincham, 2020), nine. Articles defined CDA through examples of behavioral dimensions or specific behaviors (Brem et al., 2019b; Borrajo et al., 2015a, 2015b; Duerksen & Woodin, 2019a; Flach & Deslandes, 2019; Machimbarrena et al., 2018; Miller, Jones, & McCauley, 2018; Murray et al., 2015; Ouytsel et al., 2016d) and eight articles did not provide any kind of definition (Curry & Zavala, 2020; Dank, Lachman, Zweig, & Yahner, 2014; Fernández-González, Calvete, & Sánchez-Álvarez, 2020; Flach & Deslandes, 2017; Mosley & Lancaster, 2019; Víllora et al., 2019c; Víllora, Yubero, & Navarro, 2020; Zweig et al., 2013).

Even though the CDA definition is well established, the vast majority of articles that adopted the CDA construct did not resort to the construct original definition to define this phenomenon. In comparison, the DDA construct tends to be more consistent between publications. In 15 published articles, eight articles followed the definition proposed by Reed et al. (2016) (Brown & Hegarty, 2018; Henry, Flynn, & Powell, 2020; Hinduja & Patchin, 2020a, 2020b; Reed et al., 2017, 2020b, 2021; Reed et al., 2020a). Only three articles adopted different definitions to define DDA (Bhogal, Rhead, & Tudor, 2019; Brown, Flood, & Hegarty, 2020; Weathers, Canzona, & Fisher, 2019), and three articles adopted behavioral examples to explain the construct (Brown et al., 2020; Roy et al., 2016, 2018, pp. 284–293). Although there is a considerable prevalence gap between publications that adopt the CDA construct and the DDA construct, we consider relevant to analyze how the literature defines these constructs to better understand the existing theoretical divergences that characterize this research field.

*3.2. Behavioral dimensions*

Analyzing our results, we verified that among the 42 identified constructs, only 26 constructs resorted to behavioral dimensions to analyze this phenomenon (Table 5). Since these 26 constructs resorted to multiple behavioral dimensions to analyze this phenomenon (e.g., the construct of DDA resorts to three behavioral dimensions), it could be said that the identified behavioral dimensions can be grouped into 20 multidimensional behavioral sets according to the respecting construct. The discrepancy between the number of constructs (n = 26) and the number of multidimensional behavioral sets (n = 20) can be explained by that fact that the constructs of CDA and cyber intimate partner violence adopted multiple different sets of behavioral dimensions (Table 5). For example, we identified four different multidimensional behavioral sets for the construct of cyber dating abuse: 1) cyber psychological control or monitoring, cyber harassment and cyber psychological and verbal aggression (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2018); 2) direct aggression and control/monitoring (Borrajo et al., 2015c); 3) psychological violence and relational violence (Morelli et al., 2017; Toplu-Demirtas et al., 2020); and 4) sexual cyber abuse and nonsexual cyber abuse (Zweig et al., 2013).

Additionally, several constructs (n = 10) adopted multidimensional sets of behavioral dimensions that were initially exclusive to other constructs. As an example, eight constructs adopted Borrajo et al.'s (2015c) behavioral dimensions of CDA (e.g., direct aggression and control/monitoring). Except for two publications (Pineda et al., 2021; Taylor & Xia, 2018), this result seems to be tied to the translation and adaptation of Borrajo et al.'s (2015c) "*Cyber Dating Abuse Questionnaire -*

**Table 5**
Constructs and associated behavioral dimensions.

| Constructs | Behavioral dimensions |
| --- | --- |
| Abuso digital nos relacionamentos amorosos | Resorts to CDAQ factors (Cavalcanti, Coutinho, & Pinto, 2020) |
| Abuso íntimo cibernético | Resorts to CDAQ factors (Caridade & Braga, 2019a) |
| Abuso online en el noviazgo | Resorts to CDAQ factors (Borrajo & Gámez-Guadix, 2016; Víllora et al., 2019a) |
| Cyber-based dating aggression | Emotional/verbal aggression, domineering/controlling behaviors, monitoring, relational aggression and stalking (Piitz & Fritz, 2009) |
| Cyber dating abuse | Cyber psychological control or monitor, cyber harassment and cyber psychological and verbal aggression (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2018)<br>Direct aggression and control/monitoring (Borrajo et al., 2015c)<br>Psychological violence and relational violence (Morelli et al., 2017; Toplu-Demirtas et al., 2020)<br>Sexual cyber abuse and non-sexual cyber abuse (Zweig et al., 2013) |
| Cyber dating violence | Cyber-control and cyber-aggression (adapted from the CDAQ factors) (Cava et al., 2020) |
| Ciberagresión en parejas adolescentes | Spanish behavioral typologies of "ciberacecho, intrusion en línea y los celos en línea (Jiménez, Muñoz-Fernández, López, & Ortega-Ruíz, 2017) |
| Cyber intimate partner victimization | Resorts to CARS (Cantu & Charak, 2020; Charak, Villarreal, Schmitz, Hirai, & Ford, 2019; Trujillo, Cantu, & Charak, 2020)<br>Direct cyber IPV and indirect cyber IPV (Fernet et al., 2019) |
| Cyber intimate partner violence | Resorts to CDAQ factors (Pineda, Galán, Martínez-Martínez, Campagne, & Piquera, 2021) |
| Cyber partner abuse | Resorts to CDAQ factors (Taylor & Xia, 2018) |
| Cyber psychological aggression | Severe cyber abuse and minor cyber abuse (Zapor et al., 2017) |
| Constructs | Behavioral dimensions |
| Ciber-violencia em el noviziago | Resorts to CDAQ factors (Cárdenas & Rojas-Solís, 2017; García-Sánchez et al., 2017; Muñoz-Ponce & Rojas-Solís, 2018; Romo-Tobón et al., 2019) |
| Cyber intimate partner aggression | Cyber psychological IPA, cyber stalking IPA and cyber sexual IPA (Watkins et al., 2018) |
| Digital dating abuse | Digital sexual coercion, digital direct aggression and digital monitoring/control (Reed et al., 2017) |
| Digital intimate partner violence | Control-centered cyberabuse and damage-centered cyberabuse |
| Digital intimate partner violence and abuse | Harassment, control, monitoring and sexual coercion (Hellevik, 2019) |
| Electronic dating aggression | Cyberstalking, harassment and coercive sexting (Smith-Darden et al., 2017) |
| Intimate partner cyber aggression | Indirect aggression, relational aggression and social aggression (Marganski & Melander, 2018) |
| Online dating violence | Resorts to CDAQ factors (Gracia-Leiva, Puente-Martínez, Ubillos-Landa, González-Castro, & Páez-Rovira, 2020) |
| Online partner abuse | Psychological control, harassment, psychological and verbal aggression (Gámex-Guadiz et al., 2018) |
| Partner-directed cyber aggression | Cyber relational aggression and privacy invasion (Wright, 2015) |
| Technological intimate partner violence | Resorts to CARS factors (Duerksen & Woodin, 2019b) |
| Technology-facilitated abuse in relationships | Humiliation, monitoring & control, sexual coercion and threats (Brown & Hegarty, 2021) |
| Technology-Facilitated domestic abuse | Establishing omnipresence, overt omnipresence, covert omnipresence and retributive omnipresence (Yardley, 2020) |
| Technology-facilitated intimate partner abuse | Overt surveillance, covert surveillance, physical restrictions to devices and threats, harassment and abuse (Leitão, 2019) |
| Violencia de pareja online | Resorts to CDAQ factors (Rivas & Gimeno, 2017; Cava & Buelga, 2017; Rivas, Roldan, Gimeno, & Díaz, 2015) |

*CDAQ*" instrument to the Portuguese and Spanish languages. The constructs of cyber intimate partner violence and technological intimate partner violence also adopted Watkins et al.'s (2018) behavioral dimensions of cyber intimate partner aggression (e.g., cyber psychological IPA, cyber stalking IPA and cyber sexual IPA) by the application of the

instrument "*Cyber Aggression in Relationships Scale - CARS*".

From our analysis, we were also able to identify one possible constraint related to the CDA behavioral dimensions, namely, the theoretical divergence related to which dimensions should be considered when evaluating this phenomenon (Table 6). Regarding the proposed behavioral dimensions of CDA, 11 publications adopted the dimensions of Borrajo et al. (2015c) via the application of the CDAQ instrument, three publications adopted Zweig et al.'s (2013) behavioral dimensions. However, 22 publications adopted undefined behavioral dimensions and five publications resorted to behavioral dimensions that were initially developed for other constructs.

We also identified one qualitative difference between the multidimensional behavioral sets and one difference between the behavioral dimensions by analyzing our results. The first difference is related to the consideration of a sexual component. Considering the 20 multidimensional behavioral sets, only six evaluated a sexual dimension. The remaining sets only considered behavioral dimensions that aggregated behaviors of aggression (e.g., cyber aggression, harassment) and behaviors of control and monitorization (e.g., cyberstalking, privacy invasion). As such, our data suggest that the multidimensional behavioral sets of cyber intimate partner aggression, DDA, digital intimate partner abuse, electronic dating aggression, technology-facilitated abuse in relationships and Zweig et al.'s (2013) CDA dimensions could be categorized as the most inclusive because they examine a sexual dimension. The second difference concerns the behavioral dimensions terminologies. As an example, we identified 12 different terminologies to refer to behaviors of control and monitorization (e.g., cyber psychological control, cyber stalking IPA, privacy invasion). Despite those terminological differences, the analysis of the instruments allowed us to understand that those 12-dimensional terminologies refer to the same core behaviors. This result was also mirrored regarding the terminologies to refer to behaviors of aggression.

## 4. Discussion

In the present systematic review, we identified 42 constructs and 20 multidimensional behavioral sets related to intimate abuse through technology. Only 21 constructs provided some form of definition to contextualize the construct, and only 10 constructs had an original

**Table 6**
Behavioral dimensions analyzed in publications that resort to the CDA construct.

| Behavioral dimensions | Publications |
|---|---|
| Direct aggression and control/monitoring (Borrajo et al., 2015c) | Branson & March 2021; Borrajo et al., 2015b; Caridade & Braga, 2019a; Caridade, Sousa, & Dinis, 2020b; Cavalcanti, Coutinho, Nascimento, & Pinto, 2020; Cavalcanti, Coutinho, & Pinto, 2020; Lara, 2020; Pineda et al., 2021; Víllora et al., 2019b; Víllora et al., 2019c; Víllora et al., 2020 |
| Sexual cyber abuse and nonsexual cyber abuse (Zweig et al., 2013) | Dick et al., 2014; Ouytsel, Walrave, et al., 2016; Zweig et al., 2014 |
| Undefined behavioral dimensions | Borrajo et al., 2015a; Brem, Stuart, et al., 2019; Brem et al., 2019b; Curry & Zavala, 2020; Dank et al., 2013; Deans & Bhogal, 2017; Doucette et al., 2018; Duerksen & Woodin, 2019a; Fernández-González et al., 2020; Hancock et al., 2017; Lancaster et al., 2019; Machimbarrena et al., 2018; Miller & McCauley, 2013; Miller et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2018; Mosley & Lancaster, 2019; Murray et al., 2015; Ouytsel, Walrave, Ponnet, & Heirman, 2015; Ouytsel, Ponnet, et al., 2016; Ouytsel, Ponnet, & Walrave, 2016; Peskin et al., 2017; Temple et al., 2016 |
| Behavioral dimensions developed by other constructs | Gámez-Guadix et al., 2018; Flach & Deslandes, 2017; Morelli, Bianchi, Chirumbolo, & Baiocco, 2018; Ouytsel, Ponnet, & Walrave, 2017; Toplu-Demirtas et al., 2020 |

formal definition created by the authors that conceptualized the construct. Comparing our results with previous reviews (Brown & Hegarty, 2018; Caridade et al., 2019b; Fernet et al., 2019; Flach & Deslandes, 2017; Gámez-Guadix et al., 2018), we identified a more significant number of constructs. Previous results ranged from 11 constructs (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2018) to 30 constructs (Fernet et al., 2019). This result could be explained by our inclusion and exclusion criteria and by our objectives since we only aimed to analyze how the scientific literature defines this phenomenon. Additionally, we included constructs in Latin languages (e.g., Portuguese and Spanish languages). Nevertheless, by comparing our results with the results of previous reviews, we detected some terminological constraints related to the enunciation of the constructs. For example, the construct of computer-mediated communication based teen dating violence was enunciated differently in three reviews (Brown & Hegarty, 2018; Caridade et al., 2019b; Taylor & Xia, 2019).

By analyzing the definition of the constructs and taking into account Reed et al.'s (2016) conceptualization of intimate abuse through technology, we verified that most defined constructs consider a digital element, a dating element and an abusive element. Only two defined constructs did not specifically mention the dating element (e.g., cyber intimate partner aggression victimization and cyber psychological aggression). The remaining 22 constructs did not provide any kind of definition.

Regarding the behavioral dimensions, we concluded that the behavioral dimensions of cyber intimate partner aggression, DDA, digital intimate partner and abuse, electronic dating aggression, technology-facilitated abuse in relationships and Zweig et al.'s (2013) conceptualization of CDA could be considered as the most inclusive for analyzing this phenomenon because they consider a sexual behavioral dimension. Even though these constructs developed different terminologies for their behavioral dimensions, examining the associated quantitative measures allowed us to verify that they refer to the same core behaviors. Despite these similarities, we verified a possible constraint related to measuring the sexual dimension of intimate abuse through technology. For example, the CARS instrument has four items associated with the measurement of sexual cyber aggression, and the Reed et al. (2016) instrument has four items related to the measurement of digital sexual coercion. By comparing these two subscales, it is possible to understand that even though both scales measure a sexual component, they each measure a different sexual dimension since one focuses on sexual aggression and the other on sexual coercion. Thus, it is essential to consider how these behavioral dimensions are being measured in order to achieve a holistic understanding of this phenomenon.

During the analysis of the behavioral dimensions, we also observed a tendency to follow the CDA behavioral dimensions of direct aggression and control/monitoring. Previous publications that adopted Borrajo et al.'s (2015c) multidimensional model mentioned that the CDA construct could be considered the most inclusive construct (Borrajo et al., 2015c; Caridade et al., 2019b; Lara, 2020; Stephenson et al., 2018). A previous review also recommended adopting those two dimensions via the application of the CDAQ instrument (Taylor & Xia, 2018). Considering our results, we challenge the idea that the current behavioral dimensions of CDA can be regarded as the most inclusive for analyzing and measuring intimate abuse through technology. Initially, it was proposed that the CDA construct encompassed the behavioral dimensions of sexual cyber abuse and nonsexual cyber abuse (Zweig et al., 2013, 2014). With the creation of the CDAQ instrument, the authors adopted direct aggression and monitoring/control as dimensions (Borrajo et al., 2015c). Despite being able to equate the dimension of monitoring/control with the dimension of nonsexual cyber abuse, this reformulation does not consider the sexual dimension of intimate abuse through technology. Characterizing this model as the most inclusive could raise some questions related to the holistic measurement of this phenomenon since this model theoretically disregards the existence of a sexual behavioral dimension. Even though the CDAQ has been adapted

to three countries (Cavalcanti, Coutinho, Nascimento, & Pinto, 2020; Caridade & Braga, 2019a, 2019b; Lara, 2020) and a considerable number of publications have adopted this instrument, it is essential to acknowledge that these studies include no empirical evidence related to the prevalence of behaviors associated with a sexual dimension. Thus, it is necessary to question whether the CDA can be considered a reliable instrument to measure the prevalence of intimate abuse through technology or if it should only be applied to analyze the prevalence of the behavioral dimensions of direct aggression and monitoring/control. Considering the constraint on comparing prevalence rates for intimate abuse through technology, the measurement of this phenomenon with noninclusive behavioral dimensions could be regarded as one of the main factors contributing to such constraint. We recommend that future quantitative studies consider the importance of adopting inclusive behavioral dimensions in the development of instruments. Considering that only five constructs adopted inclusive behavioral dimensions, it is important to understand whether we are measuring this phenomenon as a whole or if we are only measuring specific dimensions that constitute the phenomenon.

We also detected a possible conceptual constraint related to the conceptualization of the behavioral dimensions that aggregate behaviors of control and behaviors of monitoring. In a qualitative study with 14 teenagers, the author verified that participants characterized monitorization and control as different behaviors (Hellevik, 2019). Control was characterized by the adoption of behaviors to prevent the victim from socializing with specific individuals or posting specific content on social networking sites. Monitorization was characterized by the adoption of behaviors to surveil the victim's whereabouts, routines and interpersonal digital interactions (Hellevik, 2019). Considering those participants' experiences, we reiterate the importance of conducting qualitative studies to understand whether the behaviors of monitorization and control should be aggregated into a single behavioral dimension or if they should be considered two distinct dimensions with their specific characteristics.

Even though this research field is relatively recent, we consider there to be enough theoretical evidence to prevent the proliferation of new constructs. Considering the 42 identified constructs, our analysis suggests that the construct of digital dating abuse and Zweig et al.'s (2013) initial formulation of cyber dating abuse could be considered the most inclusive. These constructs are characterized as the most inclusive because they provide formal definitions and analyze full-spectrum behavioral dimensions. Nonetheless, since Borrajo et al.'s (2015c) conceptualization of CDA tends to be the most prevalent in the scientific literature, we recommend that future studies should consider resorting to the construct of DDA to analyze this phenomenon. Despite our recommendation, and although we characterized these constructs as the most inclusive, it is also important to acknowledge that these constructs also present some limitations. The first limitation is related to the apparent trend of analyzing these behaviors in dating relationships, neglecting other intimate and romantic relationship configurations. For example, two studies removed participants who cohabited with their intimate partner (Duerksen & Woodin, 2019a, 2019b; Lara, 2020), one study excluded participants who were married (Toplu-Demirtas et al., 2020) and another study excluded individuals in long-distance relationships (Duerksen & Woodin, 2019a, 2019b). Considering the previous study, the authors mentioned that the decision to exclude those participants was related to the fact that cohabiting with an intimate partner or having a long-distance dating relationship could influence the amount of technology used to communicate (Duerksen & Woodin, 2019a, 2019b). Following this rationale, we question these methodological choices, especially those related to long-distance relationships, since those relationships can only be maintained through the frequent use of technological means. We suggest that future studies avoid excluding participants in such configurations of intimate relationships because, until this point, most research tends to be focused on dating relationships. The second limitation relates to the apparent trend of

analyzing this phenomenon in adolescents' and young adults' samples. A previous review also mentioned that few studies examine this phenomenon with adults' samples (Henry et al., 2019). Analyzing the participants' sociodemographic data in the CDA and DDA studies included in our review, we observed a trend to study this phenomenon with such samples. However, we identified seven studies that included participants who were considerably older than adolescents and young adults. As an example, one recent study of CDA included a participant 73 years old (Branson & March 2021). We suggest that future studies avoid framing this phenomenon in specific age groups because such framing could contribute to this phenomenon being unreported in different age groups. The consideration of different configurations of intimate relationships and the inclusion of participants from diverse age groups could contribute to solving the main theoretical constraints associated with this phenomenon.

## 5. Limitations

As for this study's limitations, our delineated objectives could be considered a limitation since we only aimed to identify the constructs and the behavioral dimensions related to intimate abuse through technology and did not analyze the selected study findings.

With regard to our discussion on the importance of analyzing this phenomenon under multiple configurations of intimate relationships, we would like to address that our choice of secondary keywords ("dating" and "intimate") can be thought of as a limitation since some studies could have gone undetected. Future reviews should consider resorting to different keywords to capture more diverse configurations of intimate relationships.

Third, the substantial number of articles that we identified through reference checking could also be considered a limitation. Since we did not delineate keywords in Latin languages, most identified articles were Spanish and Portuguese. The non-establishment of predefined keywords in Latin languages and the inclusion of studies in Latin languages could be considered a shortcoming of this study.

The non-inclusion of umbrella constructs (e.g., cyber aggression, cyber-violence) could also be considered a limitation. Nevertheless, since no theoretical consensus has been reached on defining and analyzing this phenomenon, we opted to focus our research on constructs exclusively related to this phenomenon.

Finally, the review process (e.g., article screening, eligibility selection) and data extraction were mainly conducted by the main author. This could be considered a limitation of our study because we did not adopt the double screening approach, which could help avoid the non-detection and inclusion of relevant articles. Although we consider the possibility that some relevant publications were not included in this review, we do not believe that those potential studies could have contributed to a substantial change in our findings. Additionally, since our main objectives consisted of identifying constructs and behavioral dimensions, we did not adopt any quality assessment criteria for the selected articles.

## 6. Conclusions

To achieve the goal of homogenizing this field of study, our results suggest that the constructs of digital dating abuse and Zweig et al.'s (2013) CDA formulation can be characterized as the most inclusive and holistic for analyzing this phenomenon since both take into account the existence of the three core elements of intimate abuse through technology: i) a digital element; ii) a dating element; and iii) an abusive element. Additionally, both provide robust formal definitions and adopt full-spectrum behavioral dimensions. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that both constructs also present some limitations, namely, the apparent trend of analyzing these behaviors in dating relationships with samples of adolescents' and young adults. To answer these limitations, we suggest that future studies consider the inclusion of participants in different

configurations of intimate relationships (e.g., cohabiting partners and married couples) and participants of more diverse age groups (e.g., adults and elderly individuals).

Since the CDA construct, at the present moment, tends to be associated with Borrajo et al.'s (2015) multidimensional behavioral model, we recommend that future studies consider resorting to the construct of DDA to analyze this phenomenon. Additionally, we consider that future studies should consider the adequacy of measuring this phenomenon by applying the CDAQ instrument. Despite being labeled by previous reviews as an inclusive and holistic instrument, we challenge this idea because this instrument does not contemplate a behavioral dimension related to a sexual dimension of intimate abuse through technology. Moving forward, we suggest that future studies should consider analyzing this phenomenon as a whole, adopting instruments that explore all the behavioral dimensions of this phenomenon. Thus far, empirical evidence has been obtained that suggests the existence of at least three behavioral dimensions: i) a control/monitoring dimension; ii) an aggression dimension; and iii) a sexual dimension. Considering these behavioral dimensions, multiple configurations of intimate relationships and the inclusion of participants of more diverse age groups could contribute to preventing the systematic constraint related to the difficulty in the comparison of results between studies, further solidifying this field of research.

## Authorship statement

Conceptualization: Rocha-Silva, T., Rodrigues, L. Data curation: Rocha-Silva, T. Formal analysis: Rocha-Silva, T. Funding acquisition: Non applicable. Investigation: Rocha-Silva, T. Methodology: Rocha-Silva, T., Rodrigues, L. Project administration: Rocha-Silva, T. Resources: Rocha-Silva, T. Software: Rocha-Silva, T. Supervision: Nogueira, C., Rodrigues, L. Validation: Rocha-Silva, T., Rodrigues, L. Visualization: Rocha-Silva, T. Roles/Writing - original draft: Rocha-Silva, T. Writing - review & editing: Rocha-Silva, T.

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