You Set Me Up: Gendered Perceptions of Twitter Communication Among Black Chicago Youth

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Abstract
We sought to identify the key dynamics in the relationship between social media and violence by identifying new mechanisms that elucidate how Internet banging becomes offline violence through the perceptions of the Black and Latino boys and men. We conducted 33 interviews with Black and Latino boys and men aged 14–24 who live in Chicago, have experience with gang violence, and are social media users. In our investigation of the use of social media by boys and young men to navigate neighborhood violence, we uncovered a recurring narrative about gender relationships in violence. Male participants often attributed escalations of violence to girls and young women, beginning with online communications that migrated to face-to-face meetings. They described girls and young women as the precipitators of violence through “set-up” meetings that began under the guise of romance, dating, and courtship. This study provides an in-depth examination of how males perceive girls and young women as unique threats to their personal safety, a narrative we must engage with in order to further current violence prevention efforts. Future research is needed to examine the lived experiences of young women, their experience with and exposure to social media-related gang violence, and their view of social media behaviors of men that may lead to violence.

Keywords
social media, youth violence, youth, qualitative methods, African Americans

Introduction
Social media and mobile technology have changed how individuals communicate and interact with one another. The Pew Research Center suggests that 24% of teens go online “almost constantly,” and 92% of teens report going online daily. African American youth aged 13–17 are most likely out of any teen group to have access to a smartphone, with 85% of them having access to one versus 71% of White and Hispanic youth. However, over the last several years, some have expressed concerns that social media is “broken and has poisoned how we communicate with each other (Newitz, 2019).” One particular area of concern is the impact social media has had on amplifying and facilitating gang violence.

In Chicago, law enforcement and community-based organizations have gone on record stating that they believe gangs are at the helm of a gun violence public health emergency and specifically think taunts and threats between rival groups on social media are contributing factors to the uptick in violence (University of Chicago Crime Lab, 2017). Firearm violence continues to be a serious public health problem in the United States, where the overall firearm death rate is 10 times higher than other high-income countries (Grinshteyn & Hemenway, 2016). Homicide is the leading cause of death for African American youth aged 10–24, and it is the second leading cause of death for Hispanic youth of this age group (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2016). For both African American and Hispanic youth, males are disproportionately victims, overwhelmingly as a result of firearm violence (CDC, 2016; Murphy et al., 2017). The
problems of firearm violence are particularly acute in cities like Chicago, which has seen a 58% increase in homicides (764 homicides) due to firearms in 2016 (University of Chicago Crime Lab, 2017). Traditional urban-based violence intervention and prevention efforts treat violence as an epidemic, whereby violent behavior transmits and spreads based on exposure through face-to-face interactions (Slutkin, 2012; Tracy et al., 2016). However, recent research indicates that victimization and perpetration of violence are exacerbated by the growth in social media usage and the formation of the “digital neighborhoods” (Lane, 2016; Moule et al., 2017; Patton et al., 2013; Stevens et al., 2016). Digital neighborhoods are the amalgamation of the networked social media platforms, where youth communicate, surveil, and hang out with peers. These digital neighborhoods operate as staging grounds were online and offline worlds interact and amplify each other. Youth living in violent neighborhoods are often exposed to and engage with aggressive and threatening content (e.g., text, video, images) in their digital neighborhood (Stevens et al., 2019). When this aggressive or threatening messaging online is a part of a larger interpersonal conflict between youth, online communication can escalate that conflict, leading to retaliation. This unique computer-mediated violence escalation is known as Internet banging (Patton et al., 2013). Research on Internet banging suggests young people living in neighborhoods with high rates of community violence may use social media to promote, anticipate, and dodge violent encounters in person, through locational possibilities—defining who goes where in public spaces (Patton et al., 2016b). Internet banging has also been described as a behavior perpetuated by boys and men, usually involving the crafting of alter-egos and posturing on social media (Patton et al., 2013). Researchers have begun to explore how online data can be used to help prevent gun violence. Pavlick and Callison-Burch (2016) created there the Gun Violence Database by crowdsourcing annotations on newspaper articles that report on gun violence. Researchers studying gun control issues analyzed social media for posts related to any issue around guns in the year following the Sandy Hook elementary school shooting (Benton et al., 2016) and argued that online media can be used to understand trends in gun violence and gun-related behaviors (Benton et al., 2016).

**Social Media + Threatening Communication**

Threatening communication on social media is one factor that facilitates intergroup violence. The theory of intertextuality (Ott & Walter, 2000) provides a frame for understanding threats between groups. For example, when an audience shares a common language, cultures, and norms those particular frames structure how communication is interpreted. In communities where the “code of the street” is maintained, “when gang-involved youth produce text challenging rival gangs and inviting a response, both the producer and interpreter of these texts understand that a response is needed to maintain respect” (Patton et al., 2016b, p. 206).

Recent research underscores the idea that social media, in some instances works more effectively than communicating threats face-to-face because it allows for broad, real-time communication that move faster and reach a larger audience. In addition, threats on social media do not always come in the form of text. Threatening communication may include mentions of offline events, people, local institutions, and situations that may inform how and why a post is perceived as threatening (Patton et al., 2016c). This means social media communication can potentially escalate negative communication between rival groups who may compete for reputation or territory or who struggle to let smaller arguments go. The composition of social media may enhance a user’s susceptibility to such messages (Myers, 2016), normalizing, and routinizing the use of threats and violence through volume and regularity. In addition to Internet banging, we are interested in how the role of social media in neighborhood violence ties into other kinds of neighborhood peer interactions that extend online. In this article, we focus on how mixed gendered dating relationships are also mediated online using social media. This study extends our understanding of the interplay between Internet banging and online dating behaviors.

**Gendered Behavior on Social Media**

While our understanding of how violence moves on social media continues to grow, we know little about the extent to which gender influences social media behavior. A feminist theoretical perspective suggests that relational power differs by gender, leading to different approaches to handling romantic relationships (Ismail et al., 2007). Even without social media, dating relationships among youth in communities with high rates of violence were fraught, as youth had to navigate finding partners from different neighborhoods, crews, and potentially gangs (Jones, 2009). Traditionally, girls and young women have operated as network bridges, moving between social networks in a way that their male counterparts could not because they were viewed as less threatening (Lane, 2018). However, this freedom also escalates the level of tension girls and young women experience.

The related work on digital dating and violence suggests that while mixed gender dating behaviors are enacted online in ways that mimic offline dating, they also differ from face-to-face interactions (Lucero et al., 2014). In communities with high levels of violence, girls and young women who have had to strategically navigate the risks of personal violence with males offline (Jones, 2009), must also navigate the added layer of complexity social media brings to these interactions. When girls and young women cross social networks or neighborhoods to date, communication is sometimes facilitated by social media (Lane, 2016). With social media, girls and young women gain increased control over their interactions in a way that is more difficult to manage in
person (Lane, 2018). However, communicating online is often accompanied by increased surveillance within the neighborhood and between peers as likes and messaging are often visible to one’s larger social network. Visible cross-network dating and communicating online can lead to boys to become suspicious about girls’ loyalties, and ultimately lead to them being viewed as a threat (Lane, 2018). As social media is used for finding partners and cross network dating, these networked digital spaces act as online staging ground for intergroup surveillance, and ultimately, may heighten the distrust of girls and young women.

In this study, we interviewed currently and formerly gang-involved Black and Latino boys and young men who participated in or affiliated with several violence prevention organizations in Chicago in 2014, at the time of the start of the recent growth in firearm homicide rate. The goal of this study was to explore communication on Twitter that may lead to various forms of violence to include firearm violence. During the execution of this study, a dominant narrative arose whereby young men centered girls and young women as a central cause of violence, which was in part, enacted on social media. While unexpected, we felt it important to investigate these perceptions, even in the absence of a parallel study of girls and young women. In order to engage in effective violence prevention efforts, be it gang-affiliated or interpersonal violence, it is necessary to investigate what youth perceive to be attributable causes, salient threats, and how they navigate these factors in their community.

Methods

Data for this study were collected from a qualitative project that explored Internet-mediated gang violence through in-depth interviews with current and former gang-involved boys and young men as well as violence outreach workers, for which findings culminated in the identification of the Internet banging phenomenon (Patton et al., 2016a). These data were collected throughout the 2014 calendar year. The data sources were in-depth interviews (n = 33) and responses to the presentation of 15 Twitter posts from a self-identified gang-involved Chicago youth on Twitter that had been identified prior to this study. The interview questions were designed to understand: (1) how often participants use social media and to identify the platforms they use; (2) to understand how they use social media (e.g., how do you want to come across in your social media profile); and (3) and to describe situations where social media communication led to a violent event. The Twitter vignettes were used to understand how participants respond and interpret Twitter post from Chicago youth.

Participants

A snowball sampling strategy was employed to recruit study participants. All study participants were affiliated with a local violence prevention organization in Chicago. Inclusion criteria included: Black and Latino males aged 14–24 who live in Chicago, have observed, witnessed, or been a perpetrator or victim of gang violence, and who, at the time of the study, were frequent social media users. With these parameters were sought to enroll our participant population. First, the director of the violence prevention outreach program, located on the Westside of Chicago was consulted and asked to identify at least five youth he thought would be a good fit for the study based on the inclusion criteria. The director of the violence prevention program at the YMCA was key to recruitment efforts, as he has relationships with young people who live throughout Chicago. The first individuals who initiated our snowball sample were male and they recommended friends and affiliates who were also male.

To broaden our connection with Chicago youth, we asked the YMCA executive director to connect us to three other violence prevention programs who work in neighborhoods with high rates of violence in Chicago. We continued to interview youth connected with violence prevention organizations throughout Chicago until we reached saturation (Daly, 2007) and stopped learning new information regarding how Black and Latino boys and young men perceive, categorize, and react to violence-oriented social media posts. Every target participant agreed to do an interview. We believe that this is due to the relationship participants had with the violence prevention organizations and friends who had already conducted an interview. Our final sample was composed of (13) Black and (20) Latino males. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect their privacy and anonymity. Only the first author, who conducted the study, has access to participant identifying information. As shown in Table 1, participants were between the ages of 15 and 24 and the mean age for participants was 17.

Procedure

This study received IRB approval from the University of Michigan where the first author was on faculty during the time of this research. For participants under 18, we secured assent and parental consent. We secured informed consent only from participants over 18. Participants completed a two-part, audiotaped, semi-structured interview. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 min and was conducted by the first author. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted in spaces participants deemed “safe” for both parties. These included private offices at a violence prevention organization or a local church. In the first part of the interview, participants were asked to describe their experiences with gang violence, their use of social media, and how social media and gang violence overlap. Participants were compensated with a US$50 gift card.

Data Analysis

This study utilized a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Interviews were coded using open, axial, and
The first phase of data analysis utilized open coding within a three-person research team to achieve analyst triangulation in reviewing how and why initial codes were applied. This method provides a check against selective perceptions and potential blind spots while doing interpretive analysis (Krefting, 1999). Meetings were held after coding two transcripts to further refine codes. After exploring the meaning and patterns within the data, we established the final coding scheme. In this stage of analysis, we developed codes such as “online conflict, and women.” Research assistants coded transcripts using Dedoose (2018) qualitative data software. The second phase involved axial coding, comparing interactions embedded within the initial open codes, while simultaneously comparing interactions to the larger concepts that emerged. For example, within the online conflict code, we looked for variation in how participants responded to tweets that were posted by women. We looked for specific conditions or factors that shaped why participants perceived a tweet to be related to or connected to a young woman. These included references to a past violent event or discussing how girls or young women facilitated a violent event online. In the final phase, selective coding, we integrated existing categories and themes in an effort to describe how participants perceive and react to posts from youth affiliated with or connected to gangs in Chicago.

**Results**

Our analysis conveys the perceptions of boys and young men have about the role girls and young women play in instigating violence through social media. The participants generally believe that the girls and young women in their social networks are consistent contributors to both online and offline violent conflict.

### Online Conflicts Attributed to Young Women

Across our male sample, 27 of the 33 participants (82%) attributed online social media conflicts to young women. The participants were initially asked to discuss online conflicts. The involvement of young women in online conflicts emerged from the data naturally without any probing. Out of the participants who reported witnessing social media conflicts involving young women, 70% (n = 19) identified young women as principal actors in confrontations on social media platforms. Young women were deemed principal actors when they are perceived as being involved in an action leading to a conflict (e.g., arguments of a shared romantic partner). A vast majority (89%) of the participants, who reported witnessing young women as principal actors in social media conflicts, stated that these conflicts resulted in offline physical violence in the neighborhood. Participants described a total of 26 online conflicts initiated by young women, with 15 resulting in injury and 6 resulting in homicides. Ben, 23-year old, described one of these online conflicts that resulted in violence in a Westside Chicago neighborhood:

There was actually one that happened on—well, I can’t really say, but it was out west. And it all started—the whole thing started over Facebook . . . It ended up with two guys laying in the middle of the street for something that started over Facebook. I heard somebody’s sister got into it with somebody. They started talking back and forth. The dude actually really came and killed two people for something they have on Facebook.

Ben describes an incident initiated on Facebook, where someone’s sister argued with someone else, with the final result of two people killed in the middle of the street. As the social media conflict began to escalate through an exchange of words, a point was reached someone (“The dude”) felt it was necessary to take serious violent action offline. This results in him killing two people. All of this began from an exchange on Facebook involving someone’s sister. Ben attributes the initiation of this conflict to an initial exchange started by someone’s sister on Facebook. As someone’s sister gets involved in an online conflict, the likelihood of family feeling obligated to protect and defend may escalate, raising the chances of offline violence occurring. This is especially true when carrying out traditional masculine gender roles involving protection of their female family members. Nevertheless, it is understood that Ben attributes the initiation of this conflict to an interaction on Facebook involving a young woman.
Social Media Mechanisms Leading to Offline Violence

Our participants attributed set-ups as a mechanism of social media communication that lead to offline violence. Set-ups act as a catalyst of street violence emerging from social media conflict attributed to young women through the perceptions of our male participants.

Set-ups. Set-ups are situations in which young women befriend young men on social media for the purpose of surveilling their activities and potentially facilitating ambushes that may result in physical violence or homicide with firearms. Set-ups were always perceived by our participants in gang-related interactions where a gang-affiliated or involved young women would befriend and trick a young man from an opposing gang, crew, or clique (commonly known as an “opp”) on a social media platform like Facebook. Gang-related interactions are most often about defending the honor of a gang, proving both personal and collective toughness and strength. Four of the participants (12%) reported witnessing conflicts manifested as set-ups. The participants reported five-gang-related incidents initiated by young women, one resulting in injury, one in homicide, and three in injury and homicide.

Jarret, an 18-year-old Latino male, describes his understanding of set-ups:

Facebook is not supposed to be—actually, guys that are gang banging aren’t supposed to be on Facebook ’cause that’s a good way of . . . showing the other people that—you might have enemies you don’t even know about and, one way to get to you is, a girl sends you a friend request; she’s gonna look real hot. And that’s a good way of getting you set up. The girl adds you, she invites you to go to her house or chill with her. And, more than likely, it’s gonna be a guy that hates you with a passion, with a gun sitting there. And you’re just gonna walk in a “Boom!” That’s it. That’s a good way of set ups. It’s a lotta things like that happen.

Before Jarret explains his experiences with set-ups, he shares that young men who “gang-bang” should not have a Facebook altogether because it is a place for your “enemies” (opposition) to learn personal information about you. Jarret warns young men who are gang-involved about adding people they are unfamiliar with on Facebook. Attractive young women are used to retaliate against members of opposition gangs. The young woman’s objective in sending the friend request to the opposing gang member is to obtain information that would benefit her gang and/or to allow her gang to retaliate. She will attempt to charm the young man through online messaging and will ask him to meet with her. Once the young man gets to the location, he will be not be welcomed by the young woman he communicated with online. Instead, he will be ambushed by an opposing gang.

Logan, an 18-year-old male, shared a story of his friend, who was set-up by a young woman on Facebook through private messages:

You know it happened to me I’m pretty sure it happens to other people. Like couple of my friends I knew, they actually got set up by females they met on Facebook . . . Yeah well my guy, rest in peace Slick, he was from my block but he transferred and he met this girl. And they were supposed to chill and she wasn’t showing up and he was standing right there by an alley and they shot him.

Logan indicates that set-ups through private messaging on Facebook are quite common. He and a couple of his friends were set-up on Facebook by young women. They would have conversations with young women on Facebook and would then meet with them. Logan shares about his friend, Slick, who arranged to spend some time with a young woman he had met through Facebook. As he was waiting for her by an alley, he was shot and killed. We do not know who Slick was killed by or if the girl was associated with the people who shot him. While we can deduce that his death was not a random mistake and likely involved opposition, we do not know Slick’s status as gang-involved or affiliated. However, Logan attributed the death of his friend to a young woman standing him up and putting him in an unsafe circumstance that ended with him being shot.

Our participants suggested that young women may also engage in social media behaviors that have unintended consequences, potentially leading to physical violence. For instance, our participants described young women posting details about a social event on Facebook (e.g., time, location, and contact information). Those details are then displayed publicly, allowing any member of an opposing gang to view those details and inquire about the event with the intention of disrupting it. Jarret explains these occurrences:

Sometimes, party—people put up, “Party’s over here!” And they actually put the address, they put, sometimes, the phone number . . . And you can just call up . . . And, if she’s in an opposite gang and she don’t know that, of course, she’s gonna put her number down and you could call, ask for the info—where the party’s at—and you end up going over there and you can do whatever you want. If you have some type of beef or you don’t like this guy or you don’t like her friends, man, that’s a good way to catch a body or catch a martyr; through Facebook.

Jarret shares the danger of posting personal information on social media and how it can escalate into set-up violence. A young woman, who is gang-involved or affiliated, will post information about a party and its location, her address, or phone number. The information is public and available for everyone to see. Posting this information publicly could be done through naiveté, a misunderstanding about social media privacy, or a lack of care surrounding who attends the party. Members of other gangs can access her contact information to

Patton et al.
get specific details about the party, without her knowledge of who they are or their gang affiliation. Instead of opposing gang members orchestrating a set-up, it is carried out through a pre-existing event of another gang. Once the opposition have the specific party details, they are able to use it as an opportunity to enact retaliation, revenge, or strength through physical violence at the party, or as Jarret describes, “catch a body.”

**Discussion**

The findings from this study corroborate previous Internet banging research that suggests offline interactions shape aggressive communication on social media among youth who are gang-involved. This study offers a fine investigation into the mechanisms linking online social media communication and subsequent offline violence among gang-affiliated youth. These results suggest that this population of men seek out and use social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) in order to display, witness, and respond to specific behaviors related to courting, friendship, hyper masculinity, and posturing. From this perspective, social media is less of the cause but the conduit of behaviors that boys and young men, and perhaps girls and young women, would have previously exhibited via other channels. Our findings underscore the network position of girls and young women as what they post online has the potential to reach boys and young men from opposing gangs and crews. However, this digital social medium provides instantaneous broadcasting of content to socially connected individuals and facilitates interactions between groups of youth that would not naturally connect in their offline worlds. In this way, the medium of social media allows for increased conflict by increasing communication and performance between divided groups of boys and young men. This study offers unique insight into male perspectives about the role girls and young women play in escalating conflict on social media, contributing to physical violence offline. What emerged was a nuanced understanding of how young men’s interactions with the young women in their lives facilitated engagement in Internet banging. While this study only includes male perspectives, the findings should be seen as one side of a multidimensional issue that cannot be fully unpacked without further research and analysis of the perspectives of young women. Additional research on their perspectives can add to our understanding of how gendered power dynamics change when dating and communication occurs via social media.

An important finding is the prominence of female figures in these interactions and how young men attribute causal roles to young women and girls in the escalation of violence, including gun violence. Black and Latino male participants repeatedly suggested girls and women were major contributors to social media-related gang violence, gun violence specifically or Internet banging and described a variety of ways women used social media to precipitate conflict. The young men identified online sets up as a mechanism that offline violence. Set-ups are centered around male/female relationships and romantic partnerships in the context of gang involvement. This particular finding is corroborated by a study by the Centre for Young Men’s Studies (2009) which interviewed boys aged 11–16 in Northern Ireland. One of their participants shared about an experience of being set-up through online messaging. He was tricked into thinking he was meeting up with girls, and instead, boys turned up ready to fight him. While girls were used as a ploy in this instance, it is unclear whether any girls were involved in the execution of this set-up.

Previous research on young women and gangs typically describes young women having a more passive role. Girls and young women may make up 25%–33% of all youth gang members in the United States (Chesney-Lind, 2013). Typically, young women function on the peripheries of gang structures, and practice situational avoidance and relational isolation to protect themselves from threats (Curry et al., 2014). Young women have also been known to fight, often when all other avoidance strategies have been exhausted. For example, young women fight to protect their own personal boundaries and to maintain the security that comes with their prowess to engage in physical violence when provoked (Jones, 2004). However, we know little about the ways in which social media may reconfigure gang behavior for girls and women.

The findings in this study are more in line with the most recent research (Patton et al., 2016b) in which a young gang-involved woman had a more active role in gang violence in both online and offline contexts. In a set of studies that examines Gakirah’s grief, aggression, and neighborhood identity expression on Twitter (Patton et al., 2016b, 2016c, 2017), researchers found that tweets between Gakirah and her top communicators on Twitter use the social media platform to communicate grief and neighborhood identity (Patton et al., 2017); to make direct and indirect threats toward Chicago police for the death of a fellow gang member (Patton et al., 2016c), and found that tweets resembled traditional forms of gang violence to include intergroup violence, reciprocity, and status-seeking (Patton et al., 2016b). However, Gakirah was unique in that she occupied a prominent and violent role in her gang as a shooter, a position usually held by men thus making her narrative unique in the literature (Patton et al., 2016b).

The majority of study participants mentioned online conflicts that involved a girl or young woman and they indicated that those interactions on social media led to physical violence in their neighborhood. Though the veracity of these observations cannot be confirmed with the women involved, the very perception of girls and women as catalyst of conflict online deserves further interrogation. A recent investigation of the role of girls in gangs by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency found that 72% of participants in their study of girls associated or initiated into male California gangs disclosed “being asked, being forced, or volunteering to commit a violent act” (Wolf et al., 2017, p. 7). Seminal
research on female gang members’ participation in aggressive behavior and victimization included activities such as luring unsuspecting girls to locations where male gang members were present for the purpose of their sexual exploitation (Molidor, 1996). Our study suggests that, for young women who may be gang associates or gang-affiliated, this behavior may also include the luring of young men in rival gangs for the purpose of targeted or retaliatory violence. In the contemporary context, the narratives of the young men in our study suggest that social media may be a key mechanism for such “set ups.” These perceptions are an important first step in identifying how social media content may lead to offline gang violence. However, more research focused on the experiences and perspectives of young women and girls is necessary, particularly to support any theory building related to relational power operationalized on social media.

What might explain the perceptions young men have of young women’s social media use? First, our male participants may have been more interested in discussing female-centric violence in an effort to not report their own violent participation or victimization for several reasons that may include but not limited to: appeasing their male interviewers (Oltman, 2016) or to avoid discussing any incriminating details of an event or “snitching” (Clampet-Lundquist et al., 2015). Second, the cyberbullying literature provides important clues about young women and social media that could have implications for a gang-involved context. Festl and Quandt (2016) found that cyberbullying among girls depends on risky social contacts and interaction, which is relevant when viewed within a contagion of violence framework (Slutkin, 2012). However, studies on cyberbullying rarely take race into consideration, as most studies survey White participants (Low & Espelage, 2013). The few studies involving Black adolescents suggest they are more likely involved in cyberbullying as perpetrators, with lower prevalence rates of victimization than White and Latino students (Albdour & Krouse, 2014). Third, Lane suggests that perhaps social media may offer a sense of liberation and protection for young women. In his study of Harlem teens social media use, he found that social media made the connections between courtship and neighborhood violence more prominent. In public space, young men could exert power over girls to demonstrate prowess and power. As such, boys, who argue, may feel safer in public spaces via their connections to other boys from the same community. However, girls, on the other hand, feel less safe in public settings as they navigate the performative elements of boy behavior. But it is important to note that the turf systems that impact how boys traverse safety allow girls to be particularly mobile in social space, a freedom that some boys may find threatening.

**Limitations**

While the findings from this study elucidated potential mechanisms for violence that can be addressed using a public health approach to violence prevention, this study is not without limitations. First, this study only presents the perspectives of boys and young men regarding young girls and women’s behavior on social media. The initial focus of this study was violence among boys and men. While we did not anticipate the significant role girls and women would play in male understandings of violence escalation, our qualitative approach allowed for these new and unanticipated findings to emerge from the data. Second, we were unable to collect the total number of online conflicts to compare the numbers with incidents that only involve women. Finally, our participants represent a very small proportion of social media users and thus our findings cannot be generalized beyond this sample. Future research should include more diverse sample and the inclusion young women to fully understand the ways in which social media might contribute to offline injury, firearm violence, gang violence, and homicide. Future studies should include the analysis of social media posts from participants, police reports, and new sources to identify correlational and causal links between social media communication and offline violence.

**Implications for Public Health**

There is a significant gap in knowledge regarding the role of girls and young women with respect to Internet banging. While evidence of Internet banging and escalation of violence via social media is growing, more attention needs to be paid to the mechanisms and processes associated with Internet banging behavior and their connection to offline firearm violence. This study offers unique insight into male perspectives about the role young women play in escalating conflict on social media, contributing to physical violence offline. Internet Banging research offers rich interdisciplinary opportunities (e.g., public health, social science, criminal justice, computer science) for research that can inform policy and practice aimed at improving the health, well-being, and safety of young people. Our current findings are particularly important for public health professionals and researchers because they highlight how social media can act as a vector for community violence. As much of this social media communication is public and observable, escalations of violence in certain communities may be hiding in plain sight. Since this study illuminates the specific social media behaviors that escalate violence, public health practitioners can use social media communication as a tool of surveillance and for targeted violence prevention intervention. Consistent with contagion models of violence, online interrupters could be trained to identify Internet conflict, deescalate violent digital exchanges, and prevent the spread of violence from social media to the streets. Given the power of social media in the lives of youth and young adults across gender, this resource could also be leveraged to expose online audiences to videos, info-graphics, and other digital public health campaign tools to promote healthy and nonviolent conflict resolution. In
addition, as prevention efforts reveal how meet-ups and set-up work in digital culture, they will become less effective digital tools. Prior research suggests that youth are particularly savvy at navigating the social relationships and digital communications (Lane, 2018; Stevens et al., 2019), thus awareness of the use of set-up/meet-up behaviors online will likely be taken into account as youth calculate their online behaviors. However, we strongly caution against blaming or centering girls and young women as catalysts or causes of violence in any prevention efforts, as this could place them at increased risk for harm.

Since many of the violent meet-ups between youth were driven by conflicts linked to romantic relationships, interventions that promote healthy romantic relationships may also help prevent the spread of violence. For example, lessons from the HIV prevention work with young romantic couples may serve as a model for future dyadic violence prevention (Lanier & Campo, 2019). Communication and problem-solving skills training that help young men and women negotiate the place of social media in their romantic relationships may reduce the likelihood of violent involvement. Continued research that examines the process, context, meaning, and outcomes of Internet banging for violent injury and death is paramount for preventing violence and promoting the health and well-being of young men and women in the information age. This study serves as a first step in advancing our understanding of the relationship between social media and violence in any prevention efforts, as this could place them at increased risk for harm.

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