



## **Why do Women in the Context of Sexual Violence from an Intimate Partner look for Blogs to Express Themselves?**

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### **Resumo**

A high number of people all over the world commit sexual violence against their intimate or non-intimate women partners. This problem has a heavy impact in social, public health and security terms, in addition to being a gross violation of women's rights. An interesting fact is that numbers of these women look for social networking sites and/or blogs to express their feelings and doubts. This raises the research question "Why do women in this situation blog?" The goal of this paper is to find some factors that lead to this activity, using Grounded Theory to analyze blogs. We selected 31 Brazilian blogs, and the results show a relationship between the social context, the culture of rape, traumas, insufficient knowledge about women's rights, the disruption of self-integrity, outcomes related to the perception of well-being, help for other victims and the blog as a safe space in which to reconstruct self-affirmation.





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**Abstract:** A high number of people all over the world commit sexual violence against their intimate or non-intimate women partners. This problem has a heavy impact in social, public health and security terms, in addition to being a gross violation of women's rights. An interesting fact is that numbers of these women look for social networking sites and/or blogs to express their feelings and doubts. This raises the research question 'Why do women in this situation blog?' The goal of this paper is to find some factors that lead to this activity, using Grounded Theory to analyze blogs. We selected 31 Brazilian blogs, and the results show a relationship between the social context, the culture of rape, traumas, insufficient knowledge about women's rights, the disruption of self-integrity, outcomes related to the perception of well-being, help for other victims and the blog as a safe space in which to reconstruct self-affirmation.



**Keywords:** Blogs; Intimate Partner Sexual Violence; Self-Integrity; Anonymity; Violence Against Women.

## 1 Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 35% of all women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate or non-intimate partner; between 30% and 38% of all women in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from their intimate partner; 38% of all murders of women are committed by intimate partners and one in three women is or has been a victim of domestic violence.

There is growing recognition that sexual violence against women has a heavy social, public health and security impact, in addition to being a gross violation of women's rights (Heise, Pitanguy, & Germain, 1994; Signorelli, Taft, & Pereira, 2018; WHO, 2013). A study by Souza, Drezett, Meirelles, and Ramos (2012) shows that victims may suffer from several disorders, for example in eating, sexual, mood, depression, anxiety and even Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Other consequences are related to a greater use of drugs and alcohol, health problems, and reduced satisfaction with life commitments, with the body, sexual activity, interpersonal relationships, and the quality of life. Moreover, there is a strict association between sexual violence and symptoms of hypervigilance, dissociation and freezing. These symptoms interfere in the relationship with the self-image and the victim's emotional relationships are negatively affected. Unfortunately, these indications can be long-lasting, distorting women's lives for many years.

An interesting fact is that some women in this situation of vulnerability expose themselves, their feelings, and their doubts in forms of online communication.

Online communication has in general, become part of people's lives. Thus, understanding the positive and negative impacts of these media is a significant current issue. With the explosion in using the social media in the last decade, personal blogs have become an increasingly popular venue where people can write about their innermost thoughts and experiences and post their writings in an online space accessible to all (Bronstein, 2013). In many cases, it becomes their personal presence in cyberspace.

However, we looked up 'why do women in a sexual violence condition blog?' in the Scielo, EBSCO and Google Scholar databases, and could not find any result that answered the question. This is further discussed in Section 2.

The objective of this study is to identify the factors that drive women who have been affected by sexual violence from an intimate partner to expose themselves in the environment of online communication. To do this, the study made a content analysis of 31 Brazilian blogs. A content analysis was chosen since we could not find any previous studies that had analysed blogs specifically to identify the factors that led women users suffering sexual violence at the hands of their intimate partners to expose themselves online. Second, little research has been undertaken so far to analyze the literature that in general explores why women blog or reveal their situation online. Third, since Freed *et al.* (2017) affirms the limited understanding of the interactions between the victims of this violence, their abusers, law enforcement workers, and counselors, and also of the roles that digital technologies play in these interactions, the present work, using content analysis, may help by providing exploratory results.

A Grounded Theory approach was used in analyzing the blogs. This involves starting without any preconceived models and developing a model or framework through an analysis of the unstructured data from online blogs.

The source of the data for this study was online Brazilian blogs that contained Brazilian reports about women's experience of sexual violence from an intimate partner. These bloggers were chosen first because this part of the international blogosphere has yet to be investigated at length; second, because Brazil in 2015 was 4<sup>th</sup> in the world ranking for the number of its internet



users (UNCTAD, 2017), and women occupy almost 50% of its population (IBGE, 2015). This is why understanding blogging behavior in this growing part of the blogosphere is significant for research on information and communication technology as a whole. Besides, a wider comprehension of this behavior could support the stakeholders of the network in combating sexual violence and provide more (virtual) spaces to assist the victims, aiming at their well-being and the reconstruction of their self-integrity.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the literature review, Section 3 the methodology, Section 4 the findings and discussion, and Section 5 the conclusion and limitations of the work.

## 2 Literature review

To begin our research, we first tried to find works related to ours. To do this, we chose three different databases: Scielo, EBSCO and Google Scholar. We used two terms as key words: (i) blog AND intimate partner violence; (ii) why women blog.

Table 1. Results of number of titles returned from the search of databases and the number of relevant articles.

Databases	Keywords			
	Blog + intimate partner violence		Why women blog	
	Search returned	Relevant returned	Search returned	Relevant returned
Scielo	0	0	0	0
EBSCO	2	0	1	0
Google Scholar	13	0	3	0

As we can see from Table 1, when we combined terms “blog” and “intimate partner violence”, the results from Scielo returned zero (even using Portuguese terms). In EBSCO, two titles were returned, but only one about why women blog and none about why our target bloggers did so. In Google Scholar, we retrieved a higher number, 13, but none of them fitted our search terms.

When we put in the term “why women blog” as the key word, we again got no results from the Scielo database. In EBSCO, the search returned one result for “why women blog”, but the paper contained no analysis of women in this vulnerable condition. In the Google Scholar database, 03 results were found, but again, none of them related to our enquiry.

As we could not find anything relevant in these databases, we explored broader concepts, without considering the specific context of intimate partner violence and specific blogging. This was possible because blogs are often seen as similar to other media, such as email, bulletin board systems and web pages (Y. S. Chang & Yang, 2013). Ngai, Tao, and Moon (2015) define blogs similarly as related to “social media”, “virtual communities”, “online communities”, “Web 2.0”, “social networking sites”, and “social computing”. Thus, blogs may be defined as a form of internet media and the social media equivalent of personal web pages, exhibiting a multitude of variations, from personal diaries describing the author’s life to summaries of all the relevant information in a specific field.

In a general sense, Chen (2012) proposes models that explain both the needs that drive women to blog and how these needs link to the specific gratifications that women obtain from blogging. Her study applies Psychological Needs theory to women’s personal blogs. Her study reveals a statistically significant positive relationship between the need for self-disclosure and the concept of blogging as a way in which to express one’s own voice, mediated by the need for affiliation and the time spent on blogging.

Jung, Song, and Vorderer (2012) develops a theoretical model that identifies why people blog personal content and explains the effects of blogging in “real life”. First, these writers identify psychological factors that may account for personal blog use and conceptualize a



theoretical model resting on three pillars: motivations, usage, and consequences, measured by the users' perceived social support, loneliness, belonging, and psychological well-being in their social life. Then, they report collected survey data from 531 users of Cyworld, a popular Korean site, and discuss implications with respect to impression management and perceived social support from using personal blogs.

Bronstein (2013) presents blogs as personal protected spaces that tend to be less adversarial and more reflective in nature, where bloggers feel secure and comfortable enough to write. According to Child and Budu (2010), blogs allow people to have more control over the information that they disclose, leading them to reveal online intimate information that is not easily expressed in a personal conversation.

C. M. Chang and Hsu (2016) integrates the perspectives of social presence theory and social capital theory to develop a research model for assessing the factors that affect a user's perception of well-being derived from using social networking sites.

All these works explore psychological theories, relating human beings to their use of online communication opportunities.

Another approach is to consider theories to do with the use and acceptance of technology. Chang and Yang (2013) incorporate the technology acceptance model (TAM) with media choice factors to explain and predict blog acceptance behaviors. The media choice factors include media richness, critical mass, social influence (SI) and media experience (ME).

However, most of the research so far has focused on the use of technology to abuse, also known as cyberviolence. It includes cyberbullying (Savage & Tokunaga, 2017), cyberstalking (Delanie, 2016; Dhillon, Challa, & Smith, 2016) and online harassment (Wong, 2017), especially in adolescent and youth populations.

Concerning the field of violence from an intimate partner, malicious use of technology is also reported, and the literature review of Henry and Powell (2016) presents several studies showing that technology can facilitate sexual violence.

Dimond, Fiesler, and Bruckman (2011) affirms that the prevalence of domestic violence is one of the many activist projects that acknowledge a connection with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), and that the "area was a neglected one and not an unreasonable undertaking". These writers interviewed 10 female victims about their technology and shared examples of stories. Participants reported that they were harassed by mobile phones, experienced additional harassment but also were supported by social networking sites and tried to resist, using their knowledge of the right to security and privacy.

Freed et al. (2017) is a qualitative study analyzing the role of digital technologies in the intimate partner violence (IPV) 'ecosystem' in New York City. They used semi-structured interviews with 40 IPV professionals and nine focus groups with 32 survivors of IPV. The findings reveal that both IPV professionals and survivors feel that they do not possess adequate expertise to be able to identify or cope with technology-enabled IPV, and the best practices are currently inadequate to help them deal with abuse via technology. We also reveal a number of tensions and trade-offs in negotiating the role of technology in social support and legal procedures.

Privacy and security tools are also discussed. Matthews et al. (2017) present a qualitative study of the digital privacy and security motivation, practices and challenges of victims of intimate partner abuse.

As we can see, there is a gap in theory between why women blog (the ICT field) and the context of intimate partner violence (the social context). Moreover, all these approaches first propose a hypothesis and/or a conceptual framework, and then test their hypotheses applying a questionnaire to a set of respondents. However, in the context of sexual violence, most women want to be anonymous, and are generally impossible to contact in the blogosphere.



### 3 Methodology

A Grounded Theory approach was used in analyzing the blogs. This involved starting without any preconceived models and developing a model or framework by analyzing unstructured data from online blogs.

The source of the data for this study was online Brazilian blogs which contained Brazilian women's reports about their experience of sexual violence from an intimate partner. Altogether 31 blogs were selected. The theory is built from the unstructured data of these online resources through a strict data selection process and qualitative methodology of analysis. The theory is built from the unstructured data of those online resources through a strict data selection process and qualitative analysis methodology, presented in the following stages as defined by Nath and Standing (2010):

1. Data selection;
2. Sorting and selection stage;
3. Selecting the final articles;
4. Use of NVivo for qualitative analysis;
5. Identifying and analyzing the factors;
6. Consolidating and finalizing the factors so as to obviate overlapping categorization;
7. Developing a model;
8. Finding and documenting the results and conclusion.

These stages from 1 to 4 are described below in this section, while the stages 5 to 8 are presented in Section 4.

#### 3.1 Data selection

We choose the google.com site as the database where we would search the blogs. The blogs in the sample were not selected from a blog directory because the victims preferred anonymity. We did not choose a research database because we wanted to find any women who expressed themselves, direct or indirectly, using a blog.

#### 3.2 Sorting and selection stage

The sample collected for the study consisted of regularly maintained blogs written in Portuguese on the internet. The term in Portuguese "Fui estuprada pelo meu marido" (in English, 'I was raped by my husband') was used in the selection as key word. A total of 351 blogs were found satisfying the primary search conditions according to the selection criteria.

#### 3.3 Selecting the final articles

In this stage, all the 351 blogs were reviewed manually for final selection. The following criteria were invoked to control the boundary and limits of the search:

- The blog was classified as a Brazilian blog;
- It was considered just a blog whose content contained a report of a Brazilian woman who had formerly lived with the intimate partner;
- The content of the blog after examination was confirmed to contain at least one victim's report.

From the 351 possible blogs only 31 were selected for analysis.

#### 3.4 Use of NVivo for qualitative analysis

The primary nodes of the conceptual hierarchy were created in NVivo 12<sup>1</sup> (a qualitative analysis software program), using the categories identified in the blog analysis. The five

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/support-overview/downloads>





primary categories were trauma, the goal of the blog, rape culture, identification of the victim, and applicability of the law in a case of sexual violence from an intimate partner. For each post of the blog, key sentences were coded separately within NVivo, and the nodes were gradually developed through analysis, which was needed to compare, name and rename. The number of codes generated from the 31 sources provided the nodes presented in Table 2. The use of NVivo allowed constant comparisons to be made of the largest possible number of coded sentences.

Table 2. Hierarchical codes and the number of code sources

Name	Files	References
Aggressor (man) consciousness	8	9
Conscious	2	2
Conscious and regretful	5	5
Not Conscious	2	2
Rape culture	26	71
The woman is guilty	2	2
Financial dependence	6	7
Right to rape	13	15
Lack of women's knowledge of their rights	3	3
Inferiority of women	7	10
Judgment of society	3	3
Woman seen as an object, a possession	7	7
Obedience to the husband	4	6
Sexual obligation	5	7
Society's failure to provide relief	2	2
Sex as a punishment for women	2	3
Sex with unconscious woman	2	2
Society's claims that a woman has an obligation to have sex with her husband	2	2
Identity	30	31
Anonymous	27	28
Identified	3	3
Law	21	27
Support of law enforcement	4	4
Law Officials not Believing Victim	5	9
Victim's Failure to Report (Complain)	14	14
Goals for blogging	20	28
Confirm rape	2	3
Unburden, Emotional support	4	4
Rape disclosure	6	7
Doubt in denouncing the aggressor	1	1
Doubt of forgiving the aggressor	3	3
Legal doubts	1	2
Asking for help	7	8
Motivation to seek the internet	1	1
Distrust of known people	1	1
Trauma	25	111
Shaken	8	8
Anxiety	3	3
Self-affirmation	7	9
Self-image	9	9
Low self-esteem	3	4
Controlled by the aggressor	3	3
Self-blame	3	4
Depression	4	4
Difficulty in accepting the fact that a rape had been committed	10	12
Physical pain	5	6



Name	Files	References
No trust in the law	1	1
Unhappiness	2	2
Conflict intolerant	2	2
Fear	11	13
Anger	5	5
Rejection of other intimate partners	3	3
Rejection by an intimate partner	8	9
Feeling confused	3	3
Shame	9	11
What the victim looks for in life	3	12
Emotional support	2	2
Legal support	1	1
Material support	1	2
Self-affirmation/Self-image	2	4
Help	2	2

#### 4 Findings and Discussion

We found that the answer to the question “why do women suffering sexual violence from an intimate partner blog?” cannot be discussed without first considering certain factors, which emerged from the coding stage: the *social context* (laws), the *culture* (rape culture), the *traumas* suffered by victims, the effective causes of blogging (the research question: *why*) and *for what purpose* they blog. The Grounded Theory led us to a more complex relationship between factors than we had expected, which is synthetized in Figure 1 and discussed below.

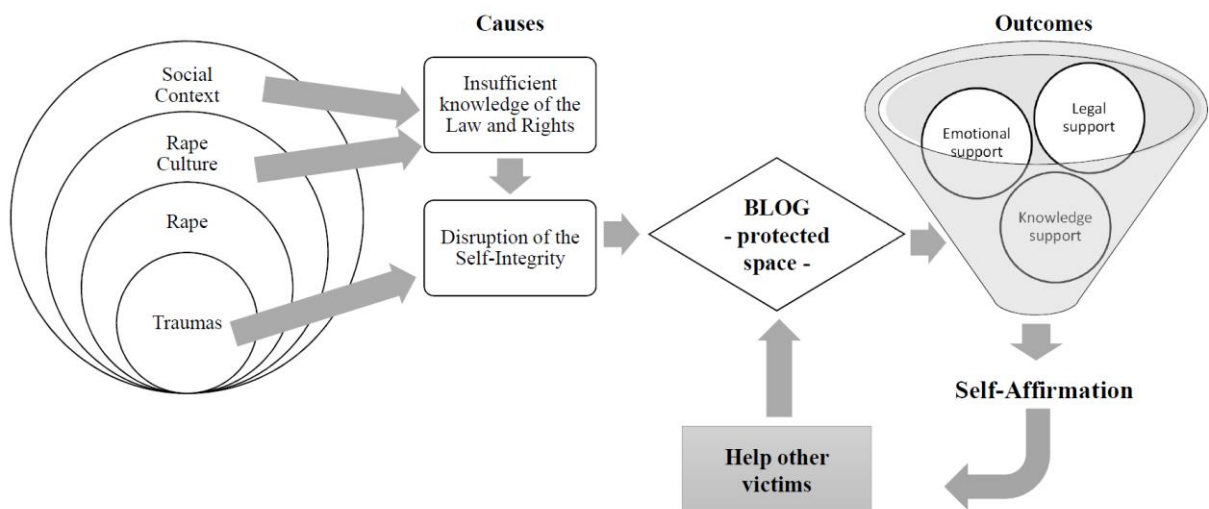


Figure 1. Analytical framework as developed.

#### *Social Context*

The ‘Brazilian Public Security Annual’ (R. S. d. Lima et al., 2017) reports that 49,497 women were victim of rape in Brazil in 2016, that is, 24 per 100 thousand habitants. To meet this problem, Brazil rolled out gender-based public policies to manage women victims of domestic violence in healthcare settings. Signorelli et al. (2018) lists four of these policies: (i) the institution of the ‘National Special Secretary for Women’s Policies’, which is responsible for developing intersectoral actions focused on women, aiming at health, security, education and the reduction of violence (Brasil, 2003); (ii) the Law 11,340/2006 ‘Maria da Penha Law’ (Brasil, 2006) to protect women, prevent, restrain, punish and eradicate VAW (violence against women); (iii) the ‘National Policy to Combat VAW’ (Brasil, 2011), which configures a





network to support women; and (iv) the ‘National Policy for Humanization in Health’ (Brasil, 2004), which is not exclusive to VAW, but also focuses on the humanization of all health care approaches.

Before the Maria da Penha Law, there was no specific law regarding domestic violence. This crime was not considered to merit a penalty for being aggravated and its sentence lasted between 6 and 12 months. The aggressor could continue to go to the same places that were frequented by the victim. Any form of contact with the victim was not forbidden. This is reinforced by one victim’s report: *“See, Mr. Antônio [father of the victim], this guy confessed the rape. Would you rather that we arrested him or that he assumes full rights over your daughter?”* Another example is *“Even after denunciation in the police department, my rapist was never arrested.”*

Despite these policies and the implementation of compulsory notification in Brazil, the complaints to the police authorities and searches for medical help remain low. Moreover, most of the cases do not come to public notice, and many are not investigated by the police investigation (R. R. Lima, Sanchez, Castro, & Jesús Pereira, 2015). Some examples are as follows:

*“... I took my baby and went to a police station. There, I still had to hear from the delegate that since I was married, that was not rape”;*

*“In the police station, I heard from the female delegate that it was bullshit, just a scratch”;*

*“Nobody helps me, I have already been to the local police station, but the official is a friend of my husband’s”.*

The study of Bezerra, Lara, Nascimento, and Barbieri (2018) analyzes the efficacy of the Brazilian public policies considering (i) women’s care service in situation of sexual violence (SV); (ii) women’s perceptions of women of SV care; and assistance from health professionals about SV care. It finds that the integral service recommended by the Ministry of Health is flouted in 87.5% of the states of the country, due to inadequate outpatient settings and professionals unable to meet women because of the social norms and the dominance of a traditional, fragmented form of medical assistance, which elevates the hegemonic biomedical model and neglects preventive actions and health promotion.

### Rape Culture

Women are unaware of their rights and suffer because of a society that still blames them for sexual aggression. The rape culture is a term used to address the ways in which society blames the victims of sexual assault and normalizes men’s violent sexual behavior. A report that we found makes this explicit: *“He said I was a slut and it was my fault.”* Powell (2015) lists several Feminist scholars who have long discussed the existence of a “rape culture” in which sexual violence against women is implicitly and explicitly condoned, excused, tolerated and normalized. We note that these ideas are deeply rooted in society, in three categories: society itself, the perpetrators and even the victims, as presented in Figure 2.

Categories	Report
Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “I have heard some people tell me that it is my obligation to give in, whether I want to or not, and that I should do it, because if he betrays me it will be my fault.”</li> <li>- “His mother knew of the assaults, but she’d slipped out. She said she was not going to interfere in a quarrel between a husband and wife.”</li> </ul>
Perpetrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “he said he did not marry me just to sleep in his shell and that it is my duty to satisfy his desire”;</li> <li>- “Almost every day he does horrible things to me and says that I have to accept because he was doing me an honor in accepting my whim to marry a virgin”;</li> </ul>



Categories	Report
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "he said that I still was his wife, that I HAD TO do it"</li> <li>- "I was raped by my own husband so that I would understand who was in charge."</li> </ul>
Victims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "I'm here for this purpose, and I gave up";</li> <li>- "I was taught to obey";</li> <li>- "He was my owner"</li> <li>- "I've never liked anal sex, but I always did it to please my husband"</li> </ul>

Figure 2. Reports that demonstrate the condoned, excused, tolerated and normalized violence against women

Perpetrators use strategies to intimidate, harass and humiliate their victims.

*"He humiliated me constantly";*

*"He did not treat me well";*

*"He was rude to me, he diminished me";*

*"Studying, going to college was a dream of mine that he would not even permit over his dead body";*

*"He would throw me to the ground, say I was no good."*

As intimidation, perpetrators often beat their wives up and deprive them of financial support:

*"I totally depend on him, I have no one to help me";*

*"I had no one to turn to and I had to go back to my daughter's father's house, because I could not go on alone";*

*"I continue with him because I depend on him financially".*

The rape and the culture of which it is part cause deep traumas in the victims, which are presented next.

### Traumas

Before we present the findings about trauma, we should first set out some concepts that may help to understand and combine our findings. Sherman and Cohen (2006) bring an overview of self-affirmation theory, which begins with the premise that people are motivated to maintain the integrity of the self. The overall goal of the self-system is to protect an image of its self-integrity, of its moral and adaptive adequacy. When this image of self-integrity is threatened, people respond in such a way as to restore self-worth (Steele, 1988). Thus, the goal of protecting self-integrity and the impact of this goal on a person's psychology and behavior become apparent when its integrity is threatened.

According to Sherman and Cohen (2006), there are three categories of response that people can deploy to cope with such threats. First, they can respond by accommodating to the threat. This means that they can accept the failure or the threatening information and then use it as a basis for attitudinal and behavioral change.

A second response involves ameliorating the threat via direct psychological adaptations. Some of these adaptations are defensive since they involve dismissing, denying, or avoiding the threat in some way (called 'defensive biases'). Although a defensive bias can restore self-integrity, the rejection of the threatening information can lessen the probability that the person will learn from the potentially important information.

Self-affirmation theory, however, proposes a third option, a different kind of psychological adaptation, which can enable both the restoration of self-integrity and adaptive change in behavior. Sherman and Cohen (2006) affirms that

The self is composed of different domains, which include an individual's roles, such as being a student or a parent; values, such as being religious or having a sense of humor; social identities, such as membership in groups or organizations and in racial, cultural, and gender groups; and belief systems, such as political ideologies. The self



is also composed of people's goals, such as the value of being healthy or succeeding in school. The self-system is activated when a person experiences a threat to an important self-conception or image. Such threat poses a challenge to a desired self-conception.

From this concept, we can conclude that rape is a threat to self-integrity, since it is an emotional and physical violation. Thus, we can combine our codes with this theory. All the traumas found are related to the disruption of self-integrity as presented in Figure 3.

Self domain	What is affected	Traumas observed	Reports
The individual's roles	Victim is no longer a wife	Defensive biases: victim avoids the recognition of her situation as a rape;  Victim is subjected to (is controlled by) the aggressor	"I love him a lot, I did not want to end my marriage because of this, but I do not know how much I'll take";  "You ask me: why I did not abandon him at the first slap? [...] Because I loved him, and he manipulated me"
Values	Being happy; having self-esteem; being religious; being a good wife; bodily integrity; being the loved one	Depression  Low self-esteem  Self-image  Self-blame   Fear, Anger  Shame  Denying, minimization of the problem (Difficulty in accepting the fact that it is a rape)	"I'm sad. I think about killing myself"  "I stood there, with my self-esteem in tatters, a rag of a woman"  "What are people thinking about me?"  "I chose a guy who hits me. I'm to blame. If I revealed it to someone else, it would be seen that I had done something wrong. I deserved it."  "He did not stop even when I was desperate". "I hate him with all my might".  "I just don't want to talk about it with anyone I know because I'm ashamed"  "Then I lost my will, I ended up releasing him and he got heavy, and I've been aching ever since. My husband is not like that, he is very affectionate and when we only do vaginal and oral sex is wonderful. But when he wants to do anal he is transformed, he changes completely until he does it. I love my husband very much, but it makes me very sad. What do I do to stop it and not have this personality transformation because of sex anymore?" "[...] there is great difficulty for the woman to understand what she has experienced. When the abuse comes from a close person, she takes a lot longer to recognize it as a situation of violence [...] Many have symptoms of trauma, such as fear, anxiety and even physical pain, but they do not link one thing to another."
Social identities	Victim excludes herself or is excluded from her social groups	Shame, self-image, Depression	"I would feel eradicated as a feminist if I left something like this unfinished" "I tried to study, tried to work, tried to ask for help. [...] I gave up. I felt ashamed of



Self domain	What is affected	Traumas observed	Reports
			the bruises, of the questions of my colleagues.” “I did not dare show up at work. What were people thinking of me? ‘That’s why you want to’. ‘Choose, now hold’. [...] I got lost inside of me”.
Goals	Study, work	Problems with self-realization, self-image	“Studying, going to college was a dream of mine that would not be permitted even over his dead body!”
Relationships	Relationships with other men	Rejection of the partner and other potential partners	“I could not even let him touch me”; “I know I’ll never be able to get involved with another man, I’m nauseous just thinking of it”

Figure 3. Relation between self-domain and traumas found from the Grounded Theory

### Causes

From the Grounded Theory, we can describe two main goals in blogging: (i) women look for ways to reconstruct their self-integrity, (ii) women are filled with doubt due to their imperfect knowledge of the law and their rights.

To reconstruct their self-integrity, they need a protected space in which they may feel safe. In this way, they will conduct this process through self-disclosure, self-expression and self-presentation. We coded it under the headings of Unburdening and Emotional Support:

*“This is more of an outburst – my husband raped me”.*

As noted above, the laws that protect women against sexual violence have recently been created (since 2006). Thus, revealing information about women’s rights and changes in the thinking are in still in process. Therefore, in view of these laws, many women do not know enough about their rights. So, they feel lost, confused, unsure what to do to escape from the violence and abuse. After their self-disclosure, they ask *“What do I do?”*. Some of them have a more specific question: *“Should I forgive him?”*, as if they were asking for society’s approval for either staying in or leaving the relationship.

The other goal is apparent when a woman has left the environment of sexual violence (though this does not mean that all her traumas have been eliminated, but only that she has reconstructed part of her self-integrity through self-affirmation). She may then decide to share her experience to make the population aware of current conditions and to help other victims of sexual abuse. Most of the reports of this kind in our sample came from news blogs. They contain not only reports by women, but also complementary information about their rights and opinions, as the following text confirms:

*“Experts point out that it is important for women to know that all forms of sexual intercourse without consent are rape and that, if it happens, they can and should seek help.”*

### The blog as a safe space

Finally, we reach an exact answer to our research question: Why do women in the context of violence from an intimate partner blog? In our findings, more than 90% of the victims concealed their identity (anonymity). One of the victims reported the following:

*“First of all, the question is serious. Understand that in this case I cannot trust in many people to give help, so it can be sent anyway with all the other reports on the internet anyway.”*

According to Papacharissi, cited in Bronstein (2013):

The anonymous and textual nature of the internet facilitates self-presentation and allows individuals to deal with issues such as gender, ethnicity or religion and to



overcome identity flaws or disabilities. This anonymity inherent in online communications enables individuals to express themselves freely and behave in ways not permissible or acceptable in their usual social sphere.

Thus, we consider that the main cause of resorting to a blog is the anonymity that it promises, because the rape itself, the rape culture, the social context, the need for self-integrity are not issues intrinsically related to blogging as an activity. They happen independently of blogs. They are issues related to human beings. But the advantage that blogs confer, as Information and Communication Technology artifacts, is a safe space where the process of reconstruction of a woman's self-integrity can be developed in private.

Even in the news blogs, most of the victims were anonymous. Only 3 victims were identified out of the 31 blogs analyzed. This indicates that traumas such as shame and insecurity after self-exposure remain. Although these women agreed to share their experiences, they still needed a safe place for self-presentation.

### Outcomes

Despite victims' need to feel secure, they also expect a feedback from virtual community. In Table 1, the codes for the desired outcomes are headed 'What the victim looks for in life', grouped under emotional support, legal support, material support, self-affirmation and self-image, and help in a general sense. In Figure 4 we exemplified each kind of support separately, but in most cases, the victims' reports combined them. One example is:

*"I treated my own case, learned about my rights, and psychologically restructured myself."*

What the victim looks for in life	Reports
Emotional support	"I have restructured [myself] psychologically" "I tried to internalize him, I looked for a spiritual center, a pastor, a priest ... but nothing."
Legal support	"I have learned about my rights"
Material support	"I graduated, I work in a good company, I have a house and a car. Everything is simple, but it's MINE, which I bought with my own efforts".
Self-affirmation / Self-image	"I have empowered myself." "I was strong! I would die trying to be free." "I do not accept being someone I am not."
Help	"I tried to study, tried to graduate, tried to work, tried to ask for help". "I knelt down and asked God for help." "About 15 minutes later he stopped and started to weep, he asked me to forgive him and the next day he gave me flowers, and some chocolates, when he saw the marks on my arms, he cried and asked for forgiveness. [...] Should I forgive him?"

Figure 4. Desired outcomes reported by the victims.

We notice that these codes are related to the causes, described above: the reconstruction of women's self-integrity and doubts due to the imperfect knowledge of the law and their rights. Hence, we regrouped the coding for emotional and material support, self-affirmation and self-image, allocating them to 'Emotional Support'. Although we concluded that the support from police officers and the legal justice system ('Legal Support'), and the knowledge about women's rights and what defines a rape ('Knowledge Support') are part of the requirements for rebuilding self-integrity in the context of sexual violence from an intimate partner, we decided to retain them as separate kinds of outcome due to the part that they play in the process. When these three elements are combined, they contribute to the restoration of self-integrity and adaptive behavior change; that is, the concept of self-affirmation, as described above. A report from a woman exemplifies this:





*“I did what I was supposed to do, shook off the dust [of this relationship], and resumed the course of my life”.*

These relations are represented at the end of the analytical framework, in Figure 1, where the input to a blog is the disruption of self-integrity and the output is self-affirmation.

## 5 Conclusion

This study identified the reason why women who suffer violence from intimate partner write blogs; it developed an analytical framework that relates the social context, the rape culture, traumas, disruption of self-integrity and unfamiliarity with women's rights with the use of blogging. The rape generates an insecure environment for the victim. What she needs most is a secure place where she can reveal herself, her doubts, her suffering and her need to escape from victimhood. The anonymity in blogging provides this safe virtual space.

Our major contribution is the developed analytical framework, which fills the gap between the use of IT-artifacts and the context of sexual violence from an intimate partner. This framework combines theories from psychology with the use of the blog as an IT-artifact which provides its users with a positive impact. The other contribution is the detection of the need to reveal women's rights more clearly and to provide better services aimed at helping victims.

Although our findings have meaningful implications for the use of blogs and the social context, this study has some limitations. However, none of the limitations is critical. First, our database was collected using the Google search engine alone. Second, we studied only one type of technology (i.e., blogs). Third, the findings are limited in their generalization because our study was conducted only in Brazil. Fourth, research is inherently driven by the values, biases, and questions of the researchers. Although this is inherent in all research, the researchers acknowledge that their own backgrounds and understandings influenced the shape of the analysis and presentation of these findings.

Future research can extend our study to other online communication environments, such as social media, where private communities exist that also provide a safe space for victims. However, a netnography approach will be required, since some communities are constituted for women only. Our research also can be replicated in other countries.

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