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https://www.losaltosonline.com/community/how-technology-is-used-to-hurt-women-confronting-domestic-violence/article_45b94767-9215-5b6d-a598-71181f7e7ea0.html

How technology is used to hurt women: Confronting Domestic Violence

Ruth Patrick
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This is the first in a six-part series on domestic violence and technological abuse. Names, professions, histories and other personal identifying information have been changed to create a composite character to protect confidentiality.

What's one of the perks of living in Silicon Valley? The instant access we have to all the latest toys and gadgets. In most cases, we are only a keystroke away from calling, connecting and controlling most aspects of our lives. There's only one critical flaw that all of these technologies have in common: In the wrong hands, these incredible tools can also do incredible damage.

It's happened to dozens of the 380 women I have worked with as a domestic violence outreach specialist. Some of them have even ended up in jail, with restraining orders, or have lost custody of their children or their life savings and homes as a result of technology being used against them.

How does this happen?

Let's look at a fact pattern that demonstrates a number of different tactics that technically savvy abusers commonly use. Many of my clients have had at least two or three of these tactics used against them, but for purposes of illustration, they have all been incorporated in the story of a domestic violence survivor we'll call "Beth."

Beth was a stay-at-home mom whose husband, Ed, owned his own company. When her children went off to college, Beth made the decision to get a divorce after years of physical and emotional abuse. In the course of leaving her husband, Beth was about to discover that she was also a victim of ongoing technological abuse.

Ed had installed a “smart lock” on their front door, an electronic lock that uses Wi-Fi or Bluetooth together with a cellphone to determine who has access to the house – and who doesn’t – and for how long. Ed would arbitrarily grant or deny Beth access, depending on whether he wanted to punish her or simply monitor when she entered or left home.

Ed had also discovered where she had hidden all of the evidence substantiating her allegations of physical abuse over their years of marriage: her journal, photographs of the bruises he inflicted and hard copies of the records documenting some of the abuse. How did she know he knew? All of these things went missing the day after she filed for divorce. Even after Ed moved out, Beth continued to feel that he was still there watching her every move.

In Part 2, we’ll see how Ed continued to stalk, frighten, harass and discredit Beth even after he was gone.

Ruth Patrick, M.A., is a local resident and domestic violence outreach specialist. Her program WomenSV is a Town Crier Holiday Fund recipient. For more information, call 543-5406.