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Taking Stock: The Current Status of Cyberstalking Research

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Introduction

The growth of technology, and more specifically the Internet, has caused human interaction to undergo a dramatic evolution. Today, the Internet influences almost every aspect of our lives, including how we work, play, and communicate. Posting, tweeting, and chatting have become common practices, and the millennial generation has been raised along with the Internet and online social networks. This technological revolution has altered the way we socialize and communicate in fundamental ways. Followers have replaced friends; comments have replaced conversations; and likes have replaced listening. Individuals post vast amounts of personal information, photos, and videos to gain followers and build their social networks—sometimes without any regard for the potential negative consequences.

The cultural shift that has accompanied this technological revolution has had a trickle-down effect, influencing every aspect of society. One of the key impact areas of this revolution is criminal behavior. Technology has irreversibly altered the landscape of crime perpetration and victimization. Advances to the capabilities of electronic devices, and the widespread use of the Internet have given criminals a variety of new methods and tools with which to commit crime, while making potential victims even more vulnerable (Holt & Bossler, 2014). This is particularly the case with stalking.

Stalking has been part of the criminal justice vernacular for just over two decades; however, in that time, it has received considerable attention from both

researchers and policy-makers. While this attention was initially fueled by cases involving high-profile celebrity victims, today stalking has become a widespread topic of discussion among legislative bodies, school officials, and even members of the general public. As a result of the plethora of research that has been produced, we now have a relatively good understanding of stalking, including its prevalence (e.g., Baum, Catalano, Rand, & Rose, 2009; Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998), the characteristics of stalking perpetrators and victims (e.g., Baum et al., 2009; Fisher, Coker, Garcia, Williams, Clear, & Cook-Craig, 2014; Pathé, Mullen, & Purcell, 2001), and some of the common risk factors for stalking victimization (e.g., Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2002; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 1999; Reyns, Henson, Fisher, Fox, & Nobles, 2015). However, stalking has undergone a technological metamorphosis, and while a great deal is known about traditional stalking, far less is known about its technology-based descendent—cyberstalking.

Commonly thought of as a form of stalking that involves the use of electronic devices and/or the Internet, the growth of cyberstalking has raised many questions. Is it fundamentally different than traditional stalking? How frequently does it actually occur? Who is mostly likely to be a cyberstalking perpetrator or victim? Unfortunately, cyberstalking is a relatively new topic of interest among scholars, and as a result, the research literature is rather sparse. However, by taking stock of the limited information available, some general conclusions can be drawn. With that in mind, the purpose of this chapter is to discuss the current state of cyberstalking research, with particular attention given to the extent of cyberstalking and the causes and correlates of both cyberstalking perpetration and victimization.

Stalking and Cyberstalking: Defining Pursuit Behaviors

Stalking

Stalking was first recognized as a crime by the state of California in 1990, and subsequently by every other U.S. state, as well as several countries around the world (e.g., Canada, Germany, Japan). Although it is widely recognized as criminal, stalking has proven somewhat difficult to define—for state legislators, scholars, and practitioners alike. As a result, in 1992 the U.S. Congress tasked the National Institute of Justice with developing a model stalking code that could serve as a guide for legislators in crafting anti-stalking statutes across the United States (Tjaden, 2013). This code provides a useful starting point for reviewing the legal criteria for stalking. The model stalking code was subsequently revised in 2007 and explains that:

> Any person who purposely engages in a course of conduct directed at a specific person and knows or should know that the course of conduct would cause a reasonable person to:
>
> (a) fear for his or her safety or the safety of a third person; or
>
> (b) suffer other emotional distress
>
> is guilty of stalking (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2007, p. 24).

Although the model stalking code provides what could potentially serve as a universal definition of stalking, there are still inconsistencies in how stalking is defined across jurisdictions. Further, not all of these criteria are included in all stalking statutes, and some of the terms used in the definition require further elaboration, such as "course of conduct," "fear," "emotional distress," and "reasonable person." First, course of conduct refers to the offender's repeated pursuit behaviors, which include but are not limited to, two or more acts such as following, monitoring, or communicating with the victim. Second, fear and emotional distress represent the harm that is suffered by the victim. These criteria in and of themselves are somewhat controversial, and have been the subject of debate among scholars (see Dietz & Martin, 2007; Reyns & Englebrecht, 2012). Third, a reasonable person is said to be someone who would react this way were they in the victim's circumstances (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2007).

Legally speaking, then, stalking involves a course of conduct that is intended to cause the victim some form of emotional harm. Much of what is known about stalking, however, is the result of empirical research conducted by social scientists and other scholars, and does not necessarily adhere to these legal definitional criteria. A further nuance to this discussion is whether the respective research study focuses on perpetration of stalking or stalking victimization. In the case of the latter, the element of criminal intent is often absent from research, because it is difficult to establish from the victim's perspective. Thus, one of the legal criteria for stalking is often left out of stalking research. Overall, in the published research, definitions of stalking have mostly characterized stalking as an unwanted and repeated behavior that may or may not cause the victim to feel fearful (Fox, Nobles, & Fisher, 2011).

Throughout the 1990s when stalking laws were being enacted and research into stalking perpetration and victimization being undertaken, it was presumed that most of the offender's pursuit behaviors would occur in physical proximity to the victim (e.g., following, waiting). While some of the course of conduct could be carried out remotely—for example, through telephone or mail—the possibility that networked computers, smart phones, and other devices would eventually become tools for stalkers was not foreseeable. Thus, a remote form of stalking, cyberstalking, has emerged as an additional concern. Some

states have specifically addressed cyberstalking legislatively, but in most states it is subsumed under the broader stalking or harassment label. From a research perspective, however, cyberstalking has been somewhat ill-defined, and is often equated with online harassment. For several reasons, defining and conceptualizing cyberstalking has been every bit as difficult as defining stalking.

Cyberstalking

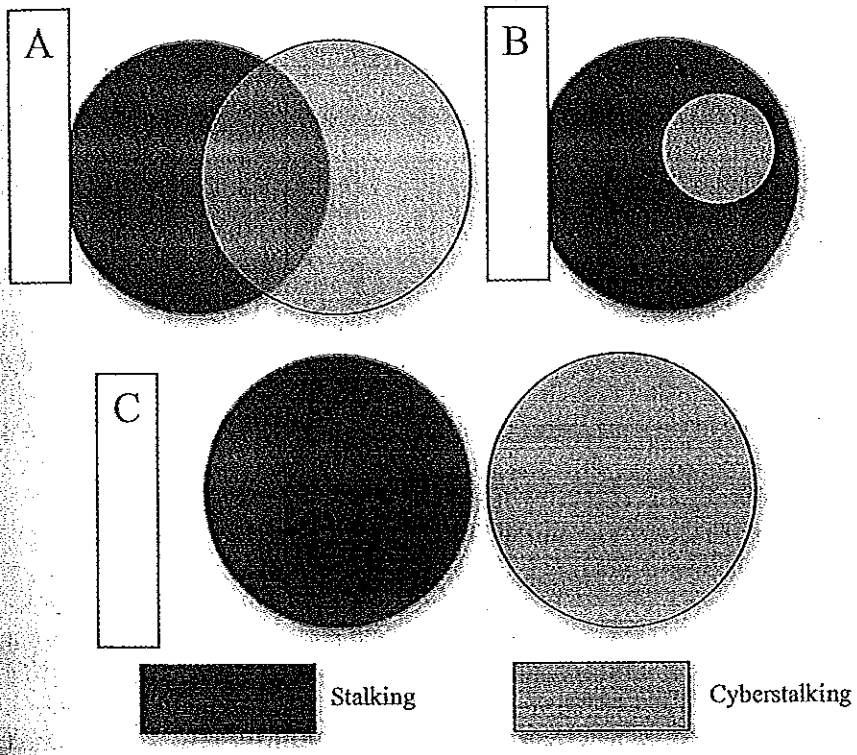
Nobles, Reyns, Fox, and Fisher (2014, p. 989) defined cyberstalking as "...repeated pursuit involving electronic or Internet-capable devices, such as mobile phones, laptop computers, or electronic tablets." Their definition offers a useful starting point for discussion. First, like stalking, cyberstalking involves a course of conduct; that is, pursuit behaviors transpiring two or more times. This is a consistent criterion that is found across many cyberstalking studies (e.g., Reyns, Henson, & Fisher, 2012). Second, this definition highlights the nature of the pursuit and describes some of the tools by which cyberstalking can be experienced (e.g., mobile phones, tablets). Again, this focus on the electronic means by which the stalking occurs has often been underscored in the empirical research (e.g., Baum et al., 2009). There are also notable differences between this definition of cyberstalking and the previously discussed criteria for stalking. Primarily, there is no mention of the emotional harm suffered by the victim. This is an important element of the crime to consider because not only has this 'fear standard' been criticized as exclusionary (see Dietz & Martin, 2007), but it also has been suggested that fear may differ across contexts and victims (Henson, Reyns, & Fisher, 2013; Randa, 2013; Reyns & Englebrecht, 2012). In other words, fear and its antecedents may be different for online crimes as comparted to offline crimes.

Overall, however, the pivotal issue in defining cyberstalking has been whether it is a distinct crime or a variant of the existing crime of stalking. While there are only a few studies that have addressed this issue, the available evidence suggests both similarities and differences between stalking and cyberstalking (e.g., Nobles et al., 2014; Sheridan & Grant, 2007). For example, Sheridan and Grant (2007) compared self-defined stalking victims to those who also experienced online pursuit, and concluded that the process, effects, and responses to victimization were similar across groups. Conversely, Nobles and colleagues (2014) reported that there were significant differences between stalking and cyberstalking victims in a national sample, particularly in relation to their post-victimization experiences, such as self-protection decisions and impact on victims.

Nobles and colleagues (2014) also offered a conceptual comparison of stalking and cyberstalking involving three scenarios that is informative. These three

scenarios represent the three possible relationships between stalking and cyberstalking victimization and are depicted in Figure 1. First, Scenario A depicts the possibility that stalking and cyberstalking are distinct types of victimization that overlap. Put differently, some victims will only experience stalking and some will only experience cyberstalking, while others experience both methods of pursuit. Second, Scenario B shows the possibility that cyberstalking is a "subset or special circumstance of the generalized stalking definition, similar to the conceptual relationship between armed robbery and robbery" (Nobles et al., 2014, p. 990). In other words, cyberstalking *is* stalking. Third, Scenario C conceptualizes the two forms of pursuit as unique and separate, depicting them as distinct legally and by definition.

Figure 1. Three Conceptual Relationships Between Stalking and Cyberstalking



Source: Nobles, Reyns, Fox, & Fisher (2014).

Nobles and colleagues (2014) argued that it is best to consider Scenario B as best capturing the relationship between stalking and cyberstalking. They concluded that scenarios A and C are problematic because of current legal definitions of stalking. Specifically, under state stalking statutes, stalking and cyberstalking are not mutually exclusive crimes. That is, cases involving cyberstalking will also satisfy the legal criteria for stalking. Therefore, while practically and conceptually an individual could be pursued in cyberspace through communication methods such as email and instant messages, and never have any physical contact with the stalker, stalking statutes usually do not distinguish such a situation as a separate crime. Rather, it would be labeled as stalking, in which case Scenario B would most accurately reflect the nature of the relationship between stalking and cyberstalking. In Figure 1, Scenario B depicts cyberstalking as a variant of stalking, wherein specific communication methods are used to facilitate the pursuit behaviors. To reiterate, cyberstalking is stalking.

Extent of Cyberstalking

The extent of cyberstalking is difficult to pinpoint for several reasons. First, the primary sources of crime statistics in the United States—the Uniform Crime Reports and the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)—do not regularly collect statistics on stalking or cyberstalking. Consequently, estimates of the extent of the problem have mostly been generated from small studies of specific populations.

Second and relatedly, these studies have varied substantially with respect to the definitions used to generate the cyberstalking estimates. For example, the preceding discussion explained that cyberstalking is defined as a special case of stalking that involves electronic or digital technologies to facilitate the offender's pursuit of the victim. However, studies have differed with respect to the conceptual relationship between stalking and cyberstalking, often focusing on the element of electronic pursuit, but nearly as often omitting the fear criterion.

Third, besides defining the crime differently, studies have also utilized diverse research methods to study cyberstalking, highlighting some methodological issues that affect estimates. These methodological issues include, but are not limited to, conceptualization and operationalization issues, sampling design issues, and primarily focusing on college student populations (Reyns, 2012). These issues are important because how a subject is studied can affect study results. In assessing the extent of cyberstalking, then, it is important to keep in mind these methodological caveats. Forthcoming sections of the chapter review the extent of cyberstalking perpetration and victimization.

Perpetration

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Perpetration

While cyberstalking, in general, is an understudied phenomenon, cyberstalking perpetration, more specifically, has received almost no attention. The vast majority of cyberstalking studies focus on victimization, attempting to explain why some individuals are more likely to experience cyberstalking than others. To date, there have been only a handful of studies focusing on cyberstalking perpetrators (e.g., D'Ovidio & Doyle, 2003; Ménard & Pincus, 2012; Reyns, Henson, & Fisher, 2012). It is understandably more difficult to capture information about perpetrators than victims, especially given that the majority of cyberstalking studies rely on self-report surveys and perpetrators may be less willing to admit that they have committed a crime. Unfortunately, however, this has resulted in almost no estimates of the extent of cyberstalking perpetration. Studies that estimate the extent of cyberstalking perpetration are highlighted in Table 1.

One of the first studies to estimate the extent of cyberstalking perpetration was Reyns and colleagues' examination of both cyberstalking perpetration and victimization among college students. The researchers analyzed data from a sample of undergraduate students from a large, urban university in the Midwest U.S. to examine the factors associated with cyberstalking. They reported that 4.9% of respondents admitted to engaging in one or more forms of cyberstalking behaviors, including repeated unwanted contacts, harassment, unwanted sexual advances, and threats of violence. This finding was echoed by Marcum, Higgins, and Ricketts's (2014) study of cyberstalking among students at a rural high school in the Southeast U.S. Utilizing a similar measure of cyberstalking, Marcum and colleagues reported that about 5% of respondents disclosed they had engaged in cyberstalking, which was operationalized as repeatedly contacting someone after being asked to stop.

In one of the more comprehensive analyses of cyberstalking perpetration, Strawhun, Adams, and Huss (2013) examined cyberstalking perpetration and victimization among a sample of undergraduate students from a private university in the Midwestern U.S. Strawhun and colleagues utilized a multi-item measure referred to as the *Electronic Use Pursuit Behavioral Index* (EUPBI) that included 42 items asking respondents about their role in cyberstalking perpetration and victimization. Based on the responses to an open-ended question asking if the respondent believes he or she has ever stalked someone electronically," Strawhun and colleagues estimated that approximately 26.5% of their sample has perpetrated cyberstalking (2013, p. 719). While this estimate is much higher than the previously discussed estimates, it should be noted that allowing respondents to identify themselves as cyberstalkers may have resulted

in measurement error since not everyone in the sample would have defined stalking in the same way.

Table 1. Studies of the Extent of Cyberstalking Perpetration

Authors (Date)	Method	Estimate of Perpetration
Reyns, Henson, & Fisher (2012)	Survey of college student sample (n = 974)	4.9%
Strawhun, Adams, & Huss (2013)	Survey of college student sample (n = 248)	26.5%
Marcum, Higgins, & Ricketts (2014)	Survey of high school student sample (n = 1,617)	5%

Victimization

Estimates of cyberstalking victimization suggest that it is a potentially widespread form of criminal victimization. However many of these victimization estimates are based on fairly broad definitions of the crime and do not necessarily involve repeated pursuit or fearful victims. Thus, cyberstalking is often unintentionally grouped with analogous crimes that do not involve stalking, such as online harassment and cyberbullying. That being said, some of the more rigorous estimates of cyberstalking victimization do make such distinctions.

In 2006, a stalking supplement was included with the NCVS called the Supplemental Victimization Survey. The purpose of the supplement was to estimate the extent and nature of stalking victimization against adults in the United States. The survey also included questions about the nature of the pursuit that victims experienced, including cyberstalking. The results of the survey indicated that 1.5% of persons age 18 or older were victims of stalking in the 12 months prior to the survey, and a further 1% of respondents were victims of harassment. Importantly, the distinguishing feature separating these two types of victimization was whether the victim felt fearful as a result of the perpetrator's attempts at contact (Catalano, 2012). In terms of cyberstalking, approximately one in four victims (26%) were cyberstalked during the encounter (Baum et al., 2009).[1]

1. This conceptualization of cyberstalking is the same as that described in Figure 1, which describes cyberstalking as a type of stalking.

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Table 2. Studies

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The stalking supplement also provided some limited information about the forms that cyberstalking takes. Specifically, 82% of cyberstalking encounters involved email, 35% involved instant messages, 12% involved blogs or bulletin boards, 9% involved Internet sites about the victim, and 4% involved chat rooms (Baum et al., 2009). Interestingly, many stalking victims (7%) were also monitored electronically by the stalker through computer spyware, video/digital cameras, listening devices/bugs, or global positioning systems (Baum et al., 2009).

The only other national-level study to provide estimates of the extent of cyberstalking victimization was published by Fisher and associates (2002) and included a nationally representative sample of college women. Like the NCVS stalking supplement, Fisher and colleagues' study conceptualized cyberstalking as transpiring during the course of a stalking encounter. Of the 13% of the sample that were identified as victims of stalking, approximately 25% were cyberstalked. However, data for this study were collected in 1997, and hence, the only method of cyberstalking included in the estimates was pursuit via email. It is interesting that although these two studies were conducted about 10 years apart, they arrived at similar estimates of victimization. These studies are highlighted along with other studies estimating the extent of cyberstalking victimization in Table 2.

Table 2. Studies of the Extent of Cyberstalking Victimization

Authors (Date)	Method	Estimate of Victimization	Fear Criterion
National-Level Studies			
Fisher at al. (2002)	National survey of college women (n = 4,446)	24.7% of stalking victims	Yes
Catalano (2012)	National survey of U.S. adults (n = 65,270)	26% of stalking victims	Yes
Studies of Other Populations			
Jerin & Dolinsky (2001)	Survey of dating website users (n = 154)	26.8%	Yes
Spitzberg & Hoobler (2002)	Survey of college student sample (n = 235)	19.6%	Yes

Table 2: Studies of the Extent of Cyberstalking Victimization, *continued*

Authors (Date)	Method	Estimate of Victimization	Fear Criterion
Studies of Other Populations, *continued*			
D'Ovidio & Doyle (2003)	New York Police Department Data	42.8% of cyber-crimes	Yes
Alexy, Burgess, Baker, & Smoyak (2005)	Survey of college student sample (n = 756)	3.7% (online only) to 31.5% of stalking victims	No
Sheridan & Grant (2007)	Survey of self-identified stalking victims (n = 1,051)	7.2%	No
Kraft & Wang (2010)	Survey of college student sample (n = 471)	9%	Yes
Reyns, Henson, & Fisher (2012)	Survey of college student sample (n = 974)	40.8%	No
Dreßing, Bailer, Anders, Wagner, & Gallas (2014)	Survey of sample of online social network users (n = 6,379)	6.3% to 8.4% (depending on the definition)	Yes

Each of the studies listed in Table 2 have contributed to the body of knowledge on the extent of cyberstalking victimization. While not all of these can be discussed individually, a few examples are reviewed in detail. First, D'Ovidio and Doyle (2003) used data from the New York Police Department's (NYPD) Computer Investigation and Technology Unit (CITU) from 1996 to 2000 to assess the extent of cyberstalking. Specifically, they investigated the degree to which cases of aggravated harassment processed by the NYPD involved a computer or the Internet. This study generated two noteworthy findings: cyberstalking was the most prevalent form of cybercrime victimization investigated during this period; and, 42% of cases of aggravated harassment could be classified as cyberstalking. Thus, while this study does not illuminate the extent of cyberstalking against all residents of the United States, it does provide some measure of the scope of the problem relative to other forms of cybercrime.

In another study of the extent of cyberstalking victimization, Dreßing and colleagues (2014) conducted an online survey of users of the German online social

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Victimization, *continued*

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network StudiVZ to assess the extent, nature, and consequences of cyberstalking. This study provides an opportunity to explore how the definitional criteria for cyberstalking can impact estimates of the extent of the problem. Specifically, in this study the research team used three criteria to identify individuals as victims of cyberstalking: (1) they experienced unwanted Internet contacts (i.e., harassment) at some time in their lives; (2) these contacts lasted for more than two weeks; and, (3) the harassment provoked fear in the victim. Across these criteria, the results suggested that 43% of respondents had experienced online harassment, 19% of these individuals were harassed for a period of two weeks or longer, 8% of all respondents were harassed and felt fearful (but not for two weeks or longer), and 6% were harassed for two weeks or longer and experienced feelings of fear. Thus, of the over 6,000 individuals who participated in the online survey, 6% to 8% had been victims of cyberstalking in their lifetime.

The majority of the remaining studies listed in Table 2 primarily focused on cyberstalking among college students. For example, results from the previously discussed study by Reyns and colleagues (2012) showed a higher lifetime prevalence of cyberstalking, but the estimates varied depending on the type of pursuit behavior the victim repeatedly experienced. In particular, 23% had experienced unwanted online contacts, 20% experienced online harassment, 13% experienced unwanted sexual advances, 4% were threatened with violence, and 40% experienced any of these forms of online pursuit. Other studies have also found that the extent of victimization differs depending on the type of pursuit behavior the victim experienced (e.g., Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002).

Overall, when considering the studies listed in Table 2, it appears that cyberstalking affects a significant number of individuals, both amongst general populations and college students. Yet it is difficult to make comparisons across these studies due to differences in definitions, study methodologies employed by researchers, and the small number of studies that have been published. More research is needed to determine the prevalence of this form of stalking, particularly studies examining groups other than college students. Cyberstalking victimization is revisited later in the chapter and discussed with respect to factors that put individuals at risk for being victimized.

Predictors of Cyberstalking

In addition to estimating the extent of cyberstalking, much of the literature has focused on identifying risk factors, or predictors, for both perpetration and victimization. As with many forms of crime and deviance, researchers have spent substantial time and effort attempting to explain why some individuals

become cyberstalkers and/or why some individuals are more likely to experience cyberstalking victimization. However, as was observed with respect to estimating the extent of the crime, these research endeavors also have their share of problems, including methodological issues and atheoretical or reductionist approaches to explaining the phenomena.

One of the key methodological missteps of cyberstalking research is the utilization of self-report surveys that lack appropriately constructed measures. Self-report surveys are very useful as they allow researchers to collect a wide array of information in a quick and efficient manner. However, while they have proven invaluable in many ways as a means of collecting data, self-report surveys are not without faults (Cantor & Lynch, 2000). If the questions used do not properly convey the meaning of constructs, then much may be left open to the respondents' interpretation, which could have a significant impact on their responses. For example, if a self-report survey simply asked, "Have you experienced cyberstalking victimization?" a respondent who is unsure what may be considered cyberstalking could respond, "No," when they actually have experienced some form of cyberstalking. While it is not feasible, or even prudent, to eliminate the use of self-report surveys, researchers should err on the side of caution when developing survey questions and evaluating data collected with them.

Further, in addition to the conceptualization and operationalization issues mentioned previously, there is also a lack of diversity in the application of theoretical concepts in cyberstalking research. Within the rather limited cyberstalking literature, very few studies have attempted to utilize criminology theory to help explain why certain individuals are more likely to be perpetrators or victims (e.g., Lowry, Zhang, Wang, Wu, and Siponen, 2013; Marcum et al., 2014; Reyns, Henson, & Fisher, 2011). Instead, many cyberstalking researchers simply opt to present descriptive information about perpetrators and/or victims. As a result of this restraint, the majority of information about the predictors of cyberstalking perpetration and victimization is limited to demographic and basic behavioral characteristics.

Perpetration

A primary focus of the field of criminology has been to identify patterns in criminal behavior. Patterns in offender characteristics, such as those based on gender, age, race, and other personal qualities of offenders can then be used in the development of criminological theories. Within the cyberstalking literature, these research efforts have just recently begun, and only a limited number of studies have been published that provide information on cyberstalking

perpetrators, such as their demographic characteristics and behaviors. Given this relatively undeveloped state of the research, theoretical explanations of cyberstalking perpetration are all but absent from the literature. Forthcoming sections of the chapter review those studies that have begun to move the study of cyberstalking toward a theoretical understanding of the crime.

Perpetrator Characteristics

Several academic studies and organizational reports have provided information on the characteristics of cyberstalking perpetrators. This information includes both demographic characteristics of cyberstalkers, as well as information regarding perpetrators' methods of cyberstalking. Though there is variation across data sources, when considered together the available information paints a relatively clear picture of the typical cyberstalker. It must be noted, however, that further research is necessary to more accurately classify patterns in perpetration.

Working to Halt Online Abuse (WHOA), an online organization focused on combating online harassment and abuse, compiles annual cyberstalking statistics based on cases reported to them. Among cases reported in 2013, WHOA (2015) data indicate that cyberstalkers are primarily males (40%).[2] D'Ovidio and Doyle (2003), who examined cases investigated by the NYPD, reported a similar finding. That is, of those cases between 1996 and 2000 involving cyberstalking, perpetrators were typically male (80%). These findings are consistent with the traditional stalking literature, which often reports that women are more often victims and men more often perpetrators (Basile, Swahn, Chen, & Saltzman, 2006; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

A gender-based pattern in cyberstalking perpetration also has been examined within published academic research (Dreßing et al., 2014; Ménard & Pincus, 2011; Reyns et al., 2012). Interestingly, however, based on the limited research available, it seems that gender differences are not as apparent among student populations. For example, with their study of cyberstalking victimization and perpetration, Reyns and colleagues (2012) indicated that approximately 51% of admitted cyberstalking perpetrators were males. Again, this echoes the traditional stalking research in which college student samples often produce more balanced rates of perpetration across gender (e.g., Ménard & Pincus, 2011; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2001).

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2. 30% of harassers were female and in 30% of cases, the gender of the stalker was unknown.

Though much less information exists on other demographic characteristics f cyberstalkers, some additional patterns can be identified.[3] For example, in erms of race, it seems that the majority of cyberstalking perpetrators are White. Vith their analysis the NYPD CITU's cyberstalking cases, D'Ovidio and Doyle .003 reported that 74% of perpetrators were White. Similarly, Reyns and colleagues (2012) indicated that almost 85% of respondents who admitted to cyberstalking perpetration in their study were White. In regards to sexual orientation, only one study has examined the sexual orientation of cyberstalking perpetrators. Reyns et al. (2012) reported that almost 85% of individuals who admitted to cyberstalking perpetration were heterosexual. These studies provide only a limited view of the demographic characteristics of perpetrators, and it is clear that more research is needed.

While our current understanding of the demographic characteristics of cyberstalking perpetrators is rather limited, more is known about the methods used to perpetrate cyberstalking. Such information is more readily available because it can often be obtained from cyberstalking victims in addition to perpetrators. Based on both organizational reports and academic research, it appears that a large portion of cyberstalkers utilize email as a key method of contact. Both WHOA (2015) and D'Ovidio & Doyle (2003) reported that email was one of the primary methods of cyberstalking (30% and 79%, respectively). Further, the majority of cyberstalking and online harassment cases began via email contact between stalker and victim (WHOA, 2009). As noted previously, the stalking supplement to the 2006 NCVS indicated that 82% of cyberstalking encounters occurred via email (Baum et al., 2009). This finding is supported by Dreßing and colleagues' (2014) examination of cyberstalking among users of a German social networking site. With their study, Dreßing and associates (2014) found that almost 93% of cyberstalking occurred via email. Other common arenas for cyberstalking perpetration include social networking sites (Henson, Reyns, & Fisher, 2011, 2013; Strawhun et al., 2013; WHOA, 2015), instant messaging/chat programs (D'Ovidio & Doyle, 2003; WHOA, 2015), and dating sites (Jerin & Dolinsky, 2001; WHOA, 2015). It is worth noting that the methods of cyberstalking perpetrators appear to adapt along with the popular technology. That is, as new forms of online communication are developed, there will undoubtedly be new arenas for cyberstalking (e.g., stalking through apps).

3. Information regarding the relationship between cyberstalking perpetrators and victims will be discussed in detail in the following victimization sections.

Explaining Cyberstalking Perpetration

It is important to identify patterns in cyberst the characteristics of cyberstalkers and their met important to understand why individuals perpetr icy responses to the crime can be developed. Unfc has been produced to address this issue. As note erature on cyberstalking perpetration is both ne few studies have been published that provide an certain individuals become cyberstalkers (Lowry et Ménard & Pincus, 2012). Based on these limited clusions can be reached.

One of the more predominant theoretical expl tfredson and Hirschi's general theory of crime. Gc originally posited that individuals possessing low to engage in deviant, delinquent, and criminal l been extensively tested by criminologists and ha an explanation for both crime and delinquency (e.g., the cyberstalking literature, there is preliminary ev may possess lower levels of self-control (Lowry 2014). For example, with their study of cyberstall dents, Marcum and associates (2014) examined tl in cyberstalking perpetration. They concluded th vidual committing cyberstalking increased, as his c creased. As will be discussed later in the chapter, t in the cyberstalking victimization literature.

Additionally, within the cyberstalking literatu that perpetrators and victims often had some typ romantic relationship, friendship) (Dreßing et a WHOA, 2015). This suggests that cyberstalking may be fueled to some extent by such relationship ending of such relationships. For instance, Straw examined cyberstalking perpetration and victimiza dergraduate college students, focusing specifical breakups. They reported that prior attachment a dictors of cyberstalking perpetration.

Finally, in one of the more comprehensive exa of cyberstalking perpetration, Ménard and Pincu of college students to determine the influence of psychological characteristics on both cyberstalking

Explaining Cyberstalking Perpetration

It is important to identify patterns in cyberstalking perpetration, such as the characteristics of cyberstalkers and their methods of pursuit, but it is also important to understand why individuals perpetrate cyberstalking so that policy responses to the crime can be developed. Unfortunately, very little research has been produced to address this issue. As noted previously, the research literature on cyberstalking perpetration is both new and sparse. To date, only a few studies have been published that provide any theoretical insight into why certain individuals become cyberstalkers (Lowry et al., 2013; Marcum et al., 2014; Ménard & Pincus, 2012). Based on these limited studies, however, some conclusions can be reached.

One of the more predominant theoretical explanations criminology is Gottfredson and Hirschi's general theory of crime. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) originally posited that individuals possessing low self-control are more likely to engage in deviant, delinquent, and criminal behaviors. This premise has been extensively tested by criminologists and has received strong support as an explanation for both crime and delinquency (e.g., Pratt & Cullen, 2000). Within the cyberstalking literature, there is preliminary evidence that perpetrators also may possess lower levels of self-control (Lowry et al., 2013; Marcum et al., 2014). For example, with their study of cyberstalking among high school students, Marcum and associates (2014) examined the role that self-control plays in cyberstalking perpetration. They concluded that the likelihood of an individual committing cyberstalking increased, as his or her level of self-control decreased. As will be discussed later in the chapter, this finding is often mirrored in the cyberstalking victimization literature.

Additionally, within the cyberstalking literature it is frequently reported that perpetrators and victims often had some type of prior relationship (e.g., romantic relationship, friendship) (Dreßing et al., 2014; Reyns et al., 2012; WHOA, 2015). This suggests that cyberstalking perpetration, like stalking, may be fueled to some extent by such relationships, or more specifically by the ending of such relationships. For instance, Strawhun and colleagues (2013) examined cyberstalking perpetration and victimization among a sample of undergraduate college students, focusing specifically on intimate relationship breakups. They reported that prior attachment and jealousy were both predictors of cyberstalking perpetration.

Finally, in one of the more comprehensive examinations of the predictors of cyberstalking perpetration, Ménard and Pincus (2012) examined a sample of college students to determine the influence of underlying emotional and psychological characteristics on both cyberstalking and traditional (overt) stalk-

ing perpetration and victimization. In particular, Ménard and Pincus (2012) examined the effects of childhood trauma, attachment, alcohol use, and personality disorders on stalking perpetration. While their findings differed somewhat for male and female subjects, they generally found that childhood sexual maltreatment and personality disorders resulting from that maltreatment predicted cyberstalking perpetration for both men and women. Ménard and Pincus's (2012) work, in combination with the work of the previously discussed researchers, seems to indicate that the causes of cyberstalking perpetration could be deeply rooted in emotional and/or psychological development.

Victimization

Within the field of victimology, much research has been devoted to describing and explaining criminal victimization. Research into cyberstalking victimization shares this focus; however, the current state of victimological knowledge on this form of victimization is still developing, and is in large part underscored as much by unanswered research questions as those that have been answered (Parsons-Pollard & Moriarty, 2009). Like other facets of cyberstalking, information regarding the nature of cyberstalking victimization can be gleaned from a small number of research studies, including descriptive information about victim characteristics as well as theoretically-derived risk factors for victimization (e.g., Dreßing et al., 2014; Nobles et al., Reyns et al., 2011).

Victim Characteristics

With respect to the gender of victims of cyberstalking, available evidence suggests that victims are predominantly females (e.g., Dreßing et al., 2014; Kraft & Wang, 2010; Moriarty & Freiberger, 2008; Reyns et al., 2014). For example, Reyns and colleagues (2012) reported a significant gender difference in victimization rates for females and males, with 46% of females having experienced some form of cyberstalking in their lives, compared to 32% of males. This has been a consistent finding across research studies and also corresponds with gender patterns reported in the greater stalking literature (e.g., Black, Basile, Breiding, Smith, Walters, Merrick, Chen, & Stevens, 2011). Another similarity victims of cyberstalking appear to share with victims of offline stalking is that they tend to be young (e.g., Black et al., 2011; Dreßing et al., 2014). In Dreßing and colleagues' (2014) study, for example, the results suggested that the average age of victims was 24 years.

Victim patterns in other demographic characteristics, such as race, have been studied less frequently. Kraft and Wang (2010), for example, reported that victims in their study were primarily White (82%), but so too was the

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knew who their stalker was, the most common
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sample of college students who participated in the study. Conversely, Reyns and colleagues (2012) found that non-Whites had significantly higher victimization rates than did Whites, with 48% of non-Whites experiencing cyberstalking during their lives, compared to 39% of Whites. This finding aligns with race patterns that have been reported in the offline stalking victimization research (Black et al., 2011). A similar demographic characteristic was explored by Dreßing and associates (2014), who investigated the nationality of victims of cyberstalking. However, since the study recruited participants from a German online social network it is not surprising that 98% of victims in their study were German.

A few studies have also explored the victim characteristics of sexual orientation and relationship status, as well as the relationship between the victim and the offender. First, Reyns and his collaborators (2012) reported that non-heterosexuals had higher cyberstalking victimization rates than heterosexuals. Unfortunately, this study did not explore *why* this was the case, but did note that the cyberstalking victimization rate was significantly higher among non-heterosexuals (56%) than among heterosexuals (39%).

Second, research examining whether the relationship status of victims is related to cyberstalking victimization is conflicting. For example, the study by Dreßing and colleagues (2014) indicates that victims are predominantly single (i.e., not in a relationship), whereas Reyns and associates (2012) reported that victims are most often in some kind of a romantic relationship. Thus, patterns in relationship status have been difficult to identify.

Third, the majority of research suggests that although victims are more likely to be cyberstalked by someone they know, there are also a large proportion of cases involving strangers. However, the data on the victim-offender relationship are far from unequivocal. To illustrate, Moriarty and Freiberger (2008) collected information on cyberstalking from newspaper articles and explained that the victim-offender relationship is often ambiguous in cyberstalking cases. In approximately half of cases included in their study victims had no relationship with their stalker. This is similar to what was reported in the study by Reyns and colleagues (2012), which found that 44% of victims were cyberstalked by a stranger, 38% by a friend or acquaintance, and 17% by an intimate partner. Dreßing and associates (2014) reported among victims who knew who their stalker was, the most common victim-offender relationships were ex-partners (29%) and acquaintances (20%), followed by friends (8%), fellow students or work colleagues (6%), ex-partners or partners (4.5%), family members (1%), and distant relatives (0.5%). Interestingly, the most frequent victim-offender relationship uncovered in this study included all other persons not fitting into one of these categories (30%).

Descriptive information, such as the victim characteristics reviewed above, is valuable because it provides a foundation upon which theories of victimization can develop. However, simple demographic risk factors for victimization also do not offer many directions for avoiding victimization. Therefore, scholars who have studied cyberstalking victimization have also worked toward identifying other risk factors, such as victim Internet behaviors, and testing victimization theories that offer insights into the causes of cyberstalking victimization.

Explaining Cyberstalking Victimization

Very little research has been published to identify factors that place individuals at risk for becoming victims of cyberstalking. One study to address this issue, however, was conducted by Reyns and colleagues (2011), who adapted and applied the lifestyle-routine activity approach from victimology to identify risk factors for victimization. Briefly, lifestyle-routine activity theory is a prominent theory in criminology and victimology that is premised on the assumption that opportunity is the cause of criminal victimization. That is, without an opportunity for a crime to occur, it is unlikely that targets will be victimized. According to the theory, there are three essential ingredients to criminal opportunities: (1) motivated offenders, (2) suitable targets, and (3) an absence of capable guardianship. Further, when these three elements converge an opportunity for crime is created. Therefore, from a victimization standpoint, individuals whose lifestyles and routine activities facilitate the creation of these opportunities are more likely to experience criminal victimization.

In using this theory to explain cyberstalking victimization, Reyns and associates adapted the central concepts of the theory—exposure and proximity to motivated offenders, target suitability, and guardianship—to the cyberspace environment, particularly its online social networks (e.g., Facebook). Overall, their results suggested that the factors that create opportunities for cyberstalking varied depending on the type of cyberstalking behavior the victim experienced. That is, the authors identified determinants of victimization for five types of cyberstalking, including unwanted contact, harassment, sexual advances, threats of violence, and general cyberstalking (i.e., the victim experienced any one of these forms of online pursuit). As an example, the results suggested that the number of photos posted on one's online social network was positively related to cyberstalking in the form of harassment. Similarly, the authors found that the number of daily social network updates was a positive and statistically significant predictor of cyberstalking in the form of sexual advances.

The study results also suggested consistent correlates of victimization across types of online pursuit, as well as for the general category of cyberstalking vic-

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timization. Importantly, individuals who added strangers to their online social networks were significantly more likely to be cyberstalked.[4] Indeed, allowing strangers to access these social networks increased the likelihood that individuals would experience any form of cyberstalking by two and a half times. Another consistent predictor of victimization was having friends who engaged in various forms of online interpersonal victimization. Associating with these deviant peers increased individuals' chances of being cyberstalked by about 25%. Further, those who engaged in these sorts of activities themselves were consequently at a substantially higher likelihood of being cyberstalked—by as much as 14 times depending on the form of the online pursuit. Finally, this study offered preliminary support for the hypothesis that the effects of these victim behaviors were moderated by gender. In other words, the effects of behaviors such as the number daily updates or the number of social network accounts actually depended on the victim's gender (Reyns et al., 2011).

An alternative theoretical explanation for cyberstalking victimization is found in Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) general theory of crime. As discussed in the context of cyberstalking perpetration, this theory focuses on low self-control as an explanation for criminality, and has since been adopted as a theory of criminal victimization. According to Schreck (1999) low self-control carries with it an increased vulnerability to victimization, meaning that individuals who lack self-control are at heightened risk for being victimized. To date, only one study has applied this theory to cyberstalking victimization. Reyns (2010a) examined the effects of low self-control upon the likelihood of experiencing several types of cyberstalking victimization amongst a sample of U.S. college students. The results suggested support for the theory, but it was not universal for all types of cyberstalking victimization. Specifically, individuals with low self-control had a 60% higher likelihood of experiencing repeated unwanted contacts from a cyberstalker, but low self-control was not a significant predictor of any other type of cyberstalking victimization (i.e., online harassment, unwanted sexual advances, threats of violence).

Where Does This Leave Us?

By evaluating the full spectrum of the cyberstalking literature, two things become clear. First, great strides have been made in the last decade to improve

4. This effect was observed for all types of cyberstalking victimization except for threats of violence.

our understanding of cyberstalking. Our knowledge of cyberstalking has increased exponentially in that time. Secondly, however, there is also still much we do not know, as there are many questions that either have not been answered or have not been answered fully. The remainder of this chapter highlights the current status of cyberstalking research, detailing what is currently known—and thus far unknown—about cyberstalking.

What We Know

First, cyberstalking perpetration is uncommon, while cyberstalking victimization is common. Put differently, based on the available research, it appears that a relatively small number of individuals engage in cyberstalking behaviors as perpetrators, but a significant number of individuals experience cyberstalking victimization. Estimates presented previously suggested that 5% to 26% of study participants have engaged in cyberstalking pursuit behaviors, while as much as 40% of individuals have been victims of cyberstalking. However, the usual qualification applies, which is that there are only a small number of studies that have estimated the extent of cyberstalking victimization, and fewer still that have assessed the scope of perpetration, so these conclusions should be considered tentative.

Second, basic patterns in characteristics of cyberstalkers and cyberstalking victims can be identified based on the available research. That is, cyberstalkers are typically White males. Additionally, cyberstalking victims are predominantly young females. Although research has explored race patterns in cyberstalking victimization, findings have been inconclusive, with some studies reporting higher victimization rates against Whites, and others, against non-Whites. Finally, studies suggest that victims and offenders often have some sort of prior relationship. In other words, it seems that cyberstalking is frequently perpetrated by someone known to the victim. However, the studies reviewed previously also suggest that nearly as often victims are pursued by strangers or do not know who is stalking them. More research into these perpetrator and victim patterns will allow for more definitive conclusions to be made.

Third, theories from criminology, victimology, psychology, and other fields provide valuable insights into the causes of cyberstalking perpetration and victimization. With respect to the predictors of perpetration, research indicates that childhood victimization and personality disorders are positively related to cyberstalking behaviors. Relatedly, a particular personality trait—low self-control—has also been linked with cyberstalking. From a victimization perspective, low self-control has also been identified as a precipitator of

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victimization. Further, victim behaviors that can facilitate opportunities for victimization, such as online social network activities can also increase one's likelihood of being victimized. These preliminary but promising results should be encouraging to researchers interested in explaining the antecedents to cyberstalking perpetration and/or victimization. We call on future research to apply more theories from criminology, victimology, and psychology and continue to develop our theoretical understanding of cyberstalking.

Fourth, more research is needed. As the previous discussion unmistakably suggests, the research that has been undertaken provides valuable information regarding the extent and nature of cyberstalking. However, there is more work to be done in exploring issues related to the scope of the crime, patterns in perpetrator and victim characteristics, and theory testing before conclusions can be reached. Beyond these issues, there are other dimensions of cyberstalking about which no research has been published. With this in mind, the next section identifies features of cyberstalking that remain unexplored.

What We Don't Know

First, one of the core, but still unsettled issues within the cyberstalking literature is how best to define, operationalize, and then study cyberstalking. Until a consistent definition can be agreed upon, there will continue to be variation across studies in the criteria used to identify instances of cyberstalking. Accordingly, identifying patterns and risk factors for perpetration and victimization will remain elusive since comparing studies will be difficult. In this chapter, we argued that based on research to date, cyberstalking is not a unique criminal behavior, and rather, should be considered a pursuit behavior carried out using digital technologies. Furthermore, and on a related note, the previously discussed 'fear standard' needs to be addressed. Most definitions of offline stalking include a requirement that the offender intended to cause the victim harm, and that the victim experienced this harm in the form of fear or a similar form of emotional distress. Such uniformity is absent from the cyberstalking research, and the issue is further confounded by fear of crime research that suggests fear of online crime is in some ways different that fear of offline crimes (e.g., Henson et al., 2013).

Second, the consequences of cyberstalking victimization are unknown. It has been argued that the consequences of being cyberstalked are quite severe. For example, Vice President Al Gore stated that "[t]his kind of harassment can be as frightening and as real as being followed and watched in your neighborhood or in your home" (Reno, 1999, p. 1). However, research has yet to empirically study this issue, so such conclusions are unsupported empirically. Yet

research into traditional or offline stalking indicates that being pursued does harm victims psychologically and emotionally, and thus it is reasonable to conclude similar post-victimization consequences will affect cyberstalking victims (e.g., Basile, Arias, Desai, & Thompson, 2004; Dreßing, Kuehner, & Gass, 2005). There may also be physiological, financial, social, and behavioral consequences of cyberstalking; only with future research can such conclusions advance beyond speculation into the realm of scientific fact.

Third, best practices for preventing cyberstalking victimization have not been fully developed. On one hand, findings from cyberstalking victimization research suggest that if Internet users constrain their online activities, they should theoretically have reduced risks for victimization because stalkers will have fewer opportunities to offend. On the other hand, limiting legitimate online behaviors may be overly restrictive. Research identifying particular behaviors or routines that increase victimization risk would be valuable in finding a middle ground in which potential victims can protect themselves without unnecessarily restricting their online behaviors. Existing crime prevention strategies from criminology, notably situational crime prevention, may also be useful in preventing cyberstalking victimization (e.g., Clarke, 1997; Reyns, 2010b). However, like so many facets of cybercrime study, research has been slow to apply these time-tested ideas to crimes occurring within cyberspace domains (see Clarke, 2004; Newman & Clarke, 2003).

Conclusion

Cyberstalking remains a relatively unexplored phenomenon when compared with other tactics used by stalkers to pursue their victims (e.g., following, spying). This chapter reviewed the small number of research studies that have investigated its extent and nature. Clearly, one of the recurrent themes of the chapter, however, is that our understanding of cyberstalkers or their victims is still rather limited. Hopefully, however, this is only a temporary state, and the cyberstalking literature will continue to expand and those unanswered will be addressed. There is little doubt that the growth cyberstalking will slow anytime soon. It is the responsibility of researchers to ensure our understanding of cyberstalking continues to grow with equal vigor.