Protection Against Pursuit: A Conceptual and Empirical Comparison of Cyberstalking and Stalking Victimization among a National Sample

ABSTRACT

Cyberstalking is a relatively understudied area in criminology, with no consensus among scholars as to whether it represents a modified form of stalking or whether it is an entirely new and emerging criminal phenomenon. Using data from the 2006 Supplemental Victimization Survey to the National Crime Victimization Survey, this study compares stalking and cyberstalking victims across several dimensions, including situational features of their experiences and self-protective behaviors. Results indicate that there are significant differences between stalking and cyberstalking victims, including their number of self-protective behaviors adopted, duration of contact with their stalker, financial costs of victimization, and perceived fear at onset. Perceived fear over time, the occurrence of a physical attack, and sex of the victim were all associated with a higher number of self-protective behaviors for cyberstalking victims compared to stalking victims, net of the effect of the control variables. Implications for stalking theory, research, and criminal justice policy are discussed.

Keywords: Stalking, cyberstalking, victimization, self-protective behavior

INTRODUCTION

Since stalking was first criminalized in the 1990s, researchers have devoted considerable

attention to understanding the nature and extent of unwanted pursuit behaviors and their

outcomes for victims (Baum, Catalano, Rand, & Rose, 2009; Björklund, Häkkänen-Nyholm,

Sheridan, & Roberts, 2010; Coleman, 1997; Englebrecht & Reyns, 2011; Fisher, Cullen, &

Turner, 2002; Jordan, Wilcox, & Pritchard, 2007; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 1999; Nobles, Fox,

Piquero, & Piquero, 2009; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). A key issue

that researchers have yet to reach consensus on relates to precisely how "cyberstalking" should

be defined. It remains an open question, one deserving of further scientific scrutiny, whether

cyberstalking is a variant of stalking that incorporates special circumstances (e.g., technology),

or as an entirely separate and distinct criminal behavior. Recent research has differentiated

"traditional" stalking behaviors from cyberstalking, or unwanted pursuit conducted

electronically, using different operational definitions (Alexy, Burgess, Baker, & Smoyak, 2005;

D'Ovidio & Doyle, 2003; Kraft & Wang, 2010; Sheridan & Grant, 2007; Spitzberg & Hoobler,

2002). Thus, criminologists have recently placed an emphasis on characterizing dimensions of

cyberstalking and determining its extent (Reyns, Henson, & Fisher, 2012). For the purposes of

this study, cyberstalking is operationally defined using responses from individuals' self-reported

experiences with harassing or threatening communication via the Internet, including: email,

instant messenger, chat rooms, blogs, message or bulletin boards, and other Internet sites.

One issue pertinent to understanding similarities and differences between stalking and

cyberstalking is the nature of the victim's response. A logical supposition is that victims of each

type of crime react to the experience by adopting a range of self-protective behaviors, and those

behaviors may directly influence outcomes, such as the risk of injury (Bachman, Saltzman,

Thompson, & Carmody, 2002). The environmental criminology literature has investigated the role of guardianship and self-protection in preventing crime (Cohen et al., 1980; Felson, 1995; Reynald, 2010). Generally, the literature supports the routine activity theory expectation that guardianship efforts reduce victimization risks (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Spano & Freilich, 2009; Tark & Kleck, 2006; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2003; Wilcox, Madensen, & Tillyer, 2007b). However, the body of research examining guardianship patterns and factors that influence self-protective behaviors among crime victims is still developing, and it remains an unanswered question as to which factors influence victims' decisions to adopt protective measures. Unpacking this issue is further complicated by the substantial number of stalking cases in which the perpetrator is known to the victim, including cases in which there was a prior intimate relationship. The current state of evidence suggests that adoption of such behaviors varies across populations, types of victimization, and contexts (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Fisher, Daigle, Cullen, & Santana, 2007; Guerette & Santana, 2010; Lurigio, 1987; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2003). Past studies examining victims' protective behaviors indicate that individual characteristics, lifestyles that expose individuals to risk, past victimization experiences, and fear of crime are related to individuals' decisions to protect themselves (Fisher et al., 2000; Lurigio, 1987; Tewksbury & Mustaine, 2003).

The current study integrates these two lines of scholarly research—stalking victimization and victim decision making—to address two primary research questions. First, we compared various dimensions of stalking and cyberstalking victimization (e.g., duration, costs, fear, victim characteristics, protective acts by victims) to inform the debate surrounding whether these are two different types of victimization or simply variations of the same underlying crime. Few studies have compared incidents of stalking and cyberstalking, leading to uncertainty about their

shared or distinct characteristics. Second, we examined which features of the victimization incident influenced victims' decisions to adopt self-protective behaviors. Identifying and explaining the predictors of these behaviors are among the next logical and empirical steps to further understand both stalking and cyberstalking victims' decision making. These research questions were explored by analyzing both types of victim responses from the 2006 Supplemental Victimization Survey to the National Crime Victimization Survey.

LEGAL AND CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS OF STALKING AND CYBERSTALKING

A methodological limitation that underlies both stalking and cyberstalking victimization research is the problem of definitional consistency. This issue arises, in part, because definitions of stalking vary across state-level criminal statutes (Goodno, 2007; Tjaden, 2009; Tjaden et al., 2000). In general, legal criteria for prosecuting a series of incidents as stalking include the following elements: (1) an unwanted pattern of conduct or behavior (e.g., following, spying, making unwanted phone calls), (2) the victim or a "reasonable person" is expected to feel fear or a comparable emotional response (e.g., torment, distress, annoyance), and (3) a credible threat of harm to the victim (Fisher et al., 2002; Fox, Nobles, & Fisher, 2011b). Since many of these criteria vary from state to state, stalking researchers have generally adopted a relatively broad definition of stalking victimization that encompasses many types of pursuit behaviors. For instance, Fisher and Stewart (2007, p. 211) have defined stalking as being "repeatedly pursued in a manner that causes a reasonable person fear for his or her safety," while Black et al. (2011, p. 29) stated, "stalking victimization involves a pattern of harassing or threatening tactics used by a perpetrator that is both unwanted and causes fear or safety concerns in the victim."

Stalking can comprise a number of different types of pursuit behaviors on the part of the stalker, including: following the victim, spying on the victim, showing up at places where the

victim is located (e.g., school, home, work), making unwanted phone calls, leaving items for the victim (e.g., gifts, flowers, cards), writing letters or emails, and posting information about the victim in public or semi-public places, including the Internet (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; Fisher et al., 2002; Reyns, Henson, & Fisher, 2011; Reyns et al., 2012).

An additional challenge in operationalizing cyberstalking concerns the context and nature of the technology used. In early stalking research, both physical and electronic forms of pursuit were categorized as stalking. However, technology has become increasingly sophisticated at the personal level as well as the macro level. For instance, individuals throughout the 1990s and 2000s became increasingly reliant on personal devices such as cell phones for not only verbal communication but also texting and sending images, while the Internet as a whole grew in its capability to facilitate social networking. These trends have fundamentally changed opportunities for crimes to occur. For example, the Internet lacks centralization in spatial or temporal terms, making asymmetric interactions much more feasible since offenders and victims need not be in direct contact for one-on-one communication to occur (Holt & Bossler, 2009; Reyns et al., 2011; Yar, 2005). Social media sites, such as Facebook, can be easily misused by stalking perpetrators as instruments of terror, broadcasting threatening and frightening communication or other multimedia content to victims. Conversely, the proliferation and ubiquity of these forms of personal technology make it ever more likely that stalking offenders and victims may subsequently extend their interactions to the domain of cyberspace, making a conceptual differentiation between stalking and cyberstalking difficult or impossible (Alexy et al., 2005).

As technology has evolved with respect to the cultural landscape as well as its role in facilitating crime, researchers have increasingly sought distinctions between offline and

electronic/online forms of pursuit behaviors and harassment. Legislatures have also adapted to this trend. While most states do not have cyberstalking statutes per se, cyberstalking can be and has been prosecuted under existing stalking and harassment statutes (Goodno, 2007; Fox et al., 2011b). In general, cyberstalking can be defined as repeated pursuit involving electronic or Internet-capable devices, such as mobile phones, laptop computers, or electronic tablets (Goodno, 2007; Parsons-Pollard & Moriarty, 2009; Reyns et al., 2012; Southworth, Finn, Dawson, Fraser, & Tucker, 2007; U. S. Attorney General, 1999). Like the definition of its spatial counterpart, the definition of cyberstalking sometimes includes the stipulation that the victim or a "reasonable person" experiences fear due to the stalker's pursuit, although the fear standard has recently been called into question. For example, Dietz and Martin (2007) argue that it is possible to be victimized by stalking without being fearful, and that requiring victims to experience fear serves to discount some victims' experiences and undercut the prevalence of victimization.

Examining the conceptual relationship between stalking and cyberstalking is a complex undertaking. Considering Figure 1, Scenario A represents a conceptualization in which some victims experience stalking, some experience cyberstalking, and some experience both. Under this scenario the set "X" would represent the population of victims who experience only cyberstalking but not stalking. Scenario B represents a case in which the conceptual definition of cyberstalking represents a subset or special circumstance of the generalized stalking definition, similar to the conceptual relationship between armed robbery and robbery. Scenario C represents a case where the definitions of cyberstalking and stalking share no conceptual overlap and are entirely distinct. The following presents the argument for why Scenario B best represents the conceptual relationship between stalking and cyberstalking. We acknowledge that

Scenario B may not be the only conceptualization of this relationship. Therefore, we encourage future researchers to contribute to this debate by empirically testing alternative conceptual relationships (e.g., Scenario A and C).

***** Figure 1 about here *****

Although some victims experience only cyberstalking behaviors while other victims experience only stalking behaviors, we contend that Scenario C is conceptually problematic given current legislation. Common legal and operational definitions of stalking and cyberstalking are not independent or mutually exclusive. Stalking requires repeated frightening, threatening, or harassing contact, of which there are many possible real-world and cyberspace examples, including showing up unannounced, communication sent from the stalker to the victim, and so forth. Cyberstalking represents a special case of this unwanted/objectionable contact that specifically employs technology, but satisfying the unique conditions for cyberstalking does not simultaneously negate the satisfaction of meeting the stalking criteria (as in a case of mutually exclusive conditions). Whether a victim receives objectionable contacts via email, social media sites, or in chat rooms, those contacts are still always *also* sufficient to meet the legal and operational criteria for stalking by definition, as long as they are repeated and are frightening, threatening, or harassing. This conceptual overlap is codified in at least one state statute that specifically defines the crime of cyberstalking relative to stalking. To illustrate, Florida statutes § 784.048(3) (2011) specify "Any person who willfully, maliciously, and repeatedly follows, harasses, *or cyberstalks* another person, and makes a credible threat with the intent to place that person in reasonable fear of death or bodily injury of the person, or the person's child, sibling, spouse, parent, or dependent, commits the offense of aggravated stalking,

a felony of the third degree" (emphasis added)[1]. Although Florida represents only a single state, it is an example of one of the very few states at present whose stalking statutes formally identifies behavioral parameters of cyberstalking in legalistic terms (Fox et al., 2011b; Leiter, 2007).

Returning to Figure 1, Scenario A is similarly problematic. It is inherently more intuitive because it seems to capture the empirical overlap between stalking and cyberstalking that has been observed in published studies. But using the same logic as in Scenario C, the victims represented by set X cannot logically exist. In all cases of cyberstalking, the objectionable contacts (e.g., repeated, frightening/threatening/harassing use of technology in whatever form) by definition also are sufficient for meeting the legal and operational stalking criteria. That those contacts involve the novel use of technology does not obviate their satisfaction of the stalking criteria and consequently exclude them from Scenario A representing stalking. Rather, those cases are the intersection of the stalking set and cyberstalking set: these cases are repeated frightening, threatening, or harassing contacts (thus must be included with the stalking set) *and* they provide the special circumstance of technology (therefore must be included with the cyberstalking set).

The resulting logic dictates that cyberstalking be conceptualized in a way similar to Scenario A minus set X. In other words, we argue that Scenario B is the most accurate depiction of how to conceptualize stalking and cyberstalking (and also is best representative of the current study sample). That is, there is a population of stalking victims, and there is a smaller subset of those that are also cyberstalking victims due to the special circumstance involving technology.

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[1] Per Florida Stat. § 784.048(1)(d) (2011), "'Cyberstalk' is defined as engaging in a course of conduct to communicate, or to cause to be communicated, words, images, or language by or through the use of electronic mail or electronic communication, directed at a specific person, causing substantial emotional distress to that person and serving no legitimate purpose."

The compelling point is that there must always be conceptual overlap as long as stalking is defined as involving repeated contacts that are frightening, threatening, or harassing. Meeting the criteria for cyberstalking – repeated frightening, threatening, or harassing behaviors involving specific technologies – automatically qualifies for the stalking criteria, and therefore set X as a subset of Scenario A cannot logically exist.

As a practical matter, in the case of both stalking and cyberstalking, the victim experiences unwanted and repeated pursuit behaviors by the offender, indicating that in both cases the fundamental criteria for stalking are met. The difference between these forms of pursuit, and the special circumstance that situates cyberstalking as a subset of stalking, is the element of space. While stalking transpires within the same physical space or in relatively close proximity (e.g., the victim is followed or spied on from a distance) in real time, cyberstalking takes place in cyberspace, in which case the victim and offender are connected through a system of networked computers (or capable devices) and not necessarily in the same physical location at the same real time (Reyns, 2010; Reyns et al., 2011). Despite the conceptual overlap, the effects on stalking and cyberstalking victims remain an empirical question.

EXTENT OF STALKING AND CYBERSTALKING VICTIMIZATION

Four national studies to date indicate that stalking has been experienced by a substantial portion of individuals living in the United States, resulting in lifetime prevalence estimates between 8%-12% for women and 2%-4% for men, depending on the criteria used (Basile, Swahn, Chen, & Saltzman, 2006; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998); similarly, among a national sample of college women, 13.1% reported being stalked during the current school year (Fisher et al., 2002). The 2006 NCVS Supplemental Victimization Survey (SVS) reported a lifetime prevalence rate of 1.4% for all adults in the United States (Baum et al., 2009). Most recently, the

Centers for Disease Control sponsored the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), which revealed that 16% of women and 5% of men had been stalked during their lifetime and "felt very fearful, or believed that they or someone close to them would be harmed or killed as a result of the perpetrator's behavior" (Black et al., 2011, p. 29). Numerous smaller scale studies reaffirm the findings of the national-level studies, providing another indicator of the importance of devoting research to stalking victims (for a review, see Fox et al., 2011b).

In contrast to the stability of stalking prevalence estimates, cyberstalking estimates show considerably more variation across studies. Depending on the samples and behavioral operationalizations used, prevalence estimates range from 1% to 40.8% in college students (Reyns et al. 2012; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002), while prevalence rates for online harassment range from 10% to 15% (Finn, 2004). Reports of general population cyberstalking estimates are scarce, but at least one study estimates the prevalence at 26.8% for women using online dating sites (Jerin & Dolinsky, 2001). Several studies do not employ conceptually distinct stalking and cyberstalking groups, instead highlighting overlapping experiences. One such study reported that of those who were stalked, 7.2% were also victims of cyberstalking (Sheridan & Grant, 2007). The 2006 SVS is the only national study to offer cyberstalking prevalence estimates, indicating that 26.1% of stalking victims also experienced cyberstalking (Baum et al., 2009). The disparity in cyberstalking estimates may reflect differences in definitions, operationalization, populations under study, and sampling designs that these studies have employed (Fox et al., 2011b).

PROTECTIVE BEHAVIORS ADOPTED BY VICTIMS

While the stalking research pertaining to self-protective behaviors adopted by victims is relatively sparse, these studies suggest that victims adopt a variety of protective and preventive

actions in response to their stalking victimization (Baum et al., 2009; Buhi, Clayton, & Surrency, 2009; Fisher et al., 2002; Reyns & Englebrecht, 2010; Sheridan & Grant, 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; Wilcox, Jordan, & Pritchard, 2007a). According to the SVS, stalking victims frequently changed their usual activities, received assistance from others (e.g., friends, coworkers), took protective actions such as purchasing caller identification systems or carrying pepper spray, and changed their personal information (e.g., email address) (Baum et al., 2009). Wilcox et al. (2007a) reported that about half of college student stalking victims carried or owned something for protection from future victimization (e.g., mace, knife), and a large portion avoided campus as a precautionary measure. In a similar study, Buhi et al. (2009) examined the subsequent help-seeking behaviors of female college student stalking victims, and reported that approximately half of victims sought help from other people (e.g., family, friends) in response to being stalked. Judicial responses, such as obtaining a restraining order against the stalker, are among the more formal actions victims take to stop the pursuit behavior (Fisher et al., 2002; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Fisher et al. (2002) reported that among victims of stalking in their college sample, 3.9% sought a restraining order, 3.3% filed a grievance or initiated disciplinary action with university officials, 1.9% filed criminal charges, and 1.2% filed civil charges.

The cyberstalking literature has not developed to the point where patterns in responses to victimization, including self-protective behaviors taken by the victim, have been clearly identified. Some published studies have indicated that preventative measures based on technology, including parental monitoring software (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006) and anti-virus software (Holt & Bossler, 2009) have little to no effect on cyber-victimization risks, possibly because these tools do not address the fundamental mechanisms that are most frequently used to threaten or harass victims. In cases of cyberstalking, Sheridan and Grant's (2007)

research indicated no significant differences in emotional responses (e.g., fear, anxiety), protective actions (e.g., changing job, moving away), or reporting behaviors between stalking and cyberstalking victims. Conversely, Reyns and Englebrecht's (2010) comparison of the reporting behaviors of stalking and cyberstalking victims suggests that there may be differences between these groups with respect to the factors influencing the decision to contact the police. For example, they reported that the financial cost to the victim increased the likelihood of reporting the victimization to the police among victims who experienced both stalking and cyberstalking compared to those who did not experience cyberstalking. The somewhat conflicting findings reported in these two studies underscore the importance of further investigating how cyberstalking victims respond to their victimization.

PREDICTORS OF ADOPTING SELF-PROTECTIVE BEHAVIORS

Aside from some exploratory work on reporting to police, the factors that influence the adoption of self-protective behaviors among victims of stalking and cyberstalking have not been empirically examined (e.g., seriousness, threats, physical assaults, duration, fear, and recognition of the behavior as stalking). The previously discussed patterns in victims' protective behaviors are informative for further exploring this issue. However, if victims are willing to change their routine activities or seek legal remedies in response to the offender's actions, then it is likely that these victims perceived their situation to be a serious one. Offense seriousness has been identified by previous research as a robust predictor of criminal justice actor decision-making, including the decision-making of crime victims (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1988; Gottfredson & Hindelang, 1979). For instance, Gottfredson and Hindelang's (1979) study revealed that

offense seriousness[2] was the primary factor in explaining reporting of victimization to the police among victims in the National Crime Survey. While this concept has not been applied to explaining the protective behaviors undertaken by stalking or cyberstalking victims, it is reasonable to expect the seriousness of the offense plays a role in this decision.

Certain characteristics of the stalking or cyberstalking incident, such as whether the offender threatened or physically attacked the victim, represent indicators of offense seriousness. Indeed, since stalking often co-occurs with other types of victimization, such as intimate partner violence (Coleman, 1997; Davis & Frieze, 2000; Mechanic, Weaver, & Resick, 2002), these experiences may represent a pattern of behavior more likely to elicit protective behaviors from victims. Financial loss to the victim also may be an indication of a serious victimization to crime victims, with greater losses being more likely to prompt a response from the victim.

The duration of the offender's pursuit may also affect the victim's conceptualization of how serious the experience is. Since repeated pursuit is one of the key elements of stalking, duration of contact may represent a stalking-specific indicator of seriousness. According to the extant stalking literature, among those who are stalked, the repeated pursuit behaviors usually occur over six months or less, but some victims are pursued continuously for many years (Baum et al., 2009; Fisher et al., 2002; Nobles et al., 2009; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Those victims who are pursued for longer periods of time may be more likely to adopt self-protective measures.

While fear is one of the definitional components of stalking (Fox et al., 2011b), victims experience varying degrees of fear (Dietz & Martin, 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), and it is likely that the more fearful a stalking victim feels, the more serious they perceive their situation to be. However, fear may have additional dimensions that are relevant for understanding victim

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[2] Gottfredson and Hindelang (1979) measured offense seriousness using the Sellin-Wolfgang (1964) seriousness scale, which is based on the extent and nature of bodily injury, weapon use, intimidation, forcible sexual intercourse, and financial loss.

behavior, such as how fear is perceived over time and as the victimization experience changes. Scenarios in which stalking or cyberstalking begin innocuously but escalate into frightening episodes are as plausible as episodes that begin with high fear that diminishes over time. Fear may also be a relative constant throughout the experience. In each of these scenarios, fear may play a different role in influencing a victim's decision to engage in self-protective behaviors as a function of factors such as individual predisposition, changing interpretations, and external support. It follows, then, that heightened emotional responses to stalking and/or cyberstalking, especially fear, increase victims' likelihood of protecting themselves from further victimization.

In general, previous research suggests that victims who self-identify as crime victims react differently than other victims to their experiences (Fisher et al., 2002; Greenberg & Ruback, 1992; Williams, 1984). More specifically, Reyns and Englebrecht (2010) found that among stalking and cyberstalking victims, acknowledging their status as a stalking victim was a significant predictor of the decision to report the experience to the police. Victimization acknowledgment may therefore be an important explanatory factor that influences victims' decisions to report to police and/or to protect oneself from subsequent victimization. The extant stalking and cyberstalking literatures have only minimally explored the role of acknowledgment in explaining the self-protective behaviors of victims (see for exception Englebrecht & Reyns, 2011). The research mentioned here, however, implies that victims' willingness to acknowledge their victimization may be key to understanding victims' self-protection efforts.

The current stalking and cyberstalking research has provided only limited insight as to whether any of the factors identified in previous victimization research – presence of threat or physical attack, financial costs, duration, fear, and victim acknowledgement – are significant predictors of the adoption of self-protection measures. Thus, identifying which, if any, of these

factors influence stalking and cyberstalking victims' decision to adopt self-protective measures is a logical next step in this nascent body of research.

CURRENT STUDY

The current study makes several contributions to the growing research on stalking and cyberstalking. First, this study uses a large nationally representative sample of adults in the United States to examine stalking and cyberstalking. With few exceptions (Basile et al., 2006; Black et al., 2011; Fisher et al., 2002; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), the majority of stalking research has employed small samples from the general population (Johnson & Kercher, 2009) or college student samples of various sizes (Buhi et al., 2009; Jordan et al., 2007; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 1999; Nobles et al., 2009; Patton, Nobles, & Fox, 2010). While these studies offer valuable information about stalking victimization, their external validity is limited. Examining a nationally representative sample of the general (adult) population is essential for a broader understanding of the scope, nature, and extent of stalking and cyberstalking, and addresses external validity concerns.

Second, this study is among the first to compare stalking and cyberstalking victimization. As we have previously discussed, whether cyberstalking represents a distinct form of pursuit-based victimization or is a variant of stalking is not well understood, and convincing arguments have been made on both sides of this debate. For example, Bocij and McFarlane (2003) argue that cyberstalking cannot be merely an extension of physical stalking since it is possible for cyberstalking to occur without any physical pursuit. Sheridan and Grant's (2007) analyses, however, suggest that the two forms of pursuit are similar in many ways (e.g., effect on victims, victim responses) and therefore are not fundamentally different. Although comprehensive theoretical and empirical evaluations of these experiences are missing from the research to date,

we have advanced a logical argument that stalking and cyberstalking share important features, and that cyberstalking episodes may represent a subset of stalking victimizations (see Figure 1, Scenario B for a visual depiction for our argument). Recall we concluded that the facets that overlap conceptually are the common operationalizations of repeated behavior that is characterized as threatening, frightening, or harassing. Cyberstalking therefore could be conceptualized as a logical subset of stalking that features the "special case" of technology as a facilitator, much as robbery and armed robbery are differentiated.[3] Until published comparisons between these behaviors are made based on empirical data, many conclusions about their dimensions are largely speculative. Accordingly, the current study examines the similarities and differences between stalking and cyberstalking victimization with respect to victims' self-protective behaviors.

Third, this study examines whether seriousness of the offense (e.g., physically attacked, threatened, financial cost to the victim), duration of stalking, fear, and acknowledgment of experience as stalking influences the adoption of self-protective behaviors among stalking and cyberstalking victims. Investigating these effects are the next logical and empirical steps to advance the understanding of stalking and cyberstalking victims' decision making about self-protection.

The primary research questions driving the current study focus on uncovering similarities and differences in self-protective behaviors adopted by stalking victims and cyberstalking victims. More specifically, the current study asks these questions: (1) Do stalking and cyberstalking victims experience similarities or differences in their duration of victimization, costs related to victimization, fear at onset and over time, threats, physical attacks, and

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[3] For additional discussion of stalking operationalization and measurement, including an analysis of definitional and behavioral differences across published studies, see Fox et al. (2011b).

acknowledgement of their victimization?; and (2) Which of these factors, if any, increase the number of protective behaviors adopted by stalking and cyberstalking victims? Given that stalking and cyberstalking share conceptual, definitional, and operational components, we expect victims of stalking and cyberstalking will experience comparable factors related to their victimization. In other words, we do not expect significant differences among stalking and cyberstalking victims in terms of duration of victimization, costs, fear, threats, physical attacks, and acknowledgment of victimization. Similarly, we expect that the factors that are significantly predictive of self-protective behaviors will be alike for stalking and cyberstalking victims.

DATA AND METHODS

SUPPLEMENTAL VICTIMIZATION SURVEY (SVS)

The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) is an ongoing data collection project administered by U. S. Bureau of Census under the auspice of the Bureau of Justice Statistics in the Department of Justice. The NCVS focuses on the extent and characteristics of criminal experiences in a given year. Telephone surveys are administered annually to a nationally representative, stratified multistage cluster sample of households. In 2006, sampled household members 18 years or older who passed initial screening questions for eligibility were administered a one-time supplemental stalking survey after completing the main NCVS interview (U. S. Department of Justice, 2009). Similar to the NVAWS (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), screening questions describing specific types of pursuit behaviors (e.g., being followed and receiving unwanted contacts) were used to identify those who had experienced these behaviors prior to administering the SVS interview. Screening questions intentionally excluded the term "stalking" given that some victims may not realize that they have been stalked. Thus,

victims were required to meet the basic screening criteria for stalking victimization but were not

required to self-identify as stalking victims for sample inclusion.

OPERATIONALIZATION OF STALKING AND CYBERSTALKING

The total sample that completed the SVS was 65,272 adults (which included both stalking

and harassment victims). From this sample, 3,388 individuals met our operational criteria for

stalking victimization by reporting that they had experienced two or more pursuit behaviors from

a given perpetrator that made them "frightened, concerned, angered, or annoyed," or that they

had experienced any single pursuit behavior from a given perpetrator on more than one occasion.

By contrast, an individual who had experienced isolated instances of any pursuit behavior

(excluding solicitors) that were not repeated did not meet our operational definition for stalking.

These individuals (n = 776) may be considered harassment victims that did not reach level of

stalking, and were thus excluded from subsequent analyses.

The SVS questionnaire provided explicit instructions to respondents to consider

experiences in which they were "frightened, concerned, angered, or annoyed." To further reduce

measurement error, an additional screen question repeated these critical criteria by asking

respondents, "Not including bill collectors, telephone solicitors, or other sales people, has

anyone, male or female, EVER – frightened, concerned, angered, or annoyed you" by engaging

in behaviors including: (a) unwanted phone calls or messages; (b) unsolicited or unwanted

letters, emails, or other forms of written correspondence or communication; (c) following or

spying; (d) waiting outside or inside places such as home, school, workplace, or recreation place;

(e) showing up at places even though the perpetrator had no business being there; (f) leaving

unwanted items, presents, or flowers; or (g) posting information or spreading rumors on the

Internet, in a public place, or by word of mouth.

Among the stalking victims in the sample, a subset of 296 individuals met the operational criteria for cyberstalking victimization by indicating that they experienced harassing or threatening communication from one or more of the following Internet technologies during the prior 12 months: email, instant messenger, chat rooms, blogs, message or bulletin boards, or other Internet sites. Given that some stalking victims failed to answer the cyberstalking items (n= 2,631), these missing cases have been excluded from the analyses in an effort to retain only the valid cases for which respondents reported information about both stalking and cyberstalking.

This study compares two groups of stalking victims: (1) victims of stalking who did not experience cyberstalking (n = 1,237), and (2) victims of stalking who also experienced cyberstalking (n = 296). This operationalization is consistent with a conceptualization of cyberstalking as a subset or special circumstance of a more generalized stalking victimization (see Figure 1, Scenario B). Also, this operationalization offers a valid and methodologically sound stalking measure that can be used to rigorously examine the differences and similarities between stalking and cyberstalking victims.

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

The dependent variable represents the number of different types of self-protective behaviors individuals took in response to their stalking victimization experience. Respondents were asked to identify their behaviors used to protect themselves as a result of their stalking victimization, including: taking time off from work or school; changing or quitting a job or school; changing the way they went to work or school; avoiding relatives, friends, or holiday celebrations; changing usual activities outside of work or school; staying with friends or relatives or having them stay with you; altering appearance to be unrecognizable; taking self-defense or

martial arts classes; getting pepper spray; obtaining a gun; acquiring any other kind of weapon;

changing social security number; changing email address; changing telephone numbers;

installing caller-identification or call blocking systems; changing or installing new locks or a

security system.[4] These sixteen items were factor analyzed to assess internal consistency as well

as dimensionality, and exploratory factor analysis revealed a single-factor solution (Eigenvalue =

2.72; loadings range: 0.06 – 0.60). A count of self-protective behaviors was calculated by

summing the number of self-protective behaviors respondents had adopted (Cronbach's α =

0.75).

Although we summed these items to create a robust global indicator of victims' self-

protection behaviors, we are not claiming practical equivalence of any individual item relative to

one another across all stalking cases. It is plausible, for instance, that certain individual self-

protective behaviors could require greater investment of resources (e.g., monetary costs, time) on

the part of the victim, or that some behaviors are more efficacious to particular forms of stalking

or cyberstalking. Ultimately, empirically differentiating the relative costs and effectiveness of

individual self-protective behaviors is a task left to future researchers. By summing the different

types of protective behaviors, our measure captures the degree to which victims proactively

engaged in a variety of help-seeking to protect themselves from subsequent victimization.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Six independent variables that captured the nature of the stalking experience were used to

examine the relationships between the situational characteristics of stalking and the adopted self-

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[4] Only one of the listed behaviors, "changing email address," directly relates to cyberstalking victimization. Thus
the protective behaviors listed seem to be primarily oriented to stalking experiences rather than specific behaviors
oriented toward technology or Internet use.

protective behaviors.[5] First, victims were asked to report the <u>duration</u> of stalking episodes in

days, weeks, months, and years[6]. To standardize the units measuring duration, each item was

recoded and summed to compute a single, continuous measure of duration in days. Many

victims reported multi-year episodes, so this variable was recoded into hundreds of days in order

to shift decimal places. Second, victims were asked to indicate the total out-of-pocket <u>costs</u>, in

dollars, related to their victimization; as with duration, the range of responses necessitated

recoding the original units into hundreds of dollars. Third, victims were asked to indicate

whether they felt frightened, scared, afraid, panicked, paranoid, threatened, alarmed, hyper-

vigilant, or terrified when the stalking behaviors *began* (0 = no to all items, 1 = yes to one or

more items), which measured <u>fear at onset</u>. A similar item assessed fear as the behavior

progressed (0 = no to all items, 1 = yes to one or more items), which measured <u>fear over time</u>.

Fourth, individuals were asked to indicate whether the stalker expressed any physical <u>threats</u>,

including: kill you; rape or sexually assault you; harm you with a weapon; hit, slap, or harm you

in some other way; harm or kidnap a child; harm another family member; harm a friend or

coworker; harm a pet; harm or kill himself/herself; or threaten you in some other way (0 = no to

all items, 1 = yes to one or more items). Fifth, victims were asked whether they had been

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[5] In addition to the listed variables, the frequency of contacts between the offender and victim, both daily and over the past 12 months, were considered. These items asked victims to report how many times a day and overall in the last 12 months the unwanted contacts or behavior occurred. Ultimately, these measures were dropped from the final multivariate models due to the small number of cases available in the dataset. The number of available cases for both measures was small overall (n = 104 for daily frequency and n = 301 for overall frequency), and very few of those reporting individuals met our operational criteria for cyberstalking (n = 19 and 55, respectively). Consequently, multivariate models could not be estimated using these measures.

[6] Stalking/cyberstalking "episodes" in this instance were self-defined by survey respondents. It is possible that some episodes involved more than one offender, or that the same victim experienced multiple episodes involving the same offender. In an attempt to control for this possible confound, we performed additional analyses (not shown but available from the first author) and included a variable in our models that asked "how many different people have done any of these things to you in the last 12 months?" This variable was not significant in either of the multivariate models; the overall variance explained was minimally increased, indicating that this dimension seems to be relatively unimportant as a predictor of victim self-protective behaviors. The variable was subsequently not included in the estimation of the model.

physically attacked in one or more of the following ways: hitting, slapping, or knocking you

down; choking or strangling you; raping or sexually assaulting you; attacking you with a

weapon; chasing or dragging you with a car; or attacking you in some other way (0 = no to all

items, 1 = yes to one or more items). Sixth, victims were asked whether they considered the

series of unwanted, threatening, or harassing behaviors to constitute stalking (0 = no; 1 = yes).

The following demographic factors were used as control variables in the analysis: age in

years (continuous), sex (0 = male; 1 = female), race (0 = non-white; 1 = white), Hispanic

ethnicity (0 = non-Hispanic; 1 = Hispanic), household income (coded in 10 categories, ranging

from less than $5,000 to greater than $75,000), and education level (0 = high school graduate or

lower; 1 = some college through doctoral degree).[7]

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

Univariate statistics for each dependent, independent, and control variable were first

examined. Bivariate relationships between stalking victimization variables and across stalking

and cyberstalking victims were examined next. Multivariate regression models also were

estimated to assess the associations between victimization experiences and self-protective

behaviors for stalking and cyberstalking victims. Given the discrete properties of the dependent

variable, a count model approximating the observed distribution of self-protective behaviors

taken by victims was most appropriate. With regard to this type of count model, overdispersion

of residual variance in event counts is, according to Osgood (2000, p. 28), "ubiquitous in

analyses of crime data," thus necessitating regression techniques that combine the more

traditional Poisson distribution with a corrective parameter (alpha) to address the presence of

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[7] In response to a reviewer's comment, models were estimated using the original, 20-category measure for education level, as well as the more parsimonious, dichotomous variable representing high school graduation or lower compared to college or above. Parameter estimates across models differed only slightly, and no substantive results were affected. Thus, only the results featuring the dichotomous measure are presented here.

residual overdispersion. Statistical significance for the alpha parameter in a post-hoc test is indicative of overdispersion in the count distribution. Hilbe (2007) notes that overdispersion is generally associated with violations of Poisson distribution assumptions and can result in unreliable parameter estimates as well as poor overall model fit. Both Osgood (2000) and Hilbe (2007) recommend the negative binomial model as an alternative, thus the current research estimates negative binomial regressions.

RESULTS

THE NATURE OF STALKING AND CYBERSTALKING VICTIMIZATION

As shown in Table 1, univariate statistics of the victimization dimensions reveal some similarities and differences between stalking and cyberstalking victims. The mean number of self-protective behaviors adopted was higher for cyberstalking victims (1.52) than stalking victims (1.08), despite shorter mean duration of victimization (651.91 days compared to 768.81 days, respectively). Cyberstalking victims also less frequently reported fear at onset (22.64% compared to 28.41%, respectively), and fear over time (13.60% compared to 15.46%, respectively) compared to stalking victims. However, the reporting of threats (23.40% for cyberstalking victims, 22.02% for stalking victims), attacks (8.78% versus 7.76%, respectively), and considering the behavior stalking (43.99% compared to 38.28%, respectively) were all higher for cyberstalking victims compared to stalking victims.

***** Table 1 about here *****

Table 1 also presents the bivariate analysis results from Student's t-tests and Pearson chi-square tests of independence comparing victimization characteristics between the stalking and cyberstalking victims. Results indicate that the levels of several situational characteristics are significantly greater for the cyberstalking group, including the number of protective acts taken in

response to the victimization and out-of-pocket costs associated with victimization. Other examined situational characteristics of victimization, such as the total duration of the episode, were not significantly different between the two groups of victims. The occurrence of self-reported fear at onset was significantly different between the groups but the distribution indicated higher counts in the opposite direction, suggesting that stalking victims perceive greater fear than cyberstalking victims. Finally, comparison of demographic variables across groups reveals several significant differences. Mean age was lower for cyberstalking victims. A higher percentage of cyberstalking victims were male and white compared to stalking victims. Finally, cyberstalking victims reported significantly higher household income and education level.

SELF-PROTECTIVE BEHAVIORS ADOPTED BY VICTIMS

Table 2 lists frequencies of self-protective behaviors for stalking and cyberstalking victims, as well as the corresponding percentages for each type of behavior. The percentages have been calculated using the valid number of victims for each group (n = 1,237 for stalking and n = 296 for cyberstalking). A comparison of these two groups reveals similarities and differences in self-protective behaviors. Stalking and cyberstalking victims were relatively similar (within +/- 2%) on 11 items: change the way you went to work or school; stay with friends/relatives or have them stay with you; alter appearance to become unrecognizable; take self-defense or martial arts classes; get pepper spray; get gun; get other weapon; change social security number; change phone number; install caller identification/call blocking; and change or install new locks or security system. A higher percentage of cyberstalking victims reported self-protective behaviors in the remaining five categories: take time off work or school; change or quit a job or school; avoid friends, relatives, or holidays; change usual activities outside work or

school; and change e-mail address. Also, consistent with results presented in Table 1, a higher overall percentage of cyberstalking victims (51.01%) reported one or more self-protective behavior than did stalking victims (44.87%).

***** Table 2 about here *****

Table 3 presents results from the multivariate negative binomial regression models predicting the number of self-protective behaviors undertaken by stalking victims compared to the victims who also experienced cyberstalking. Results indicate that several situational characteristics were positively and significantly related to the number of self-protective behaviors reported for both stalking and cyberstalking victims. Common factors that were positively and significantly associated with the number of self-protective behaviors for both types of victims included costs, fear at onset, and the victim's own opinion about whether the behavior constituted stalking. Thus, victims who experienced greater out-of-pocket costs, greater fear at onset, and those who considered their experiences to be stalking engaged in significantly more self-protective behaviors regardless of the distinction between stalking and cyberstalking.

Differences in statistically significant situational characteristics also emerged between the stalking and cyberstalking victims. Specifically, more reported self-protective behaviors for stalking victims were significantly associated with the presence of threats and were more likely among younger stalking victims, while more reported self-protective behaviors for cyberstalking victims were associated with perceptions of fear over time, the presence of an attack, and with female victims. The remaining situational and control variables were non-significant in both models. Also, with regard to model fit, the overdispersion parameters of the negative binomial models were statistically significant in post-hoc likelihood ratio tests (overdispersion parameter α

= 1.01 and 0.68, respectively; p < 0.001), indicating that overdispersion was present in the data and reiterating that the negative binomial model specification provided better overall fit than the Poisson alternative.

***** Table 3 about here *****

DISCUSSION

This study is among the first to both describe dimensions of cyberstalking victimization and compare stalking and cyberstalking victimization experiences. This contribution advances the scientific understanding of which individual and situational characteristics contribute to taking self-protective action in response to stalking and cyberstalking. Using a national sample, the current study examined the effects of fear, seriousness of the offense (e.g., physical attack, threats, financial cost to the victim), and perceptions of whether the victim acknowledges their stalking victimization, on self-protective behaviors among stalking and cyberstalking victims. These findings have a number of implications for stalking and cyberstalking research.

First, it is important to note that approximately 19% of the stalking victims reported being cyberstalked based on our operationalization, which is an estimate consistent with some of the limited research focused on this phenomenon (Finn, 2004; Fisher et al., 2002; Sheridan & Grant, 2007). While this percentage certainly reflects a minority of the stalking victims, this estimate captures hundreds of victims within our sample and thousands of victims nationally. Also, our results show that cyberstalking victims engage in more protective behaviors overall and for several specific protective types, compared to stalking victims. This information underscores the importance for researchers, practitioners, and legislators to take a close look at the causes and consequences of cyberstalking. As an emerging crime type, cyberstalking seems likely to increase in prevalence as various technologies (e.g., social networking sites, global

positioning systems, Internet blogs) become ubiquitous in day-to-day life, and criminal justice system responses for victims' services, police investigation, prosecution, and other areas will need to adapt and evolve to address this growing need.

Our bivariate results indicated that cyberstalking victims reported significantly higher household income and education levels compared to stalking victims, although neither of these variables was significantly related to self-protective behaviors in the multivariate models. Age was also significantly different in bivariate as well as multivariate tests. These demographic differences suggest support for the so-called "digital divide," a term used to characterize social inequality in access to technologies, including the Internet. Specifically, it suggests that younger, more educated, and more affluent individuals have greater access to various technologies for personal communication and information sharing. The digital divide in the United States has been attributed to differential access to technology infrastructure (e.g., broadband Internet access) as well as lacking educational opportunities for some groups, resulting in stratification in technology adoption. However, in this case greater access to technology may also increase risk for cyberstalking victimization. As the digital divide narrows, scholars and policy makers should anticipate escalating prevalence of cyberstalking, underscoring the need for further study of this phenomenon. Conversely, cyberstalking victims report greater financial costs associated with their victimization episode. Although individual stalking cases undoubtedly varied in circumstances, according to the NCVS, these costs may have included expenses such as attorney fees, damage to property, child care costs, moving expenses, or changing phone numbers. Lawmakers, in particular, may consider the financial costs of cyberstalking episodes when addressing statutory victim restitution or other remedies.

The current study also determined that cyberstalking victims engaged in more self-protective behaviors compared to stalking victims. Although the data do not permit a thorough investigation of the reason behind this finding, we offer a plausible explanation couched in the dynamics of online interaction. Compared to stalking, it is possible that the nature of cyberstalking elicits a very personal violation for victims, which may elicit more diverse and more frequent protective actions. At first glance, this may seem counterintuitive given that stalking often involves more immediate physical exposure to offenders and, hence, to potential danger (e.g., being followed). Considering the ubiquity of technology, however, as well as the amount of exposure people now have to its different forms, it is plausible that contact through this medium is just as personal as, or *more* personal than, face-to-face contact. Today, many people spend more time communicating electronically than they do in person, resulting in what Hallowell (1997, p. 60) describes as a "tide of electronic hyperconnection." Internet use generally and use of social media specifically are trends that affect human interaction on a massive scale. Recent estimates suggest that 93% of Americans ages 12-17 and 18-29 go online, and the sizable majority (73% and 72%, respectively) of each group reports using social networking sites (Lenhart et al., 2010). In fact, Lenhart and colleagues (2010, p. 5) remark that "the Internet is a central and indispensable element in the lives of American teens and young adults." Another way to state this is that the rise of personal technologies is changing human socialization, and a cyberstalking experience is increasingly likely to be perceived an intimate violation rather than an annoyance insulated by technology.

Technology also changes risk/exposure profiles for victims and facilitates information discovery in more pervasive ways. This potentially makes stalking easier and self-protection more difficult (Newman & Clarke, 2003), perhaps because "sensitive" personal information on

the Internet is harder to shield from a motivated assailant. Alternatively, the nature of cyberstalking via social networking sites may be influential in differentiating victim behavior because it is semi-public. For instance, in a stalking case, the contact between perpetrator and victim may be largely restricted to one-on-one encounters (e.g., phone calls, following, spying) that are dismissed or endured by the victim, who may second guess the instinct to take more serious protective action. In a cyberstalking case, especially one involving social media as an instrument of communication, the presence of inappropriate or embarrassing content cannot be as easily overlooked because it is instantly visible to others close to the victim, including peers and family. The use of technology in the cyberstalking case, therefore, may be simultaneously more harmful to the victim's psychological wellbeing and reputation, thus more decisive in spurring quicker self-protective action. Certainly, examining these consequences of victimization may be of particular interest for researchers who want to further compare and contrast stalking and cyberstalking victimization.

Given the overlap and conceptual similarities between stalking and cyberstalking, we expected to find consistencies rather than differences with regard to the key factors examined in the current study. Although there are some similarities between stalking and cyberstalking victims in terms of the factors that predict self-protective behaviors, there are also noteworthy differences. Inconsistent with expectations, our analysis identified differences in the significance of fear over time when comparing cyberstalking and stalking victims. One possible explanation is that cyberstalking begins as a seemingly innocuous series of events or exchanges that escalate over time, while stalking in many forms may be more immediately recognized as problematic for the victim, even if the victim does not necessarily acknowledge those behaviors as stalking *per se*. Although testing this possibility is beyond the scope of the study, this may be an important

avenue for future research to further our understanding of the ways in which stalking and cyberstalking are similar or different. Our results also identified incongruent influence of physical threats across conditions. Specifically, threats were significantly related to self-protective behaviors for stalking victims, but not cyberstalking victims. Furthermore, the findings indicated that while experiencing a physical attack was significantly associated with increased self-protective behaviors for cyberstalking victims, it was not significant for stalking victims. These findings may appear to be counterintuitive given the distal nature of cyberstalking compared to stalking. One explanation is that face-to-face offenders appear more credible, thus victims react with self-protective behaviors at the threat stage rather than reacting once an attack begins, or after an attack has occurred, to prevent subsequent victimization. However, it is also possible that the cyberstalking cases available from the SVS simply reflected the most severe characteristics of all the stalking cases (in which physical violence co-occurred with cyberstalking). Alternatively, there may be a threshold effect for cyberstalking, in which mildly objectionable behaviors in cyberspace tend not to be taken seriously until they escalate in seriousness, duration, or other modalities. Thus, many stalking victims may immediately take protective action while cyberstalking victims delay until after a physical attack occurs.

While the current study examines an understudied phenomenon, it is not without limitations. Although the NCVS is widely regarded as one of the most established sources of nationally representative data on criminal victimization trends, the relatively low counts of victims who were eligible to complete the SVS suggest that results should be interpreted and generalized with some caution. Consistent with victimization research more generally, stalking and cyberstalking are elusive crimes that are subject to the limitations inherent in underreporting. Thus, future research with progressively larger samples of stalking and cyberstalking victims is

recommended to confirm validity and reliability of estimates, capture variation that may be obscured in smaller samples (e.g., victimization experiences for minorities, regional differences), and enhance power for statistical tests. Also, some of the items contained in the SVS questionnaire inadequately captured the possible variation in the range of stalking-related experiences. For example, fear at onset and fear over time were measured on the SVS questionnaire as dichotomous variables to indicate presence or absence, neither item was measured on a continuum to capture level of fear or frequency of feeling fearful. Additionally, the available self-protective behaviors included in the SVS questionnaire were not specifically designed to include technology or Internet use (e.g., avoiding social media). Future researchers can build upon the SVS questionnaire by expanding the available indicators utilized to include not only technology or Internet-based self-protective behaviors, but also to develop more precise measures of victims' fear and financial costs, and a more exhaustive list of self-protective behaviors specific to cyberstalking cases. The latter is especially needed to examine these important dimensions of stalking and cyberstalking victimization.

Despite the limitations, the current study nevertheless offers important and unique contributions to the field of stalking and provides the foundation for the extension of this research by examining applications of criminological theory. Very little prior research has incorporated a theoretical approach to studying stalking victimization, with the exception of a handful of recent studies that have used college students to examine routine activities theory (Fisher et al., 2002; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 1999), self-control theory (Fox, Gover, & Kaukinen, 2009), life course theory (Nobles et al., 2009), and social learning theory (Fox, Nobles, & Akers, 2011a). Differences in stalking and cyberstalking victimization may portend differences in the nature of offenders, victims, situational antecedents, or all of the above. For

example, to the extent that cyberstalking may involve parallel social processes or dimensions that shape different norms, values, and behavioral expectations online compared to commonly held "real world" conventions, it may also be useful to leverage theories that rely upon subcultural explanations for crime (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). Neutralization techniques (Sykes & Matza, 1957) may also be helpful to understand both offender behavior and victim response. Furthermore, control balance theory (Tittle, 1995) has explained various types of crime and victimization, and it may be useful for understanding the dynamics related to stalking and cyberstalking. Only by testing these theories with stalking victims can researchers really assess their explanatory ability and predictive power.

Findings from the current study also hold promise for future criminal justice policy. First, given that cyberstalking is associated with negative factors and outcomes (e.g., costs, fear, and physical attacks), the current study underscores the importance for stalking legislation to specifically mention cyberstalking either as part of the legal stalking code or as a separate crime. Presently, three state statutes (Florida, Illinois, and Rhode Island) specifically outlaw cyberstalking or "stalking by computer" within their anti-stalking codes (Leiter, 2007). Second, since there appears to be substantial financial costs associated with cyberstalking victimization that exceeds the costs associated with stalking, tailoring laws to address financial needs with mechanisms such as court-imposed restitution may assist victims.

Finally, these results suggest that, for both stalking and cyberstalking victims, self-identifying their experience as "stalking" was associated with increased self-protective behaviors, which has implications for policy and programming. A minority of victims of both stalking (38.3%) and cyberstalking (44.0%), however, actually considered their experiences to be "stalking" (see Table 1). This finding suggests that victims were more likely to take action to

protect themselves when they acknowledged the pursuit behaviors were serious enough to be considered criminal, but fewer than half reached that conclusion. Although this realization may seem obvious, a deeper understanding of the victimization literature in general suggests that victims often do not realize, acknowledge, and label their experiences as "criminal" or themselves as "victims" (Karmen, 2009). This is especially true among victims of interpersonal crimes, such as sexual assault and intimate partner violence (Fisher, Daigle, & Cullen, 2010; Kolivas & Gross, 2007). Examining whether stalking and cyberstalking victims acknowledge that their experiences qualify as stalking has been largely overlooked by prior research, and the current study is among the first to shed light on this policy-relevant topic. In some ways, the finding that labeling the pursuit behavior as stalking is associated with increased self-protective behaviors provides support for the adage that "knowledge is power." Our findings suggest that people who understand they are victims of stalking and cyberstalking are significantly more likely to protect themselves. From a practical standpoint, this emphasizes the importance of educating the public about recognizing the signs associated with stalking so that they are well equipped to recognize the red flags within their personal relationships. Given the difficulty that researchers, practitioners, and legislators encounter when attempting to define stalking, the need to promote education and awareness about stalking and cyberstalking in the general public may be substantially greater. Considering that more than half of the stalking and cyberstalking victims in our sample did not acknowledge their experience as a victimization, it is clear that the public could benefit from an increased awareness of what constitutes these two crimes.

In conclusion, while the current research is a step forward for stalking research generally, it also underscores the importance of further investigation into the similarities and differences between stalking and cyberstalking. This avenue of research will help to further reconcile

whether cyberstalking is a unique crime, or a variation of stalking. Although common legal and conceptual definitions of these phenomena seem to support the idea that cyberstalking represents a special case of stalking, further study must be devoted to the empirical similarities and differences for victims and perpetrators alike. Only then will researchers be able identify and unpack their predictors, document the effects, and develop evidence-informed self-protection strategies for both stalking and cyberstalking victims.

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