CORRELATES OF CYBERSTALKING AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Cyberstalking occurs when an individual engages in repeated pursuit of another person via electronic or Internet-capable devices (Reyns et al., 2012), including sending unwanted messages, spreading false information online, posting information of a damaging or embarrassing nature, and gathering electronic information about a victim (Mullen et al., 2009). Cyberstalking may also include repeated harassment or threats via e-mail, instant messenger, chat rooms, message boards, or other Internet sites (Baum et al., 2009).

Though scholars have extended self-control theory to victimization risk in general (Schreck, 1999), and self-control has influenced risk of cyberstalking perpetration among high school students (Marcum et al., 2014), the effects of self-control on cyberstalking victimization, especially college-aged students, remains understudied. In addition, females were more likely to experience online victimization (Henson et al., 2013), and the predictors of cyberstalking offending have differed by sex (Ménard & Pincus, 2012). Researchers have not examined how gender-related attitudes affect cyberstalking victimization and offending. The present action-oriented research report presents findings from a study of 662 undergraduate students to examine self-control and gender-related attitudes on cyberstalking.

Cyberstalking

There are three major components to cyberstalking. Behaviors must involve repeated threats and/or harassment that have occurred on two or more occasions (Reyns et al., 2012). Second, the behavior must have occurred via electronic or computer-based communication (Reyns et al., 2012). Finally, behaviors must make a reasonable person afraid or concerned for his/her safety (Nobles et al., 2014). Prevalence estimates of cyberstalking victimization among college students ranged from 1 to 40.8% (Reyns et al., 2012; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002). In comparison, estimates on cyberstalking perpetration prevalence are much lower. Reyns and colleagues (2012) reported that 4.9% of their undergraduate sample indicated engaging in cyberstalking and that males (7%) were more likely than females (4%) to engage in cyberstalking.

Self-Control Theory

Self-control is a latent trait characterized by impulsivity, insensitivity, preference for physical activity, risk-taking, and short-sightedness (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Individuals with lower levels of self-control have a greater propensity for criminality and deviance because of a decreased ability to resist the immediate and short-term benefits associated with crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Scholars have noted that men and women have reported different levels of self-control (LaGrange & Silverman, 1999). Analyses that have explored the effect of self-control on crime have reported support for the theory (e.g. Pratt & Cullen, 2000). Pratt and Cullen's (2000, p. 952) meta-analysis concluded self-control is, "one of the strongest known correlates of crime." Few studies have applied self-control theory to cyberstalking perpetration. Recently, Marcum et al. (2014) surveyed high school students to examine the relation between self-control and cyberstalking. Results indicated that as an individual's self-control

decreased, cyberstalking perpetration increased. Given the association between low self-control and cyberstalking perpetration among adolescents, as well as the stability of self-control over time, self-control may affect the likelihood of cyberstalking perpetration among college students. Self-control has been expanded to include victimization (Schreck, 1999), because "the same characteristics of low self-control that increase the odds of committing crime also increase the likelihood of victimization" (Bossler & Holt, 2010, p. 228). Lower levels of self-control have been associated with increased risk of offline stalking victimization for both men (Fox et al., 2016) and women (Fox et al., 2009). Furthermore, Pratt et al.'s (2014) meta-analysis reported that self-control is a modest yet consistent predictor of victimization, and the effects were stronger for noncontact forms of victimization, because these experiences may require the victim's cooperation. Therefore, lower levels of self-control may enhance vulnerability to cyberstalking victimization among college students as individuals with lower levels of self-control have engaged in more impulsive or risky online behavior.

The Role of Gender in Cyberstalking

The disproportionate prevalence of sexual assault and intimate partner violence (IPV) targeting women has been explained by linking men's violence to a patriarchal society in which men control and dominate women (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988). Stalking, like other forms of gender violence, has had substantial gender disparity and has been motivated by power and control (Basile et al., 2006). Indeed, most offline stalking and cyberstalking perpetrators have been male and the majority of victims have been female (Breiding et al., 2014; D'Ovidio & Doyle, 2003). Few studies revealed men have been more likely than women to report cyberstalking victimization (Alexy et al., 2005), where sufficient empirical research has revealed the majority of cyberstalking victims are female (Henson et al., 2013; Reyns et al., 2012). There are gender differences in estimates of online stalking victimization and also in the factors that may lead to online victimization (Henson et al., 2013). Prior research has also suggested that there are gender-specific risks for victimization, both online (Navarro & Jasinski, 2013) and offline (Reyns et al., 2015). While Reyns et al. (2011) found few differences between male and female respondents in terms of risk factors for cyberstalking victimization, prior research reported gender stereotypes, adversarial heterosexual beliefs, and membership in Greek organizations influenced risk of violence against women (Forbes et al., 2004; Foshee et al., 2001; Hines, 2007; Humphrey & Kahn, 2000; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995). Those who endorse more stringent gender stereotypes, favoring a male's expression of dominance and control (Auerbach-Walker & Browne, 1985), have been more likely to believe that women's victimization is "a potential consequence of not fulfilling one's sex role" (Anderson et al., 1997, p. 312). Adversarial heterosexual beliefs have focused on the nature of male-female working relationships, platonic friendships, and societal relationships between the sexes

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(Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995). These beliefs have typically stemmed from a masculine ideology and have predicted negative attitudes and aggressive behaviors toward women (Forbes et al., 2004; Hines, 2007). Since cyberstalking is a crime with substantial gender disparity, indicators that have increased risk of violence against women may also play an essential role in explaining cyberstalking victimization and offending.

Data and Methods

Data were collected from a convenience sample of undergraduate students, aged 18 and older, in 11 criminal justice undergraduate classes at a southeastern university during the Fall semester of 2015. All instructors who taught large lecture criminal justice courses (i.e. greater than 75 students) were contacted and asked for permission to solicit participants. The response rate across classes was 61.47%. The paper-and-pencil survey instrument included questions on demographic characteristics, experiences with online harassment and cyberstalking, intervention behaviors, and consequences for intervention. Participation was anonymous and voluntary. At the Instructor's discretion, students received extra credit for survey participation. If the Instructor offered extra credit and the student elected not to participate, an alternative assignment was provided. Data collection resulted in 820 participants. List-wise deletion produced a final sample of 662 participants.

Measures

Cyberstalking victimization was captured with a binary measure. First, participants were asked, "Has anyone, male or female, ever frightened, concerned, angered, or annoyed you by engaging in the following behaviors over the last year?" Participants were provided with a list of behaviors: 1) unwanted or unsolicited electronic message; 2) spying online; and 3) posting information or spreading rumors. Aligning with the cyberstalking definition of repeated pursuit as two or more instances (Reyns et al., 2012), participants were asked if each behavior had happened more than once. If any of the behaviors occurred more than once, these fit the criteria for cyberstalking victimization. Participants who had experienced two or more behaviors also met the criteria because they experienced repeated pursuit. Responses were collapsed into a binary measure to capture cyberstalking victimization within the previous year [(1 = Experienced cyberstalking victimization, 23.41%) (0 = No cyberstalking victimization,76.49%)].

Cyberstalking offending was measured similarly. Participants were asked if they had engaged in 1) unwanted or unsolicited electronic messaging; 2) spying online; and 3) posting information or spreading rumors in the past year. If any of the behaviors had occurred more than once, the participant was coded affirmative for cyberstalking perpetration (Reyns et al., 2012). Two or more behaviors also met the criteria for cyberstalking perpetration. Responses were binary [(1 = Perpetrated cyberstalking, 6.65%) (0 = No cyberstalking perpetration, 93.35%)].

Gender stereotyping was captured with the 12-item Gender Stereotyping Scale (Foshee et al., 2001; Foshee et al., 2004) which has been used to measure traditional gender stereotypes (e.g. most women cannot be trusted; swearing is worse for a girl than for a boy). Response categories were measured with a four-point, Likert-type scale from 0 (Strongly disagree) to 3 (Strongly agree). Four items were reverse coded. Eleven items, all of which had factor loadings greater than 0.3, were retained and summed into a scale. Higher scores indicated increased traditional gender stereotypes (α= 0.79).

Adversarial heterosexual beliefs. The 15-item Adversarial Heterosexual Beliefs Scale (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995) focuses on the nature of relationships between males and females and was used in the present analysis. Response categories were measured with a five-point, Likert-type scale from 0 (Strongly disagree) to 4 (Strongly

agree). Twelve items with factor loadings above .4 were retained and summed into a scale. Higher scores indicated greater adversarial heterosexual beliefs (α= 0.85).

Self-control. Grasmick et al.'s (1993) 24-item self-control scale captured response options measured with a four-point, Likert-type scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 4 (Strongly agree). Items on this scale include "I often act on the spur of the moment without stopping to think," "Sometimes I will take a risk just for the fun of it," and "If things I do upset people, it's their problem, not mine." Items with factor loadings less than 0.3 were omitted leaving a 20-item self control scale that was reverse coded and summed. Higher scores represented increased levels self-control (α=0.85).

Personal Characteristics. Membership in a fraternity or sorority was measured dichotomously. Gender was captured with a binary measure (Male = 0, Female = 1). Age was a continuous measure. School classification was measured as a categorical variable, where senior served as the reference. Descriptive statistics can be found in Table 1.

Analyses

An independent samples t-test was estimated to assess if cyberstalking victims and perpetrators scored significantly different on the self-control scale. Given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variables, logistic regression models were estimated to examine the effect of predictors on the odds of reporting cyberstalking victimization and perpetration. Values greater than one increased the odds of the event occurring and values less than one decreased the odds of the event occurring (Weisburd & Britt, 2007).

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the sample. Bivariate results indicated that respondents who were not cyberstalking victims scored significantly higher on the self-control scale (M = 60.66, SD= 8.06) compared to cyberstalking victims (M= 59.21, SD= 8.66, t (660)= 1.93, $p \leq 0.05$). Perpetrators of cyberstalking scored significantly lower on the self-control scale (M = 56.11, SD=9.01) compared to individuals who had not perpetrated cyberstalking (M = 60.62, SD= 8.09, t (660)= 3.55, $p < 0.001$). Victims and perpetrators scored lower on the self-control scale than respondents who indicated they had not been victimized by or engaged in cyberstalking.

Multivariate ordinary least squares regression models predicting cyberstalking victimization and perpetration revealed several interesting findings. Females (Exp (B) = 2.02, $p \leq 0.001$), compared to males were 2.02 times more likely to experience cybserstalkign victimization. Additionally, juniors (Exp (B) = 2.43, $p \leq 0.01$), compared to seniors, were

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (n=662)				
	% (*M*)	**S.D.**	**Min.**	**Max.**
Dependent Variables				
Cyberstalking Victimization	23.41%	0.42	0	1
Cyberstalking Perpetration	6.65%	0.25	0	1
Independent Variables				
Adversarial Heterosexual Beliefs Scale	(13.01)	7.11	0	48
Gender Stereotype Scale	(7.73)	4.67	0	29
Self-Control Scale	(60.32)	8.22	20	80
Member of Greek Life	10.88%	0.31	0	1
Age	20.21	2.49	18	56
Freshmen	23.72%	0.43	0	1
Sophomore	28.10%	0.45	0	1
Junior	30.06%	0.46	0	1
Senior	18.13%	0.39	0	1
Female	62.99%	0.48	0	1

2.43 times more likely to experience cyberstalking victimization. Respondents with higher levels of self-control were less likely to be victimized (Exp (B) = 0.97, $p \leq 0.05$). Respondents who reported higher scores on the gender stereotyping scale were less likely to be victimized (Exp (B) = 0.92, $p \leq 0.01$). Adversarial heterosexual beliefs and Greek life membership were not significantly correlated with cyberstalking victimization.

Very few respondents (N=44) reported cyberstalking perpetration over the past year. Females were 3.21 times more likely to report cyberstalking perpetration (Exp (B)= 3.21, $p \leq 0.01$) compared to males. Individuals who scored higher on the self-control scale were less likely to report cyberstalking perpetration (Exp (B) = 0.93, $p \leq 0.001$). Gender stereotyping, adversarial heterosexual beliefs, and Greek life membership was not significantly correlated with cyberstalking perpetration.

Discussion

Cyberstalking Victimization

Findings indicated that college students with higher levels of self-control were less likely to report cyberstalking victimization. This is consistent with earlier research that has found lower levels of self-control are a risk factor for victimization (Schreck, 1999), including stalking victimization (Fox et al., 2009; 2016), cybercrime (Bossler & Holt, 2010), and online victimization (Pratt et al., 2014; Reyns et al., 2011). Individuals with lower levels of self-control may also engage in more risk-taking behaviors in online contexts, such as talking to strangers who may be likely offenders. Individuals who have experienced online victimization have also reported considerably more offline problem behaviors (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). Those individuals with a lower tolerance for frustration may be quick to anger, encouraging vulnerability to victimization (Schreck, 1999). On the contrary, increased self-control, characterized as possessing healthy self-esteem, interpersonal skills, prosocial emotional responses, and conflict resolution (Tangney et al., 2004), may be more likely to anticipate negative consequences and may have been less vulnerable to victimization (Schreck, 1999). The majority of cyberstalking victims in the sample (75.5%) were female, which aligns with previous research (Henson et al., 2013; Reyns et al., 2011). This finding indicates that cyberstalking victimization among college students may be a gendered crime, which has predominately affected women.

There was a significant relation between gender stereotyping and victimization, as higher scores on gender stereotyping decreased the odds of cyberstalking. This finding contradicts previous studies (Anderson et al., 1997; Foshee et al., 2001, 2004). Endorsement of gender stereotypes may mean that would-be victims may not interpret or define their experiences as cyberstalking. Anderson et al. (1997, p. 312) argued, "like men, women are socialized to believe certain sex-types behavior are appropriate for men and women." Women may believe that their experience is a "potential consequence of not fulfilling one's sex role" (Anderson et al., 1997, p. 312). Victims who support traditional gender roles may not recognize cyberstalking victimization because they may believe this behavior aligns with the gender stereotypes they hold that favor a male's experience of control (Auerbach-Walker & Browne, 1985). It is also possible that since cyberstalking behaviors are covert, the individual may not have been aware of their cyberstalking victimization.

Cyberstalking Perpetration

Findings also revealed that cyberstalking perpetration is significantly affected by the perpetrator self-control. This is important and aligns with previous research where self-control deficits have increased cyberstalking perpetration risk among high school students (Marcum et al., 2014).

Contrary to previous research (D'Ovidio & Doyle, 2003), the majority of cyberstalking perpetrators in this sample were female (81.80%). A common theme that emerged from female respondents' open-ended answers was spying online out of curiosity or to see "how people were doing." Prior research reported women may stalk due to anger or loneliness, while men reported stalking to maintain power and control, suggesting motivations differ by gender (Boyd, 2003). Given that women were more likely to engage in cyberstalking out of curiosity, perpetration of cyberstalking among the women in this sample may be different from other interpersonal violence perpetrated by women.

Though females may been more likely to engage in cyberstalking, it cannot be disregarded that females may have been more likely to *report* having engaged in cyberstalking. Nobles et al. (2009) found that females were more likely to report offline stalking compared to males and similarly argued this may be the result of gender differences in reporting behaviors. The majority of cyberstalking victims were female and most victims reported cyberstalking perpetration by a male, which contrasts the previous finding. Yet, the possibility that females are more likely than men to engage in cyberstalking perpetration should not be overlooked. Gender stereotyping and adversarial heterosexual beliefs were not significantly correlated with cyberstalking perpetration. The types of perpetration that are associated with gender stereotypes and adversarial heterosexual beliefs consist of direct behaviors, such as IPV (Foshee et al., 2001) and sexual violence (Hines, 2007). Cyberstalking may reflect an indirect form of harassment that conceptually differs from gendered crimes that are violent in nature.

Policy Implications for Texas

Despite the prevalence of cyberstalking among college students, little effort has been devoted toward awareness-raising. Directing attention to cyberstalking is important, as many individuals may not recognize cyberstalking behavior or acknowledge victimization and therefore, may be unlikely to formally report their victimization (Alexy et al., 2005). It is important for institutions of higher education (IHEs) to incorporate cyberstalking into discussions of interpersonal violence. In addition, it is possible that individuals who have lower levels of self-control may face incrased vulnerability to victimization through target attractiveness (Schreck, 1999). IHEs can focus on interventions that minimize risky situations. This can include training on cyber-security or online bystander intervention. Despite the potential of interventions to prevent and minimize the occurrence of cyberstalking, the majority of IHEs in Texas do not include cyberstalking into discussions of interpersonal violence. While many IHEs facilitate bystander intervention programs (e.g., Bystander Initiative of the University of Texas), and incorporate stalking into promming focusing on interpersonal violence, cyberstalking has often remained overlooked. As cyberstalking is an indirect form of harassment that may differ from traditional forms of stalking and can also have significant physical and mental health reprecussions, is it important to incorporate cyberstalking into prevention curriculua to teach college students how they can recognize and acknowledge cyberstalking victimization.

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