

**Module code: C84FRP**

**Student no: 4306858**

Year 1 MSc Forensic and Criminological Psychology

2018

Every Breath You Take: Comparing Perceptions of Cyberstalkers and  
Physical Stalkers

Sanish Prasad

Journal the paper is written for: Criminal Justice and Behavior

## Contents

Project Proposal .....	3
Ethics Approval Letter .....	23
Research Paper .....	24
Executive Summary .....	60
Powerpoint Presentation .....	65
Reflective Report .....	66

*It's Not You, It's Me: Comparing Perceptions of Behaviours Over the Internet and in Person*

*Sanish Prasad*

*Student ID: 4306858*

*Word Count: 1,499*

*Forensic Psychology Research Dissertation: (C84FRP UK)*

# Research Protocol

## Overview of Topic

Stalking, a criminal activity consisting of repeat and unwanted following, watching or harassment of another person, stands at odds with other criminal behaviour – in isolation, many of the behaviours stalkers engage in are relatively normal, such as going to see someone or sending gifts. Prior to the 1990's, little legal consideration was given to this behaviour; several high-profile cases such as the murder of actress Rebecca Schaefer prompted several states to officially criminalize stalking, such as California in 1990. (California Penal Code, Section §646.9, 1990)

Stalking victims typically fear for their safety or for the safety of others and suffer significant psychological distress. Again, in contrast to other crimes, such as robbery, the offender does not need to physically harm the victim to induce suffering – many typical stalker behaviours include loitering around places where the victim works or lives, sending unwanted letters or phone calls and even threatening the victim.

Over the past 20 years, research into public perceptions of stalking has yielded some insightful results; people tend to view stranger stalkers as more persistent and dangerous in their actions compared to stalkers whom they used to date (ex-partner stalkers) and the courts share a similar viewpoint: stranger stalkers are more likely to be found guilty, yet research finds that it is actually ex-partner stalkers who are more persistent and dangerous. (Scott & Sheridan, 2011) This is especially dangerous in combination with the fact that people are more likely to blame themselves and not interpret the offender's behaviour as stalking when the offender was an ex-partner. (Scott & Sheridan, 2011)

Marked gender differences are also evident in the field. For instance, Dunlap et al (2011) found that compared to women, men gave significantly fewer guilty verdicts, especially in conditions where the vignette used in the experiment involved a male stalker and female victim (a gender dynamic that is

seen to reflect typical instances of stalking). It is important to know here that much research has shown that 77% of all stalkers were male, and the victims were 75% female. (Spitzberg, 2002).

Dunlap suggests that as the stalkers are typically men, the males in their experiment identify more with the perpetrator. In a similar vein, as women are mostly the victims, they thus identify with the victims, explaining their higher pro-prosecution choices (Dunlap et al, 2011). Thus, both men and women seem to follow cognitive gender biases and do not strictly stick to objective legal guidelines in court cases.

As technology advances, crime gets more sophisticated alongside it; with the rise of social media such as Facebook and Instagram, a new type of stalking called cyberstalking has emerged. This refers to the use of the Internet to harass and follow victims. According to an internet study of 6,379 participants (Dreßing et al., 2014), the prevalence of cyberstalking was 6.3%. Given there is much less research done on cyberstalking, and that scholars are divided whether cyberstalking represents a different kind of stalking or an entirely novel behaviour, it becomes clear why more research on cyberstalking is necessary. While cyberstalking has been studied, research typically focuses on prevalence rates or what victims of cyberstalking and physical stalking have in common (Pittaro, 2007). To date, there is no research on how people perceive cyber-stalkers in comparison to physical stalkers, nor is there anything known about how gender influences this perception.

The aim of this study is to fill these gaps in the literature. Do people still rate stranger stalkers as more dangerous over the internet as well, and does the way the stalking is conducted (physical, compared to online) influence attitudes to stalking? By showing how people perceive both cyber and physical stalkers, this will provide a well-rounded account of our understanding of stalking overall. Finally, the study will further inform our knowledge of gender differences.

It is rather easy to find people online, and given how many people use social media (Common Sense Media, 2009) the results may yield strong practical implications – for instance, if people perceive

cyber-stalkers as less dangerous when in fact they are just as much a threat as a physical stalker, social media websites can reinforce the importance of having a secure and private account.

### **Research Questions**

- 1. i]** How do people's perceptions of cyberstalkers differ to that of physical stalkers?
  
- 1. ii]** How does the relationship between the victim and stalker (stranger/prior history) influence the above perception?
  
- 2.** How do males and females differ in their perceptions of stalking?

### **Design**

This will be an online between participants 2x2 design with 2 main conditions which each contain 2 smaller conditions: both an online stalker and physical stalker component, each with vignettes involving either a stranger stalker or an ex-partner stalker.

### **Participants**

For this experiment, males and females between the ages of 18-25 will be sampled. This is reflective of the younger age groups who tend to use a lot of social media and meet a lot of people online – 22% of adolescents visit their preferred social media website over 10 times per day, whilst 75% of adolescents own personal phones and 25% use them for social media (Common Sense Media, 2009).

Both genders are included as research shows that stalking affects both men and women, women moreso. However, the difference is much smaller with cyber-stalking. (Dreßing et al., 2014)

In terms of recruitment, advertisements for the study will be put on various social media websites, such as Facebook or Twitter. Participants who complete the experiment will be asked if they have any other friends or colleagues who would like to participate. First year students at the University of Nottingham need to partake in experiments, and so it has been requested for this study to be put on the list they can choose from.

In terms of the sample size, a G-power analysis showed that a sample of 113 participants is needed. (This is when alpha is 0.05, the power is 0.8, medium effect size, 4 groups with a MANCOVA analysis) As an equal number of males and females are needed, 56 males and females will be sampled at minimum.

To avoid bias, the term 'stalking' will not be used when advertising or during the experiment. Participants will be under the impression the study is just about how they perceive behaviour when it takes place over the internet/in person and will not be told it is explicitly about stalking until the debrief at the end of the experiment.

### **Procedure:**

This experiment will be internet based. Once participants click on the link to the study, they will be shown the participant information sheet. Using the word 'stalking' and telling the participants this is an experiment about stalking behaviour may bias their perceptions of the behaviour. Therefore the information sheet will instead tell participants this is a study looking at how the internet influences our perception of other people's behaviour, and will not mention it is about stalking. After agreeing to participate, they will be assigned to either the physical or cyber stalking condition, read the vignettes, then rate the behaviour using a Likert-type scale.

Once the experiment is over, they will then be debriefed on the true nature of the experiment (as the term 'stalking' will only be used for the last question of the Likert type scale – they will be told the study was about stalker perception.

Finally, they will fill out a demographic form.

Participants' responses will be saved onto a securely password-locked file on the computer.

### **Measures:**

(X being the name of the fictitious stalker. Participants will be asked to imagine if they were the victim in these vignettes and thus take their perspective.)

1. *X's behaviour causes alarm or distress to me*
2. *X's behaviour necessitates police intervention.*
3. *X's behaviour is a threat to my safety.*
4. *X's behaviour constitutes stalking.*

The above questions will be tested on a 7 point Likert-type scale – participants will tick the number that best represents their views (*e.g. 7 – strongly disagree or 1 – strongly agree*)

The Likert type Scale was chosen for multiple reasons; firstly, as it is a scale, it allows the participant to respond in a degree of agreement; it is more accommodating than a simple yes/no questionnaire. Furthermore, it also accommodates if a participant feels unsure or neutral on a topic. Perhaps the strongest advantage is that a Likert scale simply allows for an easy quantifiable analysis of results and given its flexibility, means it can be sent out either over the internet or administered in person.

### **Proposed Analysis:**

In order to analyse differences between group means, a MANCOVA will be conducted to check for



any significant differences between groups, and post-hoc tests such as Tukey to see where these differences lie.

#### **Timescale:**

Final Ethics Submission: 29<sup>th</sup> of January 2018

Data Collection: Early February 2018 – mid March 2018 (6 weeks)

Data Analysis: Mid-March 2018 – early May 2018 (6 weeks)

Draft of Portfolio: Early May 2018 – 25<sup>th</sup> June 2018 – (6 weeks)

Final Portfolio Submission: Early July 2018 – 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018 – (4 weeks)

#### **References**

*California Penal Code, Section § 646.9 (1990).*

*Common Sense Media. Is Technology Networking Changing Childhood? A National Poll. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media ; (2009)*

*Dreßing, H., Bailer, J., Anders, A., Wagner, H. and Gallas, C. (2014). Cyberstalking in a Large Sample of Social Network Users: Prevalence, Characteristics, and Impact Upon Victims. Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 17(2), pp.61-67.*

*Dunlap, E., Hodell, E., Golding, J. and Wasarhaley, N. (2011). Mock Jurors' Perception of Stalking: The Impact of Gender and Expressed Fear. Sex Roles, 66(5-6), pp.405-417.*

*Likert, Rensis (1932). "A Technique for the Measurement of Attitudes". Archives of Psychology. 140: 1–55.*

*Pittaro, M. L. (2007). Cyber stalking: An analysis of online harassment and intimidation. International Journal of Cyber Criminology, 1, 180-197*

*Scott, A. and Sheridan, L. (2011). 'Reasonable' perceptions of stalking: the influence of conduct severity and the perpetrator–target relationship. Psychology, Crime & Law, 17(4), pp.331-343.*

*Spitzberg, B. H. (2002). The tactical topography of stalking victimization and management. Trauma, Violence & Abuse, 3, 261–288.*

## **Appendix A**

### *Advertisement for study*

#### **Advertisement for Study**

Looking for males and females aged 18-25 to take part in an online based study. This will involve reading a story of another person's behaviour and the impact it may have on their ex-partner and someone they had not met before. The behaviour will either be described as taking place over the internet or in real life.

You will read the two brief stories and be asked to rate their behaviour on certain measures through a simple scale. We are looking to see if the relationship between two people has an impact on your perception of the behaviour, and if being on the internet has an effect as well.

It will take between 5-15 minutes, depending on your reading speed. Feel free to contact me or my supervisor for more information. The experiment will take place online so you can do it in the comfort of your own home.

If you have any further questions please contact me (Sanish Prasad) at [msxsp16@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:msxsp16@nottingham.ac.uk) or my supervisor at [Simon.Duff@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Simon.Duff@nottingham.ac.uk)

**Appendix B**

*Participant Information Sheet*

Centre for Forensic & Family Psychology

Division of Psychiatry & Applied Psychology

School of Medicine, Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences

**Project Title:** *It's Not You, It's Me: Comparing Perceptions of Behaviours Over the Internet and in Person*

Researcher: Sanish Prasad (msxsp16@nottingham.ac.uk)

Supervisor: Dr Simon Duff (Simon.Duff@nottingham.ac.uk)

Ethics Reference Number: ... *[to be inserted following ethical review]*

You are being invited to participate in a research study as you are within the age range of 18-25. This study is being done by Sanish Prasad and supervised by Dr Simon Duff from the University of Nottingham. The information we get from this study will inform our understanding of how the public perceive certain behaviours over the internet compared to these behaviours in person. In turn this can help psychologists understand the differences and see how the internet affects our perceptions.

*What is the study about?*

The purpose of this research is to understand how two things influence our perceptions of other people's behaviour: the internet, and the relationship between the people involved. You will be assigned to either the cyber or physical condition. The difference between the two conditions is that the former involves stories (vignettes) of behaviours over the internet, whereas the latter relates vignettes of real life behaviours.

Both conditions will involve reading vignettes of behaviours a person carries out towards someone they had not previously met and ex-partner. You will be asked to imagine you are the person experiencing the others' behaviour and then will rate the extent to which you perceive the behaviour through various measures on a scale, from 1-7, which will be done twice – once for ex-partner, and once where the person was previously unknown.

It will take you approximately 5-15 minutes to complete the experiment, depending on your own reading speed.

If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. Your participation is voluntary, and you may decline to answer a particular question, and without giving a reason. You are free to withdraw (i.e. pull out) at any point before or during the study by closing the browser window. It will not affect you in anyway. The data will only be uploaded on completion of the questionnaire by clicking the SUBMIT button.

However, because this study uses anonymous questionnaires, once you have finished the questionnaire and submitted your answers, it will not be possible to withdraw the data.

*Will the research be of any personal benefit to me?*

Whilst the results are unlikely to be of any personal benefit to you, they will inform the current literature on behaviour perception which in turn will help us identify how the internet and relationships can influence our thoughts and perceptions.

*What will happen to the information I provide?*

All of the information that you provide during the research will be kept confidential and anonymous. Only your data from the questionnaires will be used when reporting the research findings. You will not be asked for your name or any other personal details, so it will not be possible for you to be linked with the data. The UK Data Protection Act 1998 will apply to all information gathered within the questionnaires.

We believe there are no known risks linked with this research study. We will do everything possible to make sure your answers in this study remain anonymous. We will reduce any risks by keeping all information gathered within the questionnaires on password-locked computer files so that no data can be accessed by anyone other than the researcher and the supervisor. All of the data will be stored for a period of 10 years before being destroyed.

*What will you do with the data?*

The data will contribute to the researcher's MSc thesis. The results of the study may be published in scientific journals and presented at scientific conferences. The data will be reported anonymously, with any identifying information removed. If you would like a summary of the results then you can contact the researchers using the contact details above.

**If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact us at the above email addresses.**

We can be contacted before and after your participation at the above address.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION**

**Appendix C**

*Participant Consent Form*

Centre for Forensic & Family Psychology

Division of Psychiatry & Applied Psychology

School of Medicine, Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences

**Project Title:** *It's Not You, It's Me: Comparing Perceptions of Behaviours Over the Internet and in Person*

Researcher: Sanish Prasad ([msxsp16@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:msxsp16@nottingham.ac.uk))

Supervisor: Simon Duff ([Simon.Duff@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Simon.Duff@nottingham.ac.uk))

Ethics Reference Number: .... *[to be inserted following ethical review]*

- I have read and understood the Participant Information. YES/NO
  
- I know how to contact the researcher if I have questions about this study? YES/NO
  
- I understand that my participation is voluntary I am free to withdraw at any time?

YES/NO



- I understand that for anonymous questionnaire studies, once you have completed the study and submitted your questionnaire, the data cannot be withdrawn?

YES/NO

- I understand the overall anonymised data from this study may be used by other researchers in the future for research and teaching purposes?

YES/NO

- I understand that non-identifiable data from this study might be used in academic research reports or publications?

YES/NO

- I am 18 or over

YES/NO

- I indicate my willingness to take part in the study voluntarily

YES/NO

**APPENDIX D***Participant Debrief Form***Debrief**

You were told initially that this study was looking at the effect of the internet and relationships on behaviour perception. However, what this study was truly looking at was perceptions of stalkers and stalker behaviour. We were interested to see if the relationship between the stalker and victim, along with where the stalking took place – over the internet, or physically based – had an impact on how you perceived the stalker.

It was not possible to reveal the true nature of the experiment at the start as the very use of the word 'stalker' may have automatically biased your perceptions, due to the negative connotations people often hold toward stalking behaviour.

This experiment is the first of its kind to compare perceptions of cyberstalkers to physical stalkers to see if people view them any differently. Previous research has found that the public perceive stranger stalkers to be more of a threat, a view that the courts share. It is actually ex-partner stalkers who are more persistent and dangerous. With this experiment we also sought to replicate these past results and add to the literature base.

The results from this study will be used to inform the current literature on stalking awareness, which in turn may help to identify early identification of stalking and therefore reduce a person's chances of being a victim.

We apologise for not being wholly honest from the start. If you feel distressed or uncomfortable in any way, you can seek support from the following places:

- The Samaritans have a helpline that can be rang at any time, 365 days a year, on 116 123
- Alternatively you can call the Suzy Lampugh line which provides support for stalking victims on 0808 802 0300

Myself and my supervisor can also be contacted at any point. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have.

Myself (Sanish Prasad) [msxsp16@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:msxsp16@nottingham.ac.uk)  
Supervisor (Simon Duff) [Simon.Duff@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Simon.Duff@nottingham.ac.uk)

## APPENDIX E

*Likert-Type Scale used in experiment***Likert-type Scale**

	<i>1 - Strongly Agree</i>	<i>2 - Agree</i>	<i>3 - Slightly Agree</i>	<i>4 - Neutral</i>	<i>5 - Slightly Disagree</i>	<i>6 - Disagree</i>	<i>7 - Strongly Disagree</i>
<i>X's behaviour causes alarm or distress to me</i>							
<i>X's behaviour necessitates police intervention</i>							
<i>X's behaviour is a threat to my safety.</i>							
<i>X's behaviour constitutes stalking.</i>							

**APPENDIX F**

*Demographic Questionnaire*

**Demographic Questionnaire**

Today's date \_\_\_\_\_

Age (in years) \_\_\_\_\_

Current Relationship Status: [Please delete accordingly] SINGLE/PARTNER/MARRIED/DATING

Have you ever been harassed offline? [Please delete accordingly] YES/NO

Have you ever been harassed online? [Please delete accordingly] YES/NO

Which social media/dating applications do you currently use?

- Facebook [ ]
- Twitter [ ]
- Instagram [ ]
- Tinder [ ]
- Snapchat [ ]

Sex: Male [ ] Female [ ]

(please tick)

**APPENDIX G***Stalking vignettes used in experiment***Vignette: Physical****1 a**

*Recently at a party you went to you met someone who expressed a strong interest in dating you. You were not interested and politely turned them down. It has been around 2 months since and this person has been calling you at work, leaving messages and on occasion you have seen them loitering at the entrance to your workplace. You suspect you've seen them at other places you frequently visit such as the gym. Despite making it clear you are not interested, this person carries on sending things such as flowers and chocolates to you and persists in asking why you won't date them. After a while they began sending threatening messages.*

**1 b**

*Recently at a party you went to you bumped into your ex-partner whom you had been dating for a year. They expressed a strong interest to get back together with you, but you politely declined. It has been 2 months since the party and your ex-partner has been calling you at work, leaving your messages and on occasion you have seen them loitering at your workplace. You suspect you've seen them at other places you frequently visit such as the gym. Despite making it clear you do not wish to get back together, your ex-partner keeps on sending flowers and chocolate and persists in asking you why you won't get back together with them. After a while they began sending threatening messages.*

**Vignette: Cyber****2 a**

*On Facebook, you just uploaded an album containing photos from a recent holiday you had. Many of your friends and family liked the album, but you noticed someone you did not know or have on your friends list liked the album. They sent you a private message, which at first consisted of small talk relating to how the holiday was, what you got up to, and that they'd been there as well. After spending some time talking to them, they sent you a friend request which you accepted. They then asked to physically meet, to which you politely declined, resulting in a change in their behaviour: they started sending you hundreds of messages daily, demanding to meet up with you in person, started sending threats and every time you blocked or deleted them, they would make a new account and start anew.*

**2 b**

*On Facebook, you just uploaded an album containing photos from a recent holiday you had. Many of your friends and family liked the album, including your ex-partner with whom you broke up with, having dated for around a year. Your ex-partner sent you a private message, which at first consisted of small talk relating to how the holiday was, what you got up to, and that they'd been there as well.*

*After some time talking to them, they began asking why you broke up with them, and if you could get back together with them. You politely declined, resulting in a change in their behaviour: they started sending you hundreds of messages daily, demanding to meet up with you in person, started sending threats and every time you blocked or deleted them, they would make a new account and start anew.*

## Ethics Approval Letter



**University of  
Nottingham**  
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

Email: [FMHS-ResearchEthics@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:FMHS-ResearchEthics@nottingham.ac.uk)

**Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences  
Research Ethics Committee**

c/o Faculty PVC Office  
School of Medicine Education Centre  
B Floor, Medical School  
Queen's Medical Centre Campus  
Nottingham University Hospitals  
Nottingham, NG7 2UH

19 March 2018

**Sanish Prasad**

MSc Forensic and Criminological Psychology Student  
c/o Dr Simon Duff  
Deputy Director of Forensic Programmes  
Centre for Forensic and Family Psychology  
Room B05 YANG Fujia  
Jubilee Campus  
Wollaton Road  
Nottingham  
NG8 1BB

Dear Sanish

<b>Ethics Reference No:</b> 240-1802– <b>please always quote</b>	
<b>Study Title:</b> Every Breath You Take: Comparing perceptions of cyberstalkers versus physical stalkers	
<b>Short Title:</b> It's Not You, It's Me: Comparing Perceptions of Behaviours Over the Internet and in Person	
<b>Chief Investigator/Supervisor:</b> Dr Simon Duff, Deputy Director of Forensic Programmes, Dr Lydia Bullock, Assistant Professor of Forensic Psychology, Centre for Forensic and Family Psychology, Division of Psychiatry and Applied Psychology, School of Medicine	
<b>Lead Investigators/student:</b> Sanish Prasad, MSc Forensic and Criminological Psychology	
<b>Type of Study:</b> MSc, internet mediated	
<b>Proposed Start Date:</b> 01/02/2018	<b>Proposed End Date:</b> 01/08/2018 6 mths
<b>No of Subjects:</b> 112	<b>Age:</b> 18+years

Thank you for submitting the above application and the following documents were received:

- FMHS REC Application form and supporting documents version 1.0: 26.01.2018

These have been reviewed and are satisfactory and the study has been given a favourable opinion.

A favourable opinion has been given on the understanding that:

1. The protocol agreed is followed and the Committee is informed of any changes using a notice of amendment form (please request a form).
2. The Chair is informed of any serious or unexpected event.
3. An End of Project Progress Report is completed and returned when the study has finished (Please request a form).

Yours sincerely

**Professor Ravi Mahajan**

Chair, Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee

**EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE:****Comparing Perceptions of  
Cyberstalkers and Physical  
Stalkers**

Sanish Prasad

## Abstract

The current literature has identified different factors that influence perceptions of stalking behaviour, such as participant gender and the relationship between the victim and the stalker. Much less is known about perceptions of cyberstalkers. Researchers are unsure whether cyberstalking is inherently different to physical stalking. However, evidence exists suggesting they are the same. This study aimed to inform this contentious point by examining the effect of the medium of stalking (cyber or physical) on stalking perception. Participants completed an online questionnaire and were assigned to a physical or cyberstalking condition; both of which contained a vignette of stranger stalker behaviour and ex-partner stalker behaviour. After which the behaviours were rated on a 7 point Likert-type scale on 4 different measures. Participants viewed stranger stalkers as more dangerous than ex-partner stalkers, a result consistent with previous literature. The medium of stalking, however, only had a minimal influence – cyber stranger stalkers were seen as more alarming than physical stalkers; however this difference was minimal. No difference on the three other measures was found. This suggests that people view cyberstalkers as the same as physical stalkers, supporting the idea that the two forms of stalking are not distinct. Implications



for cyberstalker treatment are discussed, along with possible methods to reduce the chances of being a cyberstalking victim.

Gender had no influence on stalker perception – a result which was accounted for through methodology.

**Keywords:** *Physical stalking, cyberstalking, stalker perception, gender effects*

### *Defining stalking*

Stalking refers to a criminal behaviour consisting of repeated, deliberate and obsessive harassment of another person (Ybarra, Langhinrichsen-Rohling & Mitchell, 2017). In comparison to other criminal acts such as rape, stalking stands at odds – the behaviour of the stalker, at least in isolation, is harmless. Actions such as sending flowers or going to see someone are not inherently criminal. It is when these behaviours are unwanted and repeated that they become a cause for concern for the victim.

Reports of stalking have a long history – traced back to the 18th century (Bondeson, 2011) – but government legislation which criminalises the behaviour is quite young, with the first anti-stalking law being passed in 1990 in California, following the high-profile cases of various celebrities (Anderson, 1993). Stalking is not comprised of a single event – it typically involves a variety of behaviours over a prolonged period. There is no definitive anti-stalking legislation; definitions vary from country to country and state to state. Some US states include certain behaviours in their definition of stalking, such as surveillance or the threat of harm (Scott, Rajakaruna, Sheridan, & Sleath, 2014). By contrast, Australia focuses on the repetition of the behaviours, and the intention of harm

of the stalker. Legislature in the United Kingdom does not even use the term 'stalker', nor does it focus on intent. By contrast, UK legislature focuses on a 'reasonable person' test whereby a juror or magistrate considers the person's actions to constitute harassment (Petch, 2002). This variation in defining stalking has led to psychologists creating and measuring a continuum of stalking behaviours to encapsulate the variety of different behaviours a stalker can display (Ybarra et al, 2017).

### *General stalker perception*

Stalking literature has demonstrated that stranger stalkers are typically perceived to be more dangerous and their behaviour is more likely to induce fear than an ex-partner stalker (Hills & Taplin, 1998). This study was from an Australian sample. Students in the United States were also more likely to interpret the perpetrator's behaviour as stalking when there was no relationship with the victim (Phillips, Quirk, Rosenfeld, & Connor, 2004) while British university students are also more likely to believe the behaviour necessitates police intervention when the stalker was a stranger (Scott & Sheridan, 2011). Thus, irrespective of what the law specifies is stalking, people across different societies and nations are ubiquitous in finding strangers as more dangerous than ex-partner stalkers.

However, these perceptions are at odds with reality; it is ex-partner stalkers who have been found to be more persistent and dangerous, in terms of likelihood for assault and severity of assault (James & Farnham, 2003). One explanation put forward (Hills & Taplin, 1998) is that people are afraid of what they do not know – a person will not know the personality, motives and boundaries of a stranger. Consequently, they will not know how to predict and

subsequently control the situation; this unease and unpredictability is thought to be a major contributor to why people find stranger stalkers more threatening (Hills & Taplin, 1998). A false belief that the behaviour of a known individual is easier to control than a strangers' may also contribute to this (Cass, 2011). Finally, people have been found to struggle in determining what constitutes 'normal' behaviours following a breakup. In a relationship, it is natural for the person who did not instigate the breakup to want to get back together, and people may struggle to distinguish this from actual stalking behaviour (Dennison, 2007). This difficulty does not exist with a stranger stalker, which may account for the difference of perception.

#### *Gender biases in stalking perception*

Stalking perception is also subjected to gender biases; however, this has been found to be inconsistent - some studies have shown that women are more likely than men to interpret invasive behaviours as stalking and more inclined to believe that the perpetrator has an intent to inflict mental or physical harm (Dennison & Thomson, 2005; Yanowitz, 2006) whereas others found this difference is weak and men and women perceive stalking behaviour in the same way (Phillips et al., 2004). Women have also been found to be much more likely to be more fearful of their stalker in comparison to men, typically believing their stalker is more of a threat to their safety (Davis, Coker, & Sanderson, 2002). They are also more likely to pass guilty sentences in mock trial studies and feel more empathy toward the victim (Dunlap, Hodell, Golding, & Wasarhaley, 2012). Victims of intimate aggression (such as sexual harassment and rape) are typically female, and research suggests that women thus identify with the victims and feel more inclined to punish the perpetrator (Dennison, 2007). Research has supported this idea; people have been shown to hold positive

views of the victim and perpetrator when they match their gender; Dennison (2007) finding that Australian women were more likely to identify with the victim when she was female, with a similar result for men and male perpetrators.

### *Cyberstalking*

Through the rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, a new type of stalking has emerged – cyberstalking. Cyberstalkers use electronic communication (typically the internet) to repeatedly harass the victim, causing them to fear for their safety (Pittaro, 2007; Dreßing, Bailer, Anders, Wagner, & Gallas, 2014). Uncertainty exists over what constitutes cyberstalking behaviour, with different actions being deemed to constitute cyberstalking by different researchers – examples include sending online threats, posting rumours, (Bocij, 2003) and impersonation of the victim (Bocij, 2003). Despite no universally agreed on definition or legal legislature, cyberstalking is a serious issue, with prevalence rates varying from 3.7% to 82%, depending on how broad or restrictive the inclusion criteria is for what defines cyberstalking (Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002; Dreßing et al, 2014). Adverse health outcomes are strongly associated with being a victim of cyberstalking (Dreßing et al, 2014). Many victims of stalking report a high level of psychological distress, fear for their own safety (and that of their family and friends) along with elevated levels of anxiety (Davis et al, 2002). Such levels of distress can have drastic effects on the victim, such as increased substance misuse (Basile, Arias, Desai, & Thompson, 2004) whereas 40-50% of university stalking victims have been found to significantly change their daily routine, such as taking an alternative route to classes (Amar, 2006). Such changes to routine may result in students

dropping out of classes, changing schools, or in the more drastic cases, drop out of education completely (Bjerregard, 2000).

However, research is divided as to whether cyberstalking is merely a new weapon in a stalker's arsenal, or whether it represents an entirely new behaviour, with patterns and motivations distinct from physical stalking (Sheridan & Grant, 2007). In one study (Sheridan & Grant, 2007), victim experiences of being both cyber and physically stalked were compared; being cyberstalked was associated more with a loss to the victim's family and friends (such as breakups and losing contact with family and friends), whereas being physically stalked was associated more with occupational deteriorations (cutting work hours, changing employment). This is logical as victims may take these steps to avoid their stalker, given stalkers typically loiter at the victims' place of work (Scott & Sheridan, 2011). However, regardless of whether the stalking was cyber or physical, (or if there was any crossover) there was no difference of psychological effect on the victim. This supports research which attests that the stalking does not have to be physical to cause substantial harm (Sheridan, Blaauw, & Davies, 2003; Sheridan & Grant, 2007). Additionally, in many cases, the cyber stalking turned physical, demonstrating that the two types of stalking are not necessarily distinct from one another (Lee, 1998). Research comparing characteristics of cyber and physical stalkers themselves found that very few differences exist; while cyberstalkers were more likely to explicitly threaten their victim, this difference did not reach significance (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014). The likelihood of using violence did not differ between groups and the majority of cyberstalkers also resorted to offline stalking behaviours (following the victim, loitering at their workplace) which lends strength to the notion that the Internet

is merely another weapon at the stalker's disposal (Lee, 1998; Cavezza & McEwan, 2014).

As the psychological effects of being stalked (through the internet or in person) are the same (Sheridan & Grant, 2007), along with the behaviours of cyberstalkers being very similar to that of physical stalkers, it may be wise to move away from the idea that the two are distinct. It may also be insightful to see how people perceive cyberstalkers in comparison to physical stalkers; if people perceive the two types of stalker the same, this would further strengthen the idea that they are the same. This may be beneficial in assisting academics ascertaining whether cyberstalking is the same as physical stalking.

Utilising a between participants design, participants will be assigned to either a physical or cyber condition, which contain separate vignettes of stalking behaviour from both a stranger and an ex-partner and rate the behaviours on a scale. This will allow for two things: firstly, to attempt to replicate the findings of previous research which finds that people perceive stranger stalkers as more dangerous in the physical condition and examine if this result extends into the cyber condition. Secondly, this research will investigate how perceptions of cyberstalkers differ compared to physical stalkers, if such a difference exists. Finally, the effect of participant gender on stalker perception will also be analysed.

The way in which the way in which stalking occurs – over the internet or in person - will be referred to as the medium of stalking. The relationship between the victim and perpetrator will be referred to as the relationship between perpetrator and stalker.

### *Hypotheses*

Based on previous research, stranger stalkers are expected to be perceived as more dangerous than ex-partners. As previous research has demonstrated that cyberstalking does not represent a distinct form of stalking, it is reasonable to thus expect that participants will not see cyberstalkers any differently to physical stalkers (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014). Therefore, the medium of stalking is not expected to be a significant factor on stalker perception. It is also not possible to make a prediction for gender differences, given the inconsistencies in the field regarding the role of gender.

The aim of this study is to broaden our understanding of stalkers by extending the research focus to cyberstalkers. If the public do not perceive the two stalker types any differently, this lends strength to the idea that the two types of stalking are not distinctly different. This has implications for treatment and management of cyberstalkers.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

A power analysis (with an alpha of 0.05, power of 0.08, medium effect size, 4 groups, MANOVA analysis) reported that 113 participants were needed at minimum. One hundred and sixteen participants participated in this study. The only inclusion criterion was that participants had to be between age 18-26. This age range was chosen for two reasons: firstly, college students have a high rate of being stalked – roughly 10-30% (Amar, 2006; Bonomi et al, 2012). Secondly, it also reflects the younger generation who tend to use the most social media - 99% of people aged 16-24 use social media on a weekly basis and over 78% of users use Facebook (Ofcom, 2016).

The average age was 22 (SD = 2.75) Participants were free to complete the questionnaire from wherever in the world. No limitations were imposed regarding relationship status. 39 males (34%) and 71 females (61%) took part, with 6 participants (5%) preferring not to state their gender. Of those who partook, 68 (59%) were single, 43 were dating (37%) and 5 were married (4%). 80 participants (69%) were from the United Kingdom, 9 from Europe (8%), 22 from North America (19%), 1 from Asia (1%) and 4 from Oceania (3%).

Of the 116 participants, 50 (43%) had experienced harassment online, and 66 (57%) had not. Offline, 46 (40%) had, while 70 (60%) had not.

Facebook was the most popular social media apps with 103 (89%) users, with Instagram having 76 (66%), Snapchat with 70 (60%), Twitter with 53 (46%), and finally Snapchat with 23 (20%).

### *Materials and procedure*

This study was run on Bristol Online Survey (BOS), a tool used to create questionnaires online. The study also used a between participants 2x2 design, which had two main conditions – physical and cyber stalking. Each condition contained two different vignettes; one describing behaviour from a stranger stalker, and one from an ex-partner. The vignettes in the physical condition described behaviour of physical stalkers, such as loitering at the victims' workplace, whereas the cyber vignettes described behaviours such as sending threatening messages online. 4 vignettes were used in total – 2 in each condition. (See Appendixes A and B for the vignettes used).

Advertised on various social media websites such as Facebook and Reddit, participants were told they had to be between age 18 – 26 to take part. After



clicking the link, they were taken to a participant information sheet which told them the study was about behaviour perception (and not stalking – this deception was deliberate as telling them it was about may have biased their perceptions, given the negative associations people hold toward stalking – Landwehr, 2016). By clicking next, they were taken to the next page of the study, which was the consent form. If they did not consent, clicking this option would terminate the study. By agreeing, however, they were taken to the next page, which was the condition assignment page.

Here, they were asked to pick either condition X or Y. This was simply to assign participants to either the physical or cyber condition. Participants did not know this determined which condition they were assigned to – this was this was kept blind to participants as allowing participants to choose their condition could produce bias.

Irrespective of choice, participants were taken to a new screen. Participants were presented with the first vignette; the one describing the behaviour of a stranger.

To maintain consistency, two sets of vignettes in each condition were kept as similar to one another as possible. For instance, in the physical condition, in both vignettes, the victim met the stranger/ex-partner at a party; the only difference being that in the former, the stranger expressed a desire to date the victim, whereas in the latter, the ex-partner expressed a desire to get back together. In both cases, a rejection of the perpetrator resulted in the perpetrator engaging in stalker like behaviour. A similar consistency was kept for the 2 vignettes in the cyber condition.

Participants then rated these behaviours on a 7 point Likert-type scale, which ranged from 1 – Strongly Agree, to 7 – Strongly Disagree. A Likert-type scale was chosen for its several advantages: firstly, given it is a scale it allows the participant to respond to a degree of agreement/disagreement; being more accommodating than a simple yes/no questionnaire. It also accommodates a participant if they feel unsure or neutral on a response, and it also allows for easy quantifiable analysis.

The four measures participants rated the stalker's behaviour were: "The other person's behaviour causes alarm or distress to me," "The other person's behaviour necessitates police intervention," "The other person's behaviour is a threat to my safety," and "The other person's behaviour constitutes stalking". These measures were chosen as they typically feature in other research on stalking and was thought to capture core aspects of being a stalking victim (Scott & Sheridan, 2011). The vignettes were told from a 2nd person perspective ("Recently at a party you went to...") and participants were told to imagine they were the victim.

A Likert-type scale was chosen for its several advantages: firstly, given it is a scale it allows the participant to respond to a degree of agreement/disagreement; being more accommodating than a simple yes/no questionnaire. It also accommodates a participant if they feel unsure or neutral on a response, and it also allows for easy quantifiable analysis. (See Appendix C for an example of how the Likerty-type scale was presented).

After finishing the first scale, participants read the ex-partner vignette and rated the behaviours once more. Both vignettes and both scales were presented all on the same page.

Once the second scale had been completed, participants were taken to a page that thanked them for their participation and were debriefed on the true nature of the study. Next, they were taken to a demographics page which asked for their age, relationship status, gender, whether they had been harassed online or offline before, what social media apps they used and how much time they spend on the internet a day.

## Results

Each response on the Likert-type scale was given a number. 1 represented Strongly Agree, 2 for Agree, 3 for Slightly Agree, 4 for Neutral, 5 for Slightly Disagree, 6 for Disagree and 7 for Strongly Disagree. Data was normally distributed and parametric so mixed ANOVA and MANOVA analyses were used. 57 participants were assigned to the physical category, and 59 took part in the cyber condition.

Effects of the relationship between perpetrator and victim on stalking perception: A 2x2 mixed ANOVA found a significant effect of relationship between stalker and victim on stalking perception scores ( $F(1,114) = 31.85, p = < .001, \eta^2 = .218$ ). Descriptive statistics showed that people found stranger stalkers as more dangerous than ex-partner stalkers in both conditions – physical (mean = 1.86, SD = 1.86) and cyber (mean = 1.85, SD = 0.68). Stranger partners – physical (mean = 2.21, SD = 1.19) and cyber (mean = 2.29, SD = 1.09)

**Table 1**

Mixed ANOVA displaying mean responses to stranger and cyber stalkers under both conditions.

	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Cyber</b>
<b>Stranger</b>	1.86	1.85
<b>Ex Partner</b>	2.21	2.29

Participants rate the stranger stalker's behaviour as more dangerous (defined as the stronger agreement to the 4 measures) than the behaviour of an ex-partner. This holds true in both the physical (1.86 vs 2.21) and cyber (1.85 vs 2.29) conditions.

**Table 2**

Mixed ANOVA providing a more detailed breakdown of the scores under the Physical category from Table 1.

	<b>Stranger</b>	<b>Ex-Partner</b>
<b>Alarm</b>	1.68	1.98
<b>Police Intervention</b>	2.16	2.63
<b>Threat to Safety</b>	2.19	2.51
<b>Constitute Stalking</b>	1.4	1.72

Participants agreed more strongly on all 4 measures when judging the stranger stalker's behaviour in the Physical category.

**Table 3**

Mixed ANOVA providing a more detailed breakdown of the scores under the Cyber category from Table 1.

	<b>Stranger</b>	<b>Ex-Partner</b>
<b>Alarm</b>	1.31	1.76
<b>Police Intervention</b>	2.39	2.88
<b>Threat to Safety</b>	2.03	2.56
<b>Constitute Stalking</b>	1.68	1.97

Participants agreed more strongly on all 4 measures when judging the stranger stalker's behaviour in the Cyber category.

Effects of medium of stalking on stalking perception (Mixed ANOVA and two way MANOVA) The results of the mixed ANOVA revealed no significant effect of medium of stalking on stalking perception scores ( $F(1, 114) = .41, p > 0.05, \eta^2 = .04$ ). However, the two way MANOVA revealed the two groups differed significantly in how alarming they rated the stranger stalker's behaviour ( $F(1, 114) = 5.35, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = .45$ ) Descriptive statistics revealed that people found strangers to be more alarming when the stalking took place over the internet (mean = 1.31, SD = 0.53) compared to in off-line stalking (mean 1.68, SD = 1.13) As Table 4 demonstrates, the difference between the scores is small.

**Table 4**

MANOVA displaying the mean responses to ratings of alarm for a stranger stalker in both the physical and cyber conditions.

	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Cyber</b>
<b>Stranger stalker: Rating of Alarm</b>	1.68	1.31

Participants rated the stranger stalker as more alarming in the cyber condition.

**Table 5**

MANOVA displaying average responses to each measure for both genders in the Stranger condition.

	<b>Physical</b>					<b>Cyber</b>				
	Alarm	Police	Safety	Stalking	<b>Average</b>	Alarm	Police	Safety	Stalking	<b>Average</b>
<b>Male</b>	1.64	2.18	2.27	1.23	<b>1.83</b>	1.59	2.47	2.53	1.59	<b>2.04</b>
<b>Female</b>	1.77	2.23	2.23	1.58	<b>1.95</b>	1.77	2.40	1.85	1.75	<b>1.94</b>

Gender had no influence on perceptions of stranger stalkers in both conditions.

**Table 6**

MANOVA displaying average responses to each measure for both genders in the Ex-Partner condition.

	<b>Physical</b>					<b>Cyber</b>				
	Alarm	Police	Safety	Stalking	<b>Average</b>	Alarm	Police	Safety	Stalking	<b>Average</b>
<b>Male</b>	<i>2.00</i>	<i>2.73</i>	<i>2.55</i>	<i>1.55</i>	<b>2.20</b>	<i>2.35</i>	<i>3.18</i>	<i>3.06</i>	<i>1.76</i>	<b>2.41</b>
<b>Female</b>	<i>2.03</i>	<i>2.68</i>	<i>2.61</i>	<i>1.94</i>	<b>2.31</b>	<i>1.55</i>	<i>2.85</i>	<i>2.40</i>	<i>2.10</i>	<b>2.23</b>

Gender had no influence on perceptions of stranger stalkers in both conditions.



Tables 5 and 6 demonstrate the mean response for males and females to both stranger and ex-partner behaviour in the physical and cyber conditions. The data from participants who did not state their gender were not used in the gender analyses.

Influence of gender: The mixed ANOVA revealed that gender had no influence upon stalker perception scores ( $F(16, 206) = 1.07, p = > 0.05, \text{Wilks } \Lambda = .852, \eta^2 = .077$ ). There was also no interaction between group and gender ( $F(16, 204) = .467, p = > 0.05, \text{Wilks } \Lambda = .931, \eta^2 = .035$ )

### **Discussion**

As Table 1 shows, on average, when the victim and stalker were portrayed as strangers as opposed to ex-partners, the stalker's behaviour was viewed to cause alarm, necessitate police intervention, represent a threat to safety and represent stalking to a stronger degree – a finding consistent with previous literature (Scott, Lloyd & Gavin, 2010). This may be because people find strangers more of a threat as they do not know anything about them – a stranger's motives, boundaries, behaviour and personality are unknown. This fear of the unknown has been put forward for this recurring finding in the literature (Hills & Taplin, 1998). A false belief that it is easier to control the behaviour of someone who is known to the victim may also account for this difference (Cass, 2011). Unless the breakup was mutual, it is very common and natural for the person who did not initiate the breakup to want to get back with their partner. This may result in them expressing their desires, and constantly ask their ex-partner to reconsider. This is very similar to behaviour displayed by actual stalkers; the difference being that a non-stalker would likely not pursue

the other person to such a distressing level (Dennison, 2007). People may thus have issues in distinguishing normal, 'healthy' behaviours after a breakup from obsessive behaviours committed by a dangerous stalker. When a stranger stalker is involved, this issue has no relevance.

First proposed by Lerner and Simmons (1966), the Just World Hypothesis (JWH) refers to a cognitive fallacy which assumes a person's actions bring about consequences that are fitting and morally fair – essentially, people get what they deserve. Often used to explain victim blaming, which suggests there is no such thing as an innocent victim – if someone suffers from the actions of another person, they must have done something to deserve or cause it (Strömwall, Alfredsson, & Landström, 2013). There is much evidence to suggest this cognitive fallacy has the power to influence a person's reactions to others' suffering (Lerner & Miller, 1978) and in the context of stalking, the JWH accounts for the difference of perception between stranger and ex-partner stalkers: a participant may assume that as the victim shares a history with the ex-partner stalker, at some point either during the relationship or in the post-breakup phase, they must have done something to anger or upset the stalker. Therefore, they are more deserving of their fate. This explanation is congruent with previous research which reports that participants view the victim as more responsible for the stalker's behaviour when the stalker was an ex-partner (Scott et al., 2014). However, it is not possible to speculate participants felt as if the victim was responsible in this study given that responsibility was not included as a measure here.

In terms of the effects of the medium of stalking, only a small effect was found; how alarming participants rated a stranger stalker's behaviour in comparison to a stranger cyberstalker. Participants perceived stranger cyber stalkers as more

dangerous than stranger physical stalkers. Distance may explain this - unlike physical stalking, distance is not an issue with cyberstalking – a person can be cyberstalked from all over the world. This means that measures physical stalking victims can take to avoid their tormentor – such as moving away or changing jobs – may not be as efficient at dealing with the cyberstalker. Given how easy it is to be anonymous over the internet, victims may know less about a cyberstalker than a physical stalker – they would be able to see a physical stalker loitering at their work. This information is not afforded to cyberstalking victims – which relates to the 'fear of the unknown' explanation of why people fear stranger stalkers more than ex-partners (Hills & Taplin, 1998). This may account for why people rated cyber stranger stalkers as more alarming than their physical counterparts.

It is possible to attribute lack of statistical power to why only one small effect was found. However, this is unlikely given the power analysis conducted (with an alpha of 0.05, a power of 0.8, a medium effect size and for a mixed ANOVA) showed a minimum of 113 participants were needed, and the results from 116 were used in this study. With the same number of participants, relationship between stalker and victim was still found to be a significant influence on stalker perception. Also, the difference of alarm ratings between the two groups for stranger stalkers was very small (1.68 to 1.3). This, combined with the fact there were no other significant differences between measures, suggests that people simply do not consider the behaviour of cyber and physical stalkers to be salient in difference. This would be plausible given that many cyberstalkers also employ offline stalking tactics (Lee, 1998). Even if the differences between the other measures were also found to be significant, the difference between these scores would still be very small - both groups of participants agreed that the

physical and cyber stranger's behaviour requires police intervention - (2.16 and 2.39 respectively) Such a small difference is negligible.

Despite the lack of consensus of how distinct cyberstalking is from physical stalking, a growing body of research has pointed to the idea that the internet is just another weapon at the stalker's disposal; the likelihood of using violence on the victim does not differ between physical and cyberstalkers (Cavezza & McEwan, 2014). Stalking does not have to be physical to inflict psychological distress on the victim (Sheridan & Grant, 2007) and crucially still, most cyberstalkers also engage in physical stalking behaviours such as loitering at the victims' place of work (Lee, 1998; Cavezza & McEwan, 2014). This suggests that the two forms of stalking behaviour are not distinct from one another; which, in turn, could account for why the medium of stalking had no influence on perceptions of stalking behaviour. The vignettes used in the cyber condition stated that the stalker wanted to meet in person; from this, participants could have assumed that the stalker must live reasonably near. Therefore, they could have believed that the cyberstalker could reasonably find them and carry out their behaviours physically as well.

The persistence and severity of the stalker's behaviour has a profound impact on stalker perception; their behaviour was seen to be seen as stalking, require police intervention and cause the target more alarm when the severity and persistence of their behaviour increases (Scott & Sheridan, 2011). Explicit intent of the stalker is also significantly associated with the perception that the stalker's behaviour is indeed stalking (Phillips et al., 2004). However, in this study, neither severity, intent or persistence varied. Whilst there were elements of things such as persistence (insisting in asking why the victim does not want to date them) this was not a measure that varied. Given this study did not

investigate three established factors that influence stalker perception, this may explain why ratings on these measures were not significantly different.

Men and women did not differ in their perceptions of stalkers, irrespective of the relationship or medium of stalking. In explaining this result, it is important to look at the methodology of previous research which demonstrates gender differences in stalking perception. For instance, although Dennison and Thomson (2005) found that women were more likely to believe the perpetrator's behaviour carries an intent to cause physical or mental harm, this study did not include any measure on intent. Therefore, it is not possible to make any comparison in this regard. Secondly, a lot of the research which reports gender effects utilised vignettes that varied the gender of both the perpetrator and victim (Phillips et al., 2004) However, this detail was omitted from this study for the sake of scope – the primary focus was on the medium of stalking, not gender effects. Given that men have been shown to relate more to the perpetrator and women to the victim (Dennison, 2007) the omission of gender in the vignettes used here may explain the lack of gender differences. Even if gender had a significant effect, by looking at Table 5 and 6, the scores on each measure between the genders are generally large. For instance, on average, males have a score of 2.20 for physical stalkers, whereas females have a score of 2.31.

Gender differences have also been found to be inconsistent and modest, even when significant (Phillips et al., 2004). On the other hand, mock juror experiments have demonstrated that gender differences are much stronger, with women giving more guilty verdicts, hold stronger guilt ratings and empathise more with the victim than men (Dunlap et al, 2012). Mock juror studies are much more engaging than laboratory experiments – participants may take them

more seriously. More importantly, these experiments look at different measures. The mock experiment looked at number of guilty sentences, level of guilt of defendant, victim empathy, whereas Phillips et al (2004) examined whether the behaviour was a crime, if it was stalking, whether they'll hurt the target etc. It becomes difficult to ascertain gender differences when different studies looking into this phenomena look at different measures. Gender differences may very well exist, and even guide courtroom decisions (as opposed to strict legal guidelines). This obviously holds important ramifications. At least in the context of determining guilt of the defendant, gender differences may well exist in the courtroom.

#### *Limitations and Suggestions for Future*

The Likert-type scale did not include any measurement of blame attribution. Previous studies included this (Scott et al., 2014) however this was omitted in this study for the sake of scope - a variety of other measures were already being tested. It would have been insightful to see if the medium of stalking influenced blame perception; it is possible to speculate that given the victim accepted the stranger's friend request and got to know them, that participants may have seen them as to blame for the behaviour. Participants could have just thought that the target could have rejected the stalker's friend request and blocked them from contacting them. Or even still, set their Facebook settings so that people not on their friend list could not contact them. These are real-world measures that could be taken to lessen the chances of being stalked. Children can be taught the importance of not talking to strangers, even over the internet.

This study also placed no limitations on where participants could take the test from. This did reflect in the participant sample - whilst most participants were

British, 18% were from North America and others were from Oceania. This is important to consider given research has demonstrated different international perspectives on stalking – Australian participants have been found to consider the perpetrator's behaviour as more severe than British participants (Scott, Lloyd & Gavin, 2010) It is possible that each country's different legal definitions of stalking could influence the citizen's perceptions of stalking – Australian law focuses on the repetition and intent of the stalker's behaviour- something that British law does not. Although unfounded, it is possible to think this could have an influence. This speculation has been voiced in other research, (Scott et al., 2010) but participants in this study were not informed about the different anti-stalking laws, nor were they asked about them. Further research is necessary to see if this is a potential confounding effect. An improved version of this study could recruit participants from just one country (such as the UK) in order to alleviate this possible confounding variable.

As mentioned above, intent, severity and persistence did not vary in this study. These were deliberately kept constant in regard to the study's scope – the medium of stalking was the primary focus. Gender effects were also being examined, along with the effect of relationship between stalker and victim. Future versions of this study could also include these factors to see if they still influence stalker perception when the stalking occurs over the internet.

With gender differences, to ascertain if gender has any influence on cyberstalking perception, it would be necessary to use known measures that men and women differ on, such as how guilty the defendant is, or how much empathy is held toward the victim. These measures were used in a previous experiment which established gender differences (Dunlap et al, 2012).

Merely asking participants to imagine they were the victims in these short vignettes and then asking them how they think they would feel may not produce accurate answers. Some participants may never have had a relationship before - thereby meaning they could not realistically imagine their responses to a hypothetical ex-partner. For participants who have never been harassed or stalked before, this study could have been the first time they were ever asked to imagine it; 57%-60% of participants in this study had never been harassed before. An improved version of this study could only sample those who have experienced stalking before.

It is plausible to suggest that differences of stalking perception could be found between those who are experienced in dating and have experienced many breakups and those who have never been in a relationship before, given the former would have experience with breakups and possibly know more about what defines healthy post-breakup behaviour. Given online relationships are a part of today's modern world, a potential new idea for cyberstalker research could look at how dating history influences perception of cyberstalking behaviour.

Other measures to improve the study could involve only using participants from one country; whilst it isn't a limitation with strong evidence, research has highlighted the possibility that each country's anti-stalking laws could be influential in stalker perception (Scott et al., 2010).

A confirmatory bias can be induced if any question is framed in terms of whether the perpetrator's behaviour is stalking (Dennison & Thomson, 2005). Participants may be biased to view the behaviour as stalking and thus reinterpret the vignettes to find evidence. This study did frame itself as research on behaviour



perception, however the final measure did ask to what extent the behaviour constituted stalking. This was simply unavoidable, however, given the scale was administered twice, it is possible that the use of the word 'stalking' biased participants' perceptions.

### *Implications and Conclusion*

This research confirmed the finding that stranger stalkers are perceived as more dangerous than ex-partners. However, the medium of stalking had only a very weak influence on stalker perception. Given that research comparing perceptions of cyberstalkers to physical stalkers is relatively novel, future research could build upon this idea. If a consistent line of empirical evidence emerges demonstrating that cyberstalking is perceived the same way as physical stalking, there are many implications behind this. Firstly, this would help academics discern whether cyberstalking is distinct from physical stalking and help the field reach a consensus over the nature of cyberstalking. Secondly, as Cavezza and McEwan (2014) assert, the similarities between the two kinds of stalking mean that forensic treatment services do not need to assume any novel approaches in the treatment and assessment of cyberstalkers; treating a cyberstalker with the same kind of treatment that physical stalkers receive would suffice. Stalking, no matter the medium, is a dangerous behaviour that can be very distressing for the victim. As the evidence base on cyberstalkers grows, social media websites could do well to be aware of this information to reinforce the importance of internet safety to its users. For instance, Facebook could promote the importance of having a private profile; small measures such as limiting the amount of information available on a person's profile to the public or reminding a person of their privacy settings on photos they upload could be very conducive to avoid being a victim of cyberstalking.

In terms of gender, this study found no differences between men and women. However, in the context of mock juror studies, at least for physical stalking cases, when the gender of the victim and stalker are stated, men are significantly fewer guilty verdicts than women (Dunlap et al, 2012). It would be insightful to see if this holds true in for cyberstalking as well, especially as males have been found to be more likely than women to be cyberstalked (Alexy, Burgess, Baker & Smoyak, 2005). With physical stalking, women are typically the victims and males the perpetrators – a finding that accounts for why women typically empathise more with the victims and men resonate more with the perpetrators (Dennison, 2007). It would be interesting to see what any potential gender biases would be given the traditional notion of female victim and male perpetrator is reversed with cyberstalking. If differences do exist, courts could be aware of biases and make efforts to ensure their jurors are as free from bias as possible.

In conclusion, this study managed to replicate the finding that stranger stalkers are seen as more threatening than ex-partners. The results suggest that people do not view cyberstalkers differently to physical stalkers. It is important to be aware of different experiments using different measures; the heterogeneity of what is being examined may account for discrepancies found.

## References

- Alexy, E. M., Burgess, A. W., Baker, T., & Smoyak, S. A. (2005). Perceptions of cyberstalking among college students. *Brief treatment and crisis intervention, 5*(3), 279-289.
- Amar, A. F. (2006). College women's experience of stalking: Mental health symptoms and changes in routines. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing, 20*(3), 108-116.
- Anderson, S. C. (1993). Anti-stalking laws: *Will they curb the erotomaniac's obsessive pursuit. Law & Psychol. Rev., 17*-171.
- Basile, K. C., Arias, I., Desai, S., & Thompson, M. P. (2004). The differential association of intimate partner physical, sexual, psychological, and stalking violence and posttraumatic stress symptoms in a nationally representative sample of women. *Journal of Traumatic Stress: Official Publication of The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, 17*(5), 413-421.
- Bjerregaard, B. (2000). An Empirical Study of stalking victimization. *Violence and Victims, 15*, 389-406.
- Bocij, P. (2003) Victims of cyberstalking: An exploratory study of harassment perpetrated via the internet. *First Monday, 8*, Article 10. Retrieved 5 October 2005, from:  
[www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue8\\_10/bocij/index.html](http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue8_10/bocij/index.html).
- Bondeson, J. (2011). *Queen Victoria's Stalker: The Strange Case of the Boy Jones*. Kent State University Press.

- Bonomi, A. E., Anderson, M. L., Nemeth, J., Bartle-Haring, S., Buettner, C., & Schipper, D. (2012). Dating violence victimization across the teen years: Abuse frequency, number of abusive partners, and age at first occurrence. *BMC public health, 12*-637.
- Cass, A. I. (2011). Defining stalking: The influence of legal factors, extralegal factors, and particular actions on judgments of college students. *Western Criminology Review, 12*, 1-14
- Cavezza, C., & McEwan, T. E. (2014). Cyberstalking versus off-line stalking in a forensic sample. *Psychology, Crime & Law, 20*(10), 955-970.
- Davis, K. E., Coker, A. L., & Sanderson, M. (2002). Physical and mental health effects of being stalked for men and women. *Violence and Victims, 17*(4), 429-443.
- Dennison, S. M. (2007). Interpersonal relationships and stalking: Identifying when to intervene. *Law and Human Behavior, 31*(4), 353-367.
- Dennison, S. M., & Thomson, D. M. (2005). Identifying stalking: The relevance of intent in commonsense reasoning. *Law and Human Behavior, 26*(5), 543-561.
- Dreßing, H., Bailer, J., Anders, A., Wagner, H., & Gallas, C. (2014). Cyberstalking in a large sample of social network users: Prevalence, characteristics, and impact upon victims. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 17*(2), 61-67.
- Dunlap, E. E., Hodell, E. C., Golding, J. M., & Wasarhaley, N. E. (2012). Mock jurors' perception of stalking: The impact of gender and expressed fear. *Sex Roles, 66*(5-6), 405-417.

- Hills, A. M., & Taplin, J. L. (1998). Anticipated responses to stalking: Effect of threat and target-stalker relationship. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 5, 139-146.
- James, D. V., & Farnham, F. R. (2003). Stalking and serious violence. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online*, 31(4), 432-439.
- Kraft, E., & Wang, J. (2010). An exploratory study of the cyberbullying and cyberstalking experiences and factors related to victimization of students at a public liberal arts college. *International Journal of Technoethics (IJT)*, 1(4), 74-91.
- Landwehr, E. (2016). *Perceptions of stalking: The influence of perpetrator mental disorder diagnosis, target-perpetrator gender, and perpetrator persistence*. Retrieved from Edith Cowan University.
- Lee, R. K. (1997). Romantic and electronic stalking in a college context. *The College of William and Mary Journal of Women and the Law*, 373-409.
- Lerner, M. J., & Simmons, C. H. (1966). Observer's reaction to the "innocent victim": Compassion or rejection? *Journal of Personality and social Psychology*, 4(2), 203-210.
- Lerner, M. J., & Miller, D. T. (1978). Just world research and the attribution process: Looking back and ahead. *Psychological bulletin*, 85(5), 1030-1051
- Ofcom. (2017) *Adults' media use and attitudes – Report 2017*. London, United Kingdom
- Petch, E. (2002). Anti-stalking laws and the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry*, 13(1), 19-34.

Phillips, L., Quirk, R., Rosenfeld, B., & O'Connor, M. (2004). Is it stalking?

Perceptions of stalking among college undergraduates. *Criminal justice and behavior*, 31(1), 73-96.

Pittaro, M. L. (2007). Cyber stalking: An analysis of online harassment and

intimidation. *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*, 1(2), 180-197.

Scott, A. J., & Sheridan, L. (2011). 'Reasonable' perceptions of stalking: the

influence of conduct severity and the perpetrator–target relationship.

*Psychology, Crime & Law*, 17(4), 331-343.

Scott, A. J., Lloyd, R., & Gavin, J. (2010). The influence of prior relationship on

perceptions of stalking in the United Kingdom and Australia. *Criminal*

*Justice and Behavior*, 37(11), 1185-1194.

Scott, A. J., Rajakaruna, N., Sheridan, L., & Sleath, E. (2014). International

perceptions of stalking and responsibility: The influence of prior

relationship and severity of behavior. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*,

41(2), 220-236.

Sheridan, L., & Davies, G. M. (2001). Violence and the prior victim–stalker

relationship. *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*, 11(2), 102-116.

Sheridan, L., Gillett, R., Davies, G. M., Blaauw, E., & Patel, D. (2003). 'There's

no smoke without fire': Are male ex-partners perceived as more

'entitled' to stalk than acquaintance or stranger stalkers? *British Journal of Psychology*, 94(1), 87-98.

Sheridan, L. P., & Grant, T. (2007). Is cyberstalking different? *Psychology,*

*crime & law*, 13(6), 627-640.

- Spitzberg, B. H. (2002). The tactical topography of stalking victimization and management. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 3*(4), 261-288.
- Strömwall, L. A., Alfredsson, H., & Landström, S. (2013). Rape victim and perpetrator blame and the Just World hypothesis: The influence of victim gender and age. *Journal of sexual aggression, 19*(2), 207-217.
- Van Laer, T. (2014). The means to justify the end: Combating cyber harassment in social media. *Journal of Business Ethics, 123*(1), 85-98.
- Yanowitz, K. L. (2006). Influence of gender and experience on college students' stalking schemas. *Violence and Victims, 21*(1), 91.
- Ybarra, M. L., Langhinrichsen-Rohling, J., & Mitchell, K. J. (2017). Stalking-like behavior in adolescence: Prevalence, intent, and associated characteristics. *Psychology of violence, 7*(2), 1-11.

## Appendix A

## Vignettes from the Physical stalking condition

## Stranger

On Facebook, you just uploaded an album containing photos from a recent holiday you had. Many of your friends and family liked the album, including your ex-partner with whom you broke up with, having dated for around a year. Your ex-partner sent you a private message, which at first consisted of small talk relating to how the holiday was, what you got up to, and that they'd been there as well.

After some time talking to them, they begun asking why you broke up with them, and if you could get back together with them. You politely declined, resulting in a change in their behaviour: they started sending you hundreds of messages daily, demanding to meet up with you in person, started sending threats and every time you blocked or deleted them, they would make a new account and start anew.

On the scales below, please rate to what extent you agree with the statements provided.

## Ex-Partner

Recently at a party you went to you bumped into your ex-partner whom you had been dating for a year. They expressed a strong desire to get back together with you, but you politely declined. It has been 2 months since the party and your ex-partner has been calling you at work, leaving your messages and on occasion



you have seen them loitering at your workplace. You suspect you've seen them at other places you frequently visit such as the gym.

Despite making it clear you do not wish to get back together, your ex-partner keeps on sending flowers and chocolate and persists in asking you why you won't get back together with them. After a while they began sending threatening messages.

On the scales below, please rate to what extent you agree with the statements presented.

## Appendix B

## Vignettes from the Cyber stalking condition

## Stranger

Recently at a party you went to you bumped into your ex-partner whom you had been dating for a year. They expressed a strong desire to get back together with you, but you politely declined. It has been 2 months since the party and your ex-partner has been calling you at work, leaving your messages and on occasion you have seen them loitering at your workplace. You suspect you've seen them at other places you frequently visit such as the gym.

Despite making it clear you do not wish to get back together, your ex-partner keeps on sending flowers and chocolate and persists in asking you why you won't get back together with them. After a while they began sending threatening messages.

On the scales below, please rate to what extent you agree with the statements presented.

## Ex-Partner

On Facebook, you just uploaded an album containing photos from a recent holiday you had. Many of your friends and family liked the album, including your ex-partner with whom you broke up with, having dated for around a year. Your ex-partner sent you a private message, which at first consisted of small talk relating to how the holiday was, what you got up to, and that they'd been there as well.

After some time talking to them, they begun asking why you broke up with them, and if you could get back together with them. You politely declined, resulting in a change in their behaviour: they started sending you hundreds of messages daily, demanding to meet up with you in person, started sending threats and every time you blocked or deleted them, they would make a new account and start anew.

On the scales below, please rate to what extent you agree with the statements provided.

## Appendix C

## Example of the format of the Likert-type scale

The other person's behaviour causes distress/alarm to me.

	1 - Strongly Agree	2 - Agree	3 - Slightly Agree	4 - Neutral	5 - Slightly Disagree	6 - Disagree	7 - Strongly Disagree
<i>Question</i> <i>1</i>							

## **Executive Summary**

Target Audience: Non-psychology university graduates. Chosen as people in their early 20s age use social media/the internet the most and therefore have a high risk of being cyberstalked.

### **Background**

Stalking is a criminal behaviour which involves a person deliberately and obsessively harassing someone else. These behaviours are typically repeated and examples include constantly trying to communicate with someone who has expressed a desire not to be contacted, loitering around places they visit frequently (such as the gym, or work) or sending threats – whether that be in person, or over the phone.

Understandably, stalking causes the victim a lot of distress. Many victims report fear for not just their own well-being, but for the well-being of their family and friends, as stalkers may also threaten to attack them. Broadly speaking, there are two different kinds of stalker – stranger stalkers (who have no history with the victim) and ex-partner stalkers, whom the victim used to date. Research has found that people consistently find stranger stalkers to be more dangerous and threatening to their health than ex-partner stalkers, despite ex-partner stalkers being more persistent and more likely to commit an assault. Experts believe people fear stranger stalkers as they have a fear of the unknown; not knowing where a stranger stalker's boundaries lie causes much fear.

Men and women have also been found to perceive stalking behaviour differently; women are typically more fearful of their stalker and see them as more of a

threat to their safety than men. However, this result hasn't been consistently replicated and as such more research is needed to determine what effect gender has on perceptions of stalkers.

As technology advances, cyberstalking also emerged. Cyberstalking refers to the use of electronic media – typically the internet – to once again, harass others. Experts are unsure whether cyberstalking represents a new type of behaviour distinctly different from traditional, physical stalking, or whether the internet is just another tool at the stalker's disposal. However, research has suggested that the effects of being physically and cyber stalked are the same. Cyberstalkers also typically employ off-line stalking behaviours as well, such as those listed above. More research would help clarify whether the two stalking types are distinctly different.

### Study Rationale

As such, research would benefit from understanding how the public perceives cyberstalkers in comparison to physical stalkers. This research is the first of its kind to compare perceptions between the two stalking types. Given that cyberstalking is thought to not be distinct from physical stalking, it would be plausible to imagine that people do not perceive cyberstalkers any differently.

Also, whether differences exist between men and women in their perceptions of cyber and physical stalkers is unknown. This study aims to answer these questions.

### Research Aims

The research aims to provide insight on the following topics:

\* Whether the type of stalking (physical, cyber) has an influence on how people perceive stalkers

\* What effect does relationship between the stalker and victim (stranger or ex-partner) have on stalker perception?

\* Whether gender has any influence on stalker perception

#### Data Collection/Analysis

This study was essentially an online questionnaire. Participants were assigned to either the physical or cyber stalking phase of the study and were presented with two short stories of stalker behaviour – one from a stranger, one from an ex-partner. They then rated the behaviour on a 1-7 point scale (for instance, a score of 1 represented 'Strong Agreement', 2 was 'Agree', and so on) on 4 statements:

1. 'The behaviour of this person causes me alarm.'
2. 'This person's behaviour requires police intervention.'
3. 'This person's behaviour is a threat to my safety.'
4. 'This person's behaviour is stalking.'

#### Key Findings

In line with previous research, people feared stranger stalkers more than ex-partner stalkers. Cyberstalking only influenced how alarming people saw the stranger stalker's behaviour – cyber strangers were rated as more alarming than

physical strangers. However, this difference was very small. No other difference was found.

Men and women did not perceive the stalker's behaviour any differently.

#### Implications/Recommendations

Consistent with other research, people rated the stranger stalker as more dangerous than the ex-partner stalker. Given how ex-partner stalkers are more of a threat, it would be wise for stalking charities to challenge this misconception. It would be very beneficial to raise awareness of the dangers of ex-partners as this could potentially lessen the harmful effects of being stalked as the victim may seek help earlier on.

Research suggests that cyberstalking is no different to physical stalking. The only time a difference occurred between perceptions of physical and cyberstalker behaviour was in ratings of alarm for stranger behaviour; this difference was also small. This finding supports the idea that cyberstalking may not be distinctly different to physical stalking, especially given many cyberstalkers often physically stalk as well. These results may help academics reach a consensus over the nature of cyberstalking. For treatment, if we can more confidently establish that the two kinds of stalking are fundamentally the same, then we could ascertain whether or not new treatments or assessments need to be adopted in order to manage and treat cyberstalkers. If not, then current treatment plans for offline stalkers may be viable in treating cyberstalkers.

Social media websites such as Facebook could promote the importance of having a private profile. Small measures, such as limiting the amount of information



that can be seen by the public on a person's profile, or reinforcing privacy settings, could be conducive to avoid being a cyberstalking victim. Some proposed ways to deal with a cyberstalker involve just blocking them; however, being aware that cyberstalkers also physically stalk means that new, more helpful strategies must be offered to victims.

No gender differences were found between men and women in how they perceived cyber and physical stalker behaviour. Even with studies that did find a gender difference, this influence was found to be rather weak and inconsistent. This suggests that whilst men and women might perceive stalker behaviour differently, it is not a particularly strong influence. More research is needed.

## Powerpoint Slides

### *Every Breath You Take: Comparing perceptions of cyberstalkers and physical stalkers*

Sanish Prasad

Supervisors: Simon Duff (Main) Lydia Bullock (Secondary)  
mxxsp16@nottingham.ac.uk

### Rationale + Aims

- ◊ Stalking refers to a criminal behaviour of repeated, deliberate and unwanted harassment of another person (Ybarra, Langhinrichsen-Rohling & Mitchell, 2017)
- ◊ People rate stranger stalkers as more dangerous than ex-partner stalkers (Hills & Taplin, 1998)
- ◊ Researchers are unsure if cyberstalking (using the internet to harass others) is different to physical stalking (Sheridan & Grant, 2007)
- ◊ Men and women have also been found to perceive stalking differently (Yanowitz, 2006) although this hasn't always been found (Phillips et al, 2004)
- ◊ This experiment seeks to investigate how people perceive cyberstalkers in comparison to physical stalkers. The effect of the relationship between the stalker and victim will also be examined (stranger vs ex partner).
- ◊ Gender biases will also be investigated.

### Method

- ◊ This study was ran online through Bristol Online Survey – a tool used to create questionnaires
- ◊ Participants were assigned to either the physical or cyber stalking condition. Both conditions contain 2 short stories; 1 describing behaviour from a stranger stalker, the other from an ex-partner.
- ◊ Participants had to imagine they were the victim in the stories then rate the stalker's behaviour on 4 measures:
  - 1) How alarming the behaviour was
  - 2) To what extent police intervention was necessary
  - 3) How much of a threat to their safety the behaviour was.
  - 4) To what extent the behaviour constituted stalking.

They rated these measures on a 7 point scale ranging from Strongly Agree down to Strongly Disagree.

Participants were not told the study was about stalking until the debrief at the end – this is because use of the word 'stalking' can influence how they perceive the behaviour, given the negative associations stalking has (Landwehr, 2016)

### Results

- ◊ On average, the relationship between the stalker and victim had an influence on how people perceived stalker behaviour - people rated the stranger stalker as more dangerous (stronger agreement to all 4 measures) than the ex-partner. This was found in both the physical and cyber-stalking condition.
- ◊ On the whole, the medium of stalking (cyber or physical) had no influence on how people rated the stalker's behaviour on the 4 measures, with one exception:
- ◊ In terms of rating of **alarm**, cyber stranger stalkers were rated as more alarming than physical stranger stalkers. However this was a very small difference.
- ◊ No gender differences were found on stalker perception.

### Implications + Future Research

- ◊ People finding stranger stalkers more threatening than ex-partner stalkers supports previous research; stalking charities can start challenging this perception and raise awareness of the danger of ex-partner stalkers.
- ◊ If cyberstalking is no different to physical stalking, it would be logical to expect no difference in perception of a cyber and physical stalker's behaviour. The medium of stalking was found to have only a weak influence on stalker perception.
- ◊ This suggests cyberstalking is in fact similar to physical stalking; from a treatment perspective there would be little need to devise new programmes for cyberstalkers.
- ◊ Given stalking has harmful effects on its victims, social media websites could do well to reinforce the importance of managing security on users' profiles to lessen their chances of being a victim of cyberstalking.
- ◊ More research needs to be done on gender to ascertain the influence it has on stalker perception.

### References

- ◊ Hills, A. M., & Taplin, J. L. (1998). *Anticipated responses to stalking: Effect of threat and target-stalker relationship*
- ◊ Landwehr, E. (2016). *Perceptions of stalking: The influence of perpetrator mental disorder diagnosis, target-perpetrator gender, and perpetrator persistence.*
- ◊ Phillips, L., Quirk, R., Rosenfeld, B., & O'Connor, M. (2004). *Is it stalking? Perceptions of stalking among college undergraduates. Criminal justice and behavior, 31(1), 73-96.*
- ◊ Sheridan, L. P., & Grant, T. (2007). *Is cyberstalking different?. Psychology, crime & law, 13(6), 627-640.*
- ◊ Yanowitz, K. L. (2006). *Influence of gender and experience on college students' stalking schemas. Violence and Victims, 21(1), 91.*
- ◊ Ybarra, M. L., Langhinrichsen-Rohling, J., & Mitchell, K. J. (2017). *Stalking-like behavior in adolescence: Prevalence, intent, and associated characteristics. Psychology of violence, 7(2), 192.*

## **Reflective Report**

Conceptualization – Preliminary Reading (August – September 2017)

Over the summer of 2017, I read about the research interests of each staff member. However, I was initially attracted to Simon Duff's work on stalking, so I did some light reading on the topic.

(September – 5 October 2017)

As the course began, I gained an interest in Kate Green's topics, such as the role of personality traits and violence and did some research on it. These 2 would be my supervisor choices.

With Simon, I realised there was no research looking at perceptions of cyberstalkers. So I decided to fill in this gap in the literature with my proposal – comparing perceptions of cyberstalkers with physical stalkers. I opted to keep my project simple given my course was only a year long.

With Kate, I also looked for gaps in the literature, finding a study looking at the links between personality disorder and risk of being a homicide victims. This gave me the idea to see if any links existed between personality traits and chances of being a victim of lesser assault, which I put down as my proposal.

Preparation (13 October 2017 – 21 March 2018)

Once I was assigned Simon as a supervisor (13 October 2017) we had a meeting in late October. Here, we had a more in-depth discussion about my idea, talking about how to translate my idea into an actual study, deciding to create the study through Bristol Online Survey (BOS), a tool which lets a user create online

questionnaires. We also agreed that the study would be very similar in design to other research – having vignettes (stories) of stalker behaviour and having participants rate the behaviour on a scale afterwards. This was my first meeting with Simon as my supervisor so we developed a working relationship. Simon was approachable from the start and I felt comfortable discussing the questions and thoughts with him.

During our next meeting on the 17th of November, we built upon what was discussed in our previous meeting, discussing things such as numbers of participants needed and began thinking about the kind of analyses necessary to analyze the results. Although results analysis was quite far off, it was still useful to have this foresight. We also discussed how to write the vignettes in the study. We also agreed to test the effect of gender on stalking perception (along with the effect of relationship of stalker/victim and the medium of stalking (physical, cyber)).

Throughout November, I also passed the ethics integrity test and worked on my first draft of the project's research protocol, along with the ethics application. These two were needed by the ethics committee for them to approve the project. Both involved writing a brief overview of the project. The ethics form was concerned with what kind of participants I'd be looking for. I found both documents straightforward to write up. I submitted these to Simon for feedback by the deadline of the 24th of November. Overall, as the end of Christmas term arrived, I felt satisfied with my progress on my project. I had a simple, yet interesting idea which could easily fill a gap in the literature on stalking. Throughout the first semester, my meetings with Simon were constructive and I felt like I was in a solid position by December. We had established a good

working relationship and I was comfortable with asking him for help when it was necessary.

Simon gave me feedback on my protocol and ethics application on the 24th of January 2018. I didn't have too much to change, and I easily submitted by the deadline (31 January 2018).

While I was awaiting approval from the Ethics Committee, I decided to get started with Bristol Online Survey. On the 1st of March, I sent an email to create an account by the 16th of March, my account was up and running. On the 21st of March, the Ethics Committee formally approved my study. Meeting up with Simon on the 26th of March, we discussed how to create the survey on BOS. A crucial question was how to divert people to 1 of the 2 conditions. Simon suggested telling participants to choose an arbitrary condition (X and Y were chosen) which would divert participants to the physical or cyber condition respectively. We also discussed how I would advertise my study and Simon accepted my idea – to use popular social media sites such as Facebook and Reddit.

I remained quite confident in my idea and felt like I had a solid base to go from. Thanks to the discussions with Simon, I knew what kind of study I would create on BOS and how to make it.

Design & Data Collection (21 March – 21 May 2018)

Working with the BOS proved to be quite a simple process, given how intuitive it was. I was able to build most of the experiment without any hassle and referred to the handy FAQ section on their website. However I struggled to create the

page which diverts participants to either physical or cyber conditions. This was challenging and I was stumped for a week or so, however I managed to overcome this eventually. I sent my finalized version to Simon on the 20th of April and received feedback 3 days later. Aside from minor corrections, I was good to go.

On the 24th I began advertising my study on Facebook, Reddit and other websites allowing for study sharing. At this point I couldn't do much but wait until I had the data from 113 participants. Progress was initially a little slow but by the 21st of May I had all my data.

As this was going on, I was looking over the data to make sure nothing was out of order. BOS was collecting data as I hoped it would. However, I felt my data collection was a bit slow. If I were to repeat this, I would take a more pro-active stance and advertise more frequently so I would have my data ready to analyze earlier.

#### Analysis & Write Up (22 May – 1 August 2018)

Simon suggested I start with some basic analyses so I could get a sense of my data before I start doing more advanced statistical analyses. We arranged to meet on the 14th of June so in the mean time I began looking at my data to get a sense of it.

By looking at my data and generating means, I saw a few patterns, such as people rating stranger stalkers as more dangerous than ex-partner stalkers, a result consistent with previous literature. By transferring all of my data from

BOS onto Microsoft Excel, I had a document ready to show Simon for our meeting.

During our meeting we discussed my results and Simon assisted in me in deciding what statistical tests to run. He agreed to run his own statistical tests to see if our results matched; this was not him doing my analyses for me, but merely so he could assist me in getting my own analyses correct if we got different results. Stats is not my strong point so I was quite worried about how challenging the analyses would be, so having Simon assist me if necessary was reassuring. I did not want to rely on him so I went off and performed the analyses we agreed on by myself, just to see how I fared.

As I was analyzing different sets of data, I found the analyses quite confusing initially. However, through tutorials and reading of stats textbooks, I began to make sense of my data. To my relief, the analyses I ran on SPSS matched the averages I gained on Excel. My results showed that people feared stranger stalkers more than ex-partners, and that the medium of stalking (cyber or physical) had only a small influence: people rated cyber stalkers as more alarming than physical stalkers. However this difference was very small. Gender also had no influence on stalker perception.

On the 2nd of July Simon sent me the results of his analyses and our results matched. This was very relieving as it meant we didn't need to do any further work to get the same result.

From late June onwards, I worked on writing the first draft of my paper. I had written every section of the report, however I struggled to explain my results. Therefore, I requested specific feedback on the discussion section.

On the 5th of July I sent my first draft over to Simon. He replied the next day and I had a few minor edits to make, such as providing subheadings for clarity and defining terms such as 'cyberstalking' better. I changed my graphs to tables given other research papers prefer tables and it would be easier to publish mine this way. The biggest change I had to make, as expected, was how to discuss my results. He pointed me in the direction of some papers which looked at cyberstalkers. From these, I realised that in the research, there was an idea that cyberstalking is fundamentally the same as physical stalking. This could account for why people didn't perceive the two that differently; this would explain the weak influence the medium of stalking had on perception.

Thus, my discussion section now reflected this idea and I was able to discuss this with little difficulty. The finding that people feared stranger stalkers was consistent with other literature so explaining this was easy. I found key methodological differences between my study and those which found gender differences and used this to account for why no gender effects were found in my study. By late July my paper was written.

### Strengths & Challenges

Overall, I felt like I was able to get on with my project with a lot of independence. I was able to get BOS up and running and collect data independently. I also struggle with statistics, however given I didn't need any of Simon's help to get the right results, I feel like my statistical ability grew stronger. Writing the final paper went smoothly; I was able to implement Simon's comments for improvement.



However, I was a little slow with data collection. Whilst I did ask my fellow classmates for websites they used to get their participants, I could've done this a bit earlier. Granted, advertising was whole new to me so I wasn't aware of which websites were viable for study sharing. I also struggled initially with data analysis; whilst I did figure it out, it took me a week or two – again, leaving it late. This could've been alleviated somewhat if I finished my data collection earlier so I had more time to analyze it.

I also struggled to interpret my finding that medium of stalking had very little influence on gender perception. Up until late July, no paper I had looked at could explain this, so I felt like I was relying on Simon for advice. Thankfully, whilst he pointed me to the right place, I found an explanation by myself.

What was learned/would be done differently?

I learned a lot about the nature of stalking; gaining an insight into the behaviour and being aware of the differences – and similarities – between cyber and physical stalking. I also learned a lot about how to advertise my study (learning which websites are best to use, how to write concise summaries for people to read) and how to run statistical analyses, such as the MANOVA. I hope that my research can be used in the field to provide a new insight into the stalking literature.

If I could repeat this experiment, I would aim to include more measures; my experiment did not include the stalker's intent as a factor that influences perception. Other research has shown this is important. I would also aim to have more participants. Given different countries have different laws on stalking

(which could influence participant perception) I would also have participants from one country only.

Word Count: 1,996