



## Cyberstalking

by the School Internet Safety Initiative

**What is it?** Since the advent of the Internet, *cyberstalking* has gained the attention of both victims and law enforcement. Cyberstalking is the repeated use of one or more technological devices to harass, follow, scare, or intimidate someone.<sup>1</sup> Cyberstalkers feel that they can target, follow, and harass their victims because of the anonymous nature of the Internet, as well as the ability to use pseudonyms (made up names) and fake profiles to gain someone's personal information.<sup>2</sup>

**How is it done?** Certain behaviors of cyberstalkers are similar to that of physical stalkers, where they follow, harass, and scare their victims. But a cyberstalker's methods are considerably different because of the ease of access to personal information in online and mobile environments. Cyberstalking may often take the form of repeated threats or harassment through email, chat rooms, Instant Messenger (IM), message boards, newsgroups, and social networking sites.<sup>3</sup> These acts are classified as cyberstalking if they make the victim feel afraid or concerned for their mental, emotional, and/or physical safety. A victim's personal information found online may be obtained by a cyberstalker and then used to figure out a physical location to harass the victim in person.<sup>4</sup> Cyberstalkers may send instant messages with threatening content, send a virus through email, flood a victim's inbox with unwanted content, steal a person's identity, or gather more information with the intent to harass, threaten, or intimidate the person online or offline.<sup>5</sup>

**What kind of harm does it cause?** Cyberstalking can be just as devastating to a victim as physical stalking, and can lead to anxiety, physical harm, and even death in severe cases.<sup>6</sup> In a majority of cyberstalking cases, victims and stalkers did not know each other prior to the start of the stalking incidents, and males were found to be more likely to be the offenders.<sup>7</sup>

**Types of cyberstalkers.** There are three general types of cyberstalkers, which have been grouped into the following categories:

- a. *domestic violence stalkers* – the most persistent and possibly the most dangerous because they want to control their victims mentally and/or physically
- b. *erotomania or delusional stalkers* – those who have intense, false beliefs that a victim is in love with them
- c. *nuisance stalkers* – those who start off with non-threatening, but annoying, behavior that sometimes escalates to violent behavior

To learn more about these categories of stalkers, see Roberts and Dziegielewski's (2006) article.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Goodno, N. H. (2007). Cyberstalking: a new crime: Evaluating the effectiveness of current state and federal laws. *Missouri Law Review*, 72, 66–102.

<sup>2</sup> Tavani, H. T., & Grodzinsky, F. S. (2002). Cyberstalking, personal privacy, and moral responsibility. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 4, 123–132.

<sup>3</sup> D'Ovidio, R., & Doyle, J. (2003). A study on cyberstalking: Understanding investigative hurdles. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 10–17.

<sup>4</sup> Deirmenjian, J. (1999). Stalking in cyberspace. *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 27(3), 407–413.

<sup>5</sup> Finn, J. (2004). A survey of online harassment at a university campus. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 19(4), 468–483.

<sup>6</sup> Moriarty, L., & Freiburger, K. (2008). Cyberstalking: Utilizing newspaper accounts to establish victimization patterns. *Victims & Offenders*, 3, 131–141.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Roberts, A., & Dziegielewski, S. (2006). Changing stalking patterns and prosecutorial decisions: Bridging the present to the future. *Victims and Offenders*, 1, 47–60.



**For more information and to learn how to protect yourself from cyberstalking, check out these suggested readings and resources:**

- NetSmartz Workshop: *Educators* <http://www.netsmartz.org/Educators>
- NoBullying.com: *CyberStalking Facts – The Top 20*  
<http://www.nobullying.com/cyberstalking-20-important-facts/>
- Norton by Symantec: *Straight Talk About Cyberstalking* <https://us.norton.com>