

Stalking and Violence

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New Patterns of Trauma and Obsession

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Preface

The concept of stalking, e.g., repeated and unwanted following, lying in wait, and other intrusive and harassing behaviors, did not come into public consciousness until the late 1980s (Meloy, 1999). The stalking of President Ronald Reagan, Rebecca Schaeffer, Jodie Foster, David Letterman, and Nicole Simpson were high-profile examples (Dietz, et al., 1991a; Dietz, et al., 1991b). The media played an instrumental role in transforming stalking into a social problem. Movies such as, *Fatal Attraction*, television and radio broadcasts, and the print media brought into public awareness the deadly consequences of stalking and the frustration and helplessness of stalking victims (Lowney & Best, 1995, pp. 33–57).

Stalking is not a new phenomenon; in fact, a sub-type of stalking, erotomania, has been known and documented in ancient times. Erotomanics stalk their targets to fulfill a delusional belief or fantasy that their target is in love with them (Esquirol, 1838; de Clerambault, 1921; Zona, et al., 1993; Kurt, 1995, p. 223). Other stalkers hold paranoid and other delusional beliefs and will stalk and attempt to harm their targets as a result of these delusional beliefs (Dietz, et al., 1991a; Dietz, et al., 1991b). The stalking syndrome is not limited to erotomania and other severe pathologies, but encompasses many "normal" persons who for various reasons stalk their dates, acquaintances, spouses, and other family members (NIJ, 1998; Kurt, 1995, p. 225; Hamburger & Hastings, 1986).

The 1989 murder of Rebecca Schaeffer led to the enactment of the first anti-stalking law in California in 1990. California's anti-stalking statute became a model for other states. Public outcry over stalking led to U. S. Congressional hearings and the enactment of anti-stalking laws at the state and federal levels. Community-based and Internet-based organizations were formed to deal with the problems posed by stalkers. The federal government established a model stalking code to assist states in developing constitutional and enforceable laws. The increased access to the Internet also resulted in public concern about stalkers, pedophiles, and other predators online, and twenty-six states now have laws against electronic stalking.

Along with the development of stalking as a social problem and its inclusion into the realm of legal problems, came research into the sociology and psychology of stalking (NIJ, 1998; Emerson, et al., 1998, pp. 289–314; Meloy, 1998; Meloy, 1999; Lowney & Best, 1995, pp. 33–57; Boychuk, 1994). The National Institute of Justice-supported National Violence Against Women survey estimated that 8% of women and 2% of men in the U.S. are stalked at one time in their life, while 1% of women and 0.4% of men are stalked annually (NIJ, 1998). Research has focused on clinical evaluations of perpetrators, analysis of stalking in current and/or terminated relationships, and legal analysis of stalking and the criminal justice system (Sinclair & Frieze, 2000, p. 24; Brewster, 2000, pp. 41–54; Spitzberg, Nicasastro, & Cousins, 1998; Boychuk, 1994). In addition, in this book, quantitative and qualitative findings from the Stalking and Violence Project (SVP) will describe new patterns and effects of stalking in social relationships using a random sample of 519 protective orders filed in two domestic courts (See Appendix A—Research Methods and Appendix B—Selected Cases from the Stalking and Violence Project).

With the enactment of anti-stalking laws, domestic courts are now collecting data on stalking incidents. These analyses of domestic court cases will provide invaluable insights into the dynamics and impact of stalking in different relationships and the response of the police, courts, and mental health professionals to stalking complaints.

One of the central assumptions in this book is that stalking is a patterned set of behaviors that arises out of attempts to exert power over other persons in a variety of relationships. Stalkers use

stalking behaviors to develop and maintain relationships, retaliate, and/or punish those whom they perceive as having hurt them. In this way, stalking becomes an essential aspect of forming, maintaining, and ending various types of relationships in the mind of the stalker (Emerson, et al., 1998).

This book also assesses the extent to which gender, age, and other characteristics of victims and offenders affect the patterns of stalking behaviors. This process will shed light on the degree to which the roles and norms related to demographic and social characteristics influence the dynamics of stalking as well as the diverse and sometimes ambiguous nature of stalking itself (Tjaden, Thoennes, & Allison, 2000, pp. 7–22).

First, some researchers assert that stalking can involve a variety of behaviors, e.g., following, lying in wait, telephoning a person at home or work, and assaults (Sinclair & Frieze, 2000, pp. 23–35; Brewster, 2000, pp. 41–54). Some of these actions, when viewed in isolation, may not seem to qualify as stalking.

Second, stalking varies in severity from being a mild nuisance to being extremely stressful and dangerous. Motivations underlying stalking behaviors may affect the severity of the phenomenon. For instance, stalking that is motivated by jealousy and anger may be more violent than stalking that is guided by other motivations.

Third, the duration of stalking varies and when the time frame is short, neither the victim nor the perpetrator may consider the behavior as stalking.

Fourth, certain social norms encourage some forms of stalking as legitimate behavior and, this blurs the line between stalking and legitimate behaviors. Sinclair and Frieze (2000) describe how courtship norms, e.g., "at first you don't succeed try, try again," encourage suitors to pursue their love objects even when the targets explicitly rejects them. Movies such as *The Graduate* and *There's Something About Mary* exemplify the fine line between courtship persistence and stalking. The pursuer's behaviors initially may be perceived by the love object as normal courtship behaviors, which gradually evolve into being a nuisance, and ultimately to stalking.

Fifth, persons have made false claims of being stalked, which contribute to skepticism about the authenticity of claims made by stalking victims (Mohandie, Hatcher & Raymond, 1998).

The book evaluates the diverse and sometimes ambiguous nature of stalking in terms of its demographic and social patterns, psychological consequences, and organizational reactions.

Chapter 1 explores the types of relationships in which stalking occurs and which factors are related to stalking and violence in these relationships.

Chapter 2 describes stalking in terms of a technological innovation in communication: the electronic stalking of children and adults. The impact of increased Internet use on patterns of electronic stalking and organizational responses to electronic stalking are assessed.

In Chapter 3, the demographic and social characteristics of offenders and victims are analyzed to determine the degree to which power dynamics in the larger society influence patterns of stalking, control, and violence. The possible effects of gender, age, and race/ethnicity are elucidated.

Chapter 4 investigates the social, psychological, and economic impact of stalking in different social relationships. Emphasis is on the power inequities between stalkers and their victims and the ineffectiveness of the criminal justice system, both of which can result in severe stress and trauma for stalking victims.

In Chapter 5, the focus is on the informal, non-legal approaches that stalking victims take in dealing with their stalkers. The victims' responses to their perpetrators and their use of safety precautions, domestic violence shelters, and mental health services are analyzed.

The enactment of anti-stalking laws and the victims' use of the courts are assessed in Chapter 6. Emphasis is placed on the societal conditions that gave rise to anti-stalking legislation, the elements of anti-stalking laws, their constitutionality, and factors associated with the stalking victims' requests for protective orders.

Chapter 7 describes the conditions under which stalking victims and others seek police assistance to resolve stalking incidents. The characteristics of victims and offenders in different relationships are evaluated to determine which factors are related to seeking police assistance for stalking incidents.

The classification of stalkers for psychosocial treatment and/or incarceration are explored in Chapter 8. This chapter

focuses on effective treatment for victims and their perpetrators and which conditions are associated with successful treatment outcomes for victims and offenders.

Finally, in the last chapter, the book analyzes the implications of stalking in face-to-face interactions and in society.

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