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Stalking: The Constant Threat of Violence

Shari A. Sinwelski and Linda Vinton

All 50 states and the District of Columbia have passed antistalking legislation. This article discusses the history and dynamics of stalking and contemporary efforts to define and regulate stalking behavior, along with interventions for victims and stalkers.

Stalking is unlike other types of crimes because it may include individual actions that are legal, but when put together, these acts cause victims to be fearful of injury or death (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1996). Stalking did not receive much recognition until the 1989 shooting death of actress Rebecca Shaeffer shed light on the potentially violent consequences of stalking (de Becker, 1997) and celebrities such as David Letterman, Theresa Saldana, Janet Jackson, Madonna, and Steven Spielberg revealed that they had been victims of some form of repeated harassment (McCann, 1995).

Publicity surrounding such cases put pressure on state legislatures in the 1990s to draft legislation to protect those who are repeatedly and persistently followed, harassed, and physically intimidated or threatened in some other way. As with other forms of interpersonal violence, many hidden victims soon came forward to tell their stories and seek protection and remedy for being stalked. Although a precise number of stalking cases has not yet been determined, the National Violence Against Women Survey, a comprehensive survey of violence...
against women conducted by the Center for Policy Research, found that of the 16,000 respondents, 8% of the women and 2% of the men had been victims of stalking at some time in their lives (Tjaden, 1997). A projection of the findings to the 1995 U.S. population indicated that about 1.4 million persons (1 million women and 400,000 men) per year were affected by stalking; thus, the problem appears to be more prevalent than was previously believed.

This article reports on the history of stalking as a social and legal problem and contemporary efforts to define and regulate stalking behavior. The dynamics of stalking are described along with various profiles or typologies of stalkers. Interventive strategies for working with victims and stalkers are also discussed.

BACKGROUND

All the states and the District of Columbia have antistalking laws, most of which were passed in the 1990s. Prior to this legislation, the police could not arrest stalkers unless victims were physically attacked or injured. Although the legislation on stalking is new, the phenomenon is not. Historically, some behaviors that would be included in today’s definitions of stalking were referred to as erotomania, which has been considered a pathological form of love since ancient times, with references to it in the writings of Hippocrates, Plutarch, and Galen (Kurt, 1995). Although the psychiatrists Hart (1912) and Kraepelin (1921/1976) alluded to erotomania in their writings on mental disorders, de Clérambault (1942), a French psychiatrist, is credited with describing the clinical features of erotomania. The phenomenon has even been referred to as de Clérambault’s syndrome or psychose passionelle (Segal, 1989).

What appears to be missing from these early descriptions of stalking as a psychiatric disorder is the sociopolitical context of the behavior. Although psychoanalytic interpretations may suggest that women gain power through stalking, the contemporary reality is that more than twice as many women as men
are stalked (Tjaden, 1997). Furthermore, it has been estimated that as many as 90% of the women who were murdered by their husbands or boyfriends were stalked prior to their deaths (Beck et al., 1992).

Although stalking gained attention during the late 1980s with the death of actress Rebecca Shaeffer, the stage was set during the 1960s and 1970s to accept stalking as a social problem with recognition of child and wife abuse as societal problems. The first law against stalking was passed in California in 1990, and by 1994, 48 states and the District of Columbia had passed such legislation (Dziegielewski & Roberts, 1995). Although Maine does not have an antistalking law, the state has a statute on terrorizing to address stalking behavior (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1996).

Although the legal definitions of stalking vary from state to state, most definitions suggest that the stalker must have exhibited criminal intent of inducing fear in the victim and engaged in threatening behavioral patterns toward the victim. Most laws also have a course-of-conduct criteria clause that refers to the stalker’s behavior as a series of acts that have taken place over time, and the laws of some states require that the victim must be fearful for his or her personal safety or of bodily injury or death as a result of the stalker’s actions (Dziegielewski & Roberts, 1995).

One of the toughest antistalking laws in the country was unanimously approved by the Florida legislature in 1992 (Dziegielewski & Roberts, 1995). According to Florida Statute 784.048, a victim must prove that she or he has been repeatedly followed or harassed by another person to file a charge of stalking against an alleged stalker but does not have to provide evidence of overt threats of death or severe injury. If found guilty, the stalker is convicted of a first-degree misdemeanor and faces a fine of up to $1,000 and up to 1 year in a county jail. As stated in Florida Statute 784.048 (§ 775.083), a misdemeanor escalates to the level of a felony (also called aggravated stalking) when a person “willfully, maliciously, and repeatedly follows or harasses another person, and makes a credible threat with the intent to
place that person in reasonable fear of death or bodily injury” or violates an injunction for protection against repeated violence or for domestic violence. A person who is convicted of aggravated stalking faces a fine of up to $5,000 and up to 5 years in prison. Like Florida, most states have laws that distinguish between a misdemeanor and a felony charge of stalking.

In 1996, the National Institute of Justice released the Model Antistalking Code as a guide for states on writing antistalking laws that are neither too vague nor too specific. The Model Antistalking Code is distinguished from many state statutes in that it does not list specific types of behavior that constitute stalking (and thus avoids the implication that certain behaviors are the only ones) and does not use the term credible threat (which means that actual verbal or written threats would not be required as evidence of a threat that caused fear in a victim). In addition, the Violence Against Women Act of 1998 provides for stalkers who have restraining orders against them to be prosecuted when they travel across state lines.

STALKING BEHAVIORS

As indicated by the various legal definitions, stalking behaviors range on a continuum of severity and intensity. They may begin with acts that individually may seem insignificant, such as repeated, unwanted contact in the form of telephone calls, beeper codes, e-mail messages, or letters. If left unchecked, these contacts may escalate to unwanted physical contacts or the stalker’s “coincidental” appearance wherever the victim goes. Sometimes the contacts are in the form of unwanted gifts, such as flowers or jewelry. At other times, stalkers spread false rumors about their victims to the victims’ family members, friends, or employers or lie to frighten or coerce their victims. One stalker, for instance, falsely informed the victim, his ex-girlfriend, that he had AIDS. In addition, many stalkers go to the extreme of vandalizing, stealing, or destroying the victims’ personal property. For example, one woman reported that her
stalker mutilated her cat and left it in her yard, and another reported that her stalker left a pig’s head on her doorstep (Pathé & Mullen, 1997).

Two studies used the Stalking Incident Checklist to assess stalking behaviors (Coleman, 1997; Wright et al., 1996). Wright et al. constructed a list of defining characteristics of stalking behavior that were organized around victimology, frequent crime scene indicators, common forensic findings, investigative considerations, and search warrant suggestions that were reviewed by FBI agents who were working on stalking cases. They then reviewed anecdotal cases, the literature, and newspaper accounts of stalking, along with 10 self-reports and 20 additional cases reported to the Trauma and Violence Office at the University of Pennsylvania, to refine the instrument to a 46-item checklist, which was pilot tested at a victim assistance agency. The Stalking Incident Checklist included background information, number or frequency of incidents, length of time the behavior has been directed at the victim, location of the behavior, level of aggression, style and content of communication during the stalking incident, typology, victim’s level of risk, stalker’s motive, and outcome.

Coleman (1997) used a version of the Stalking Behavior Checklist (SBC) along with the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) to measure abusive behavior in her study of 141 female undergraduate psychology students. We assume that availability dictated the choice of sample. Coleman stated that stalking often takes place in cases in which there is a romantic or even imagined relationship. The participants were divided into three groups: (a) controls (who answered no when asked if they ever ended a relationship that resulted in repeated, unwanted attention by a former partner), (b) harassed (who answered yes to the same question and to questions based on Florida’s antistalking law), and (c) stalked (who answered yes to all these questions and affirmed the malicious intent of and fear caused by their former partners’ acts). The vast majority of the participants (90) were controls; 38 and 13 were in the harassed group and the stalked group, respectively.
Coleman examined the three groups’ demographic characteristics, reports of former partners’ behavior, and use of violent tactics to resolve conflict during former relationships and found no statistically significant demographic differences between the groups. The participants’ mean age (23.6 years) and race (78% were White) matched the mean age (24.6 years) and race (81% were White) of their former partners. Gender of the former partners was not among the demographic information collected.

The results of a factor analysis indicated that two factors accounted for 45.5% of the variance in scores on the SBC. Factor 1 (34.7%) consisted of items on the violent behavior subscale of the SBC (physically harming the victim, breaking into the victim’s house or car, and violating a restraining order), and Factor 2 (10.8%) consisted of items on the harassing behavior subscale (made repeated telephone calls to the victim, followed or watched the victim, and went to the victim’s home or workplace). Post hoc analyses distinguished the women in the stalked group as reporting more violent and harassing behaviors than those in the control and harassed groups. With respect to the CTS, Coleman found that the stalked participants reported using more reasoning conflict-resolution strategies during their relationships with the stalkers than did those in the other two groups; this finding led her to suggest that men who are abusive during relationships are more likely to demonstrate harassing or violent behavior after the relationships have ended.

CHARACTERISTICS OF STALKERS

A few studies have examined the characteristics of stalkers. In one such study, Zona, Sharma, and Lane (1993) examined case files categorized as erotomanic, love obsessional, or simple obsessional that were collected by the Los Angeles Police Department’s Threat Management Unit. Stalkers in the first two groups had delusions that they were passionately loved by their victims, with whom they had little or no contact. In contrast,
those in the simple obsessional category had prior relationships with their victims, whom they felt had wronged or mistreated them; had more frequent contact with their victims (by telephone, letter, or in person); and were the only ones to cause bodily or property harm. However, as Coleman (1997) pointed out, from a methodological standpoint, Zona et al.’s study did not include a control population and did not examine specific demographics of stalkers and victims.

Wright et al. (1996) did not report the victims’ or stalkers’ gender, age, race, educational level, or marital status for the 30 stalking cases they examined. In terms of typology, they found that 16 of the 30 cases were domestic (the stalkers and victims had relationships); 15 of these 16 stalkers were nondelusional, and 4 of the remaining 14 stalkers were delusional.

Similar to other types of partner violence, the motives of the 30 stalkers were classified primarily as anger-retaliation (12 cases) and possession (10 cases), followed by infatuation (6 cases) and other motives (2 cases). With regard to the victims’ level of risk, 13 victims (43%) were considered to be at high risk, 12 (40%) were considered to be at medium risk, and 5 (17%) were considered to be at low risk. Of the 30 cases, 16 were dispatched to the legal system, and 4 received psychiatric treatment; 7 stalkers committed suicide, and for the remaining 3 cases, the outcomes were not known. Of the 30 victims, 6 were murdered by their stalkers. Wright et al. (1996) described three such cases in which the stalker-murderers were either ex-husbands or ex-boyfriends; again, the similarity to scenarios of homicides in domestic violence cases is evident.

In their article, Wright et al. (1996) referred to “targets” as well as victims and stated that the terms are not necessarily interchangeable. A target is the primary recipient of the stalker’s attention, but there may be victims other than the targeted person, including relatives and friends. Wright et al. may have drawn this distinction because of their law enforcement, rather than victim assistance, perspective, as is evident when they described persons other than the target that the stalker may harm as “innocent parties.” The implication is that the
targets of stalkers are not innocent or are somehow implicated in the stalking behavior.

The National Violence Against Women Survey of 8,000 women and 8,000 men, conducted from November 1995 to May 1996, collected data on the prevalence of stalking, characteristics of stalkers and victims, characteristics of stalking behaviors, victims’ perceptions of the reasons they were stalked, incidence of stalking with domestic violence, victims’ responses, and the psychological and social consequences of stalking (Tjaden, 1997). Of those who were surveyed, 10% (8% of the women and 2% of the men) had experienced stalking at some time. Of these cases, the women were significantly more likely than the men to have been stalked by a current or former partner (79%), and 87% of the stalkers were men. Half the male victims’ stalkers were reported to have had accomplices (typically a friend or girlfriend), whereas the women’s stalkers tended to act alone.

The survey found no difference in the rate of stalking between White and minority women, but among minority women, Native American women were at a greater risk of being stalked. Behaviors that the stalkers demonstrated included spying on or following the victim (reported by 75% of the victims), making overt threats (45%), vandalizing the victim’s property (30%), and threatening to kill or killing the victim’s pets (10%). Most of the female victims (and many of the male victims) believed they were being stalked because their partners or ex-partners wanted to scare or control them and keep them in the relationships. In 60% of the cases, the stalking behaviors started before the relationships had ended; 80% of the women reported being physically assaulted and 31% sexually assaulted by their partners during the relationships.

VICTIMS’ PERCEPTIONS

With respect to victims’ responses to stalking, Tjaden (1997) reported that half the victims reported stalking behaviors to law enforcement personnel. A disproportionately greater
number of female victims than male victims obtained restraining orders, 80% of which were violated. Slightly less than one fourth of the women’s cases against the stalkers were prosecuted, compared to 19% of the men’s cases. About one third of the victims sought psychological help in the aftermath of the stalking, which usually stopped 1 to 2 years after the first episode. One fifth lost work hours, and 7% said they did not return to work because of the stalking. When asked what made the stalking cease, 20% of the victims said they had moved away, and 15% attributed the cessation to involvement by the police. Others noted that the stalking stopped when the assailants remarried or had new girlfriends.

Romans, Hays, and White (1996) conducted a study of 10 staff members of a counseling center who had been stalked by their clients. Of the 10 stalkers, 5 were female and 3 were male; the gender of the remaining 2 was not specified. The reported ages of the male stalkers ranged from 17 to 25, and the female stalkers’ ages ranged from 20 to 40. According to the counselors, 6 of the 10 stalkers had presenting problems related to Axis II personality disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed.) (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Although this study shed light on the stalking of professional helpers, it was limited by its small sample size and the selective sample (stalkers who had sought counseling).

Lowney and Best (1995) examined the construction of stalking as a crime problem and classified claims from 1980 to 1994. From 1980 to 1988, the term psychological rape was used to describe stalking claims. The dynamics of psychological rape were considered to be men harassing women, usually in nonviolent ways; obsessed offenders; and victims who may have shared responsibility for the harassment—these claims resulted in occasional media coverage. From 1989 to 1991, the claims were termed star stalking because the victims tended to be celebrities and the offenders were of either gender. In these cases, the victims tended not to be viewed as sharing responsibility for the stalking; the offenders were thought of as suffering from erotomania, and violence and homicide were seen as pos-
sible outcomes. The response was increased media coverage and the passage of California’s antistalking law.

From 1992 to 1994, the term *stalking* was used to describe claims, and in these claims, the dynamics of psychological rape and star stalking were combined. In the stalking claims, men tended to harass women, victims and offenders were often former intimates or current partners, the victims were not responsible for the harassment, and homicide was often the outcome. According to Lowney and Best (1995), some of the sociocultural aspects of stalking are vulnerability to harassment, violence by men, and the victimization of women. Contemporary resources in combating stalking include the crime victims’ movement, battered women’s advocates, and law enforcement.

**EFFECTS OF STALKING**

Pathé and Mullen (1997) explored the effects of stalking on 100 victims (whose genders and races were not reported). They found that 94 of the victims experienced changes in their work or social lives. The types of changes they experienced varied, but 53% either changed jobs or stopped working, and 39% moved as a result of being stalked (among those who moved, 7 moved to another state and 3 moved overseas). Most of the victims (82%) modified their usual activities because of their experiences, including avoiding places that the stalker might be or forbidding their children to answer the door, and many (73%) took measures to increase their security, such as changing telephone numbers or obtaining unlisted numbers, getting post office boxes, or even changing their names. Others purchased security systems for their homes, and 3 used security guards at their places of employment. Some victims took more aggressive approaches; for example, 5 took self-defense courses, and 4 kept makeshift weapons under their beds.

With respect to psychological responses, 83% of the victims in Pathé and Mullen’s (1997) study reported increased anxiety and “jumpiness, shakes, panic attacks, hypervigilance and
exaggerated startle response” (p. 14), 74% cited chronic sleep disturbance, and 55% reported nightmares or intrusive flashbacks. Many victims exhibited some symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and 37% were diagnosed as having PTSD; 24% reported suicidal ruminations.

Physical reactions to the stalking, including appetite disturbances (48%), persistent nausea (30%), and indigestion (27%), were also common. More than 20% of the victims reported increased alcohol or cigarette consumption, and more than half said they were excessively tired. Other physical problems noted were headaches and a worsening of existing physical problems, such as psoriasis or asthma.

Gross (1994) suggested that victims of stalking go through the five grief stages described by Kübler-Ross (1969). In the first stage, the victims may deny the seriousness of the stalkers’ behavior or fail to label it as stalking. In the second stage, they may bargain with the stalkers if the stalkers are known to them. In the third stage, the victims, particularly women, may feel guilty or assume some of the fault for the stalkers’ behavior because of women’s gender socialization, which places more responsibility for relationships on women. In the fourth stage, the victims may feel angry at the stalkers for disrupting their lives and making them feel afraid. In the fifth and final stage, the victims may come to accept that the burden for protecting themselves from the stalkers rests with the victims themselves.

INTERVENTIONS

Because stalking is such a new crime, the victims may not know where to go for help, and the people they approach for help may be as confused as the victims about the crime of stalking and the rights of victims. Because they often feel ashamed and embarrassed by the stalking, victims tend to isolate themselves and not tell others what is happening to them. They may blame themselves for their problem and ask themselves what they did to deserve being stalked. This way of thinking creates the illusion that if they would change their behavior in some way, the
stalking would stop, whereas in reality, it is the stalkers who are responsible for the behavior, and only they can make it stop. Victims cannot control their stalkers’ behavior; they can only take precautions and do the best they can to cope.

According to Dziegielewski and Roberts (1995), three events typically cause victims to seek treatment: escalation of the incidence or severity of the stalking episodes, inflicted injury, and problems with a relationship or job. In other words, the precipitating event is viewed as the last straw—that is, the victims can no longer use their normal coping mechanisms to get through the situation, and a crisis state follows.

When victims seek treatment, it is important that they are taken seriously and not blamed for the stalking behavior. If they approach someone for help who does not understand the dynamics of their problem and how to treat it, they are likely to try to continue to cope on their own. Unfortunately, stalking is such a new crime that little has been written about strategies for treating its victims or which interventions are more effective for various groups: women or men, same-sex versus opposite-sex victims and stalkers, or victims and stalkers with mental or physical disabilities. In general, helpers must consider both the legal and psychosocial aspects of the crime as well as the safety of the victims.

Legal Interventions

The police response to the crime of stalking has been varied, perhaps because only 50% of the police departments in states with antistalking laws provide formal training to their officers, and hence police officers may not completely understand the dynamics of the crime (Dziegielewski & Roberts, 1995). However, some police departments have developed model programs to protect victims.

In response to a number of stalking incidents against celebrities, the Los Angeles Police Department established a four-member Threat Management Unit, also known as the Stalking Squad, in its Mental Evaluation Unit (Lane, 1992). Another innovative aid to stalking victims—a pendant with a small
beeper—was developed by ADT security systems working directly with police departments and is used by two agencies in Florida and New Jersey that have coordinated victim assistance programs (Dziegielewski & Roberts, 1995). If a victim sees the stalker, she or he presses the pendant, which triggers an alarm at the ADT monitoring station that immediately informs the police. This aid may serve many stalking victims who are in protected places, but it will not help those who are directly exposed to their stalkers because no matter how quickly the police are notified, it will still take some time for them to arrive on the scene.

Stalking victims have the legal option of obtaining restraining orders against their assailants. Restraining orders do not guarantee protection, however; they simply give victims legal recourse if the orders are violated. Requirements for restraining orders vary, but most states require that the offensive behavior already has occurred. An advantage of restraining orders is that they help to document the fear perceived by the victims, which it is necessary to show under most state statutes. After completing a 3-year follow-up study of 200 randomly selected persons against whom orders were issued, Meloy (1997) found that more than 80% of the persons who violated the orders were not subsequently arrested for crimes against the victims whom the orders were supposed to protect.

Interventions to Empower Victims

Meloy (1997) advocated using a team consisting of “the victim, an emotionally supportive companion, a mental health professional, a local police officer familiar with the case, a local prosecutor, and in some cases, a private attorney and private security guard/investigator” (p. 175). Victim advocates may also be helpful to victims dealing with their responses to stalking and navigating the legal and other support systems. In addition, there should be a coordinator among the team members who maintains networking efforts on behalf of the victim. Depending on the needs of the victim, the focus of the group and involvement of its members may change.
According to Meloy (1997), clinicians should emphasize to stalking victims that they are primarily responsible for their own safety—that no one, including the police, has the power or ability to protect them from harm at all times. Although it is important for victims to take responsibility for their safety, they should not be made to feel responsible for the fact that they are being stalked. In taking personal responsibility, victims can develop a proactive approach by attempting to minimize risk when possible, such as by not walking to their cars alone, adding security systems at home, and developing safety plans, that is, what they can do if they spot their stalkers nearby.

Because most stalking victims find their usual coping mechanisms inadequate for dealing with their predicament, it is often helpful for them to seek the assistance of victim advocates or mental health professionals who are familiar with the dynamics of stalking. An advocate can help a victim manage the situation by giving support and guidance. Initially, the advocate can validate the victim’s feelings and help empower the victim to take action. An advocate can also inform a victim of the laws in his or her state with regard to stalking.

After forming a trusting relationship with the victim, the advocate can help the victim deal with the stalker. The first thing the victim should do is tell the stalker explicitly that he or she does not want a relationship with the stalker and do so briefly because the stalker may misinterpret the victim’s intentions. To build confidence and empower the victim, the advocate can help the victim rehearse what she or he will say and, if safety considerations permit, be present when the victim confronts the stalker. Victims should never be alone with stalkers because their personal safety may be at risk. Once a victim confronts the stalker, she or he should have no further contact with the stalker. Any communication, whether positive or negative, can stimulate the stalker to continue to contact the victim.

Obviously, not all stalkers stop harassing their victims after they are confronted. In these cases, the victims may choose to file police reports or injunctions for protection. Documentation is of utmost importance in these cases. It is helpful for a victim who is working with the legal system to keep a log or journal of
all attempts the stalker makes to contact her or him; each entry should include the date, time, and place of the contact; a description of the incident and how it affected him or her; and the names of any witnesses who were present.

Two sites on the World Wide Web may be helpful to stalking victims. The Stalking Victim’s Sanctuary (http://www.stalkingvictims.com) offers information about stalking, tips on how to cope, and an online support group, and Survivors of Stalking (http://www.soshelp.org/) provides information about a national support group for stalking victims.

Prevention

Although the prevention of stalking is not within the victims’ control, there are “red flags,” according to de Becker (1997), who has written extensively about safety issues and stalking. As the result of working with victims of stalking on enhancing their security, de Becker believes that there are warning signs or behaviors that stalkers demonstrate before they actually stalk their victims. Knowing these signs can enhance awareness and therefore security; thus, de Becker refers to such “survival signals”—that is, behaviors that may indicate that a person will become a stalker—as forced teaming, charm or niceness, the use of too many details, “typecasting,” “loan-sharking,” unsolicited promises, and discounting the word no. As was pointed out earlier, these individual behaviors do not necessarily indicate that stalking will follow, but joined in a pattern over time, they can be intimidating or threatening.

According to de Becker (1997), in forced teaming, a stalker tries to establish a bond between himself or herself and the victim by creating the illusion that they share a common predicament, with the goal of establishing premature trust between them. A stalker who uses forced teaming may use phrases such as, How are we going to get through this? Charm can seem alluring and attractive but is used by stalkers to compel or control the victim for personal gain.

A stalker uses “too many details,” according to de Becker (1997, p. 58), when he or she is lying and feels compelled to back
up the lie with details because the lie “doesn’t sound credible” even to him or her. A stalker who uses typecasting may say, “You are probably too busy to hear this, but . . . ,” which may impel the listener to try to prove the stalker wrong by having a conversation with him or her.

Loan-sharking is used when a stalker does unsolicited favors for or gives gifts to the victim, which often makes the victim feel indebted to the stalker. According to de Becker (1997), there is often a motive behind unsolicited favors, and a person should be cautious if someone overextends himself or herself. “The unsolicited promise is one of the most reliable signals because it is nearly always of questionable motive” (p. 61). Unsolicited promises are little more than attempts by the speaker to convince the victim of something and thus should be viewed with caution. The final red flag is discounting the word no. A person should be able to say no to a question or request without feeling the need to defend it. A speaker who attempts to persuade another person to back down when the person has a strong belief about an issue sends the message that the speaker is in charge; this feeling of control can be dangerous.

Working With Stalkers

According to Meloy (1997), therapeutic interventions with stalkers must take into account that stalkers exhibit antisocial behaviors and are angry or out of touch with reality (or both). Thus, the stalker needs to experience both social repercussions and psychological treatment. The criminal justice system can attempt to protect the victim and send the stalker a message that society will not tolerate this type of behavior, but such treatment is not always effective. Sometimes the attention that stalkers receive through the legal system reinforces their stalking behavior; for example, Arthur Jackson, the man who stalked and attempted to murder the actress Theresa Saldana, continued to stalk her after he was incarcerated (Markman & La Brecque, 1994). Other stalkers may like the notoriety that being in prison brings them. According to Rhonda Saunders (Crazy for You, 2000), a Los Angeles prosecutor who interviewed
Robert Hoskins, who was incarcerated for stalking crimes against the singer Madonna, Hoskins painted “The Madonna Stalker” in his jail cell and appeared to enjoy being referred to as “the material guy” by his cell mates.

By its nature, stalking raises questions about the mental stability, maturity, and level of aggression of people who engage in it. Small-scale, descriptive studies of stalkers are now being conducted, but little is known about how stalkers are distinguished from the general population and whether legal or psychological treatment was effective in cases in which it was employed. Some states, such as Minnesota and Wisconsin, have recognized the dual nature of stalking and require the courts to order mental health evaluations and counseling for all stalking defendants (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1996). In these cases, psychological treatment is usually left to the discretion of mental health professionals.

A few states have tried an unusual approach to curbing stalkers’ obsessive behavior. They require convicted stalkers to wear electronic devices that signal to the police when they are in locations that are in violation of the stalker’s probation (McCann, 1995). These devices take some of the responsibility for staying away from the victims off the victims and place it back on the offenders.

CONCLUSION

Historically, stalking received attention only when an obsession stalked, either a man or a woman, pursued or harmed a public figure. It is now known that stalking is not a rare occurrence, and though it can happen to anyone (particularly in nondomestic cases), proportionately more women than men are victims. Some victims do not realize that stalking may have serious consequences and therefore do not take personal or legal measures against it when it starts.

Antistalking legislation was passed in swift response to the death of an actress in California in 1989. Since 1990, each state
has taken steps to criminalize stalking behavior. Because legislation was passed rapidly, the need for modifications to these laws is already evident. The Model Antistalking Code (National Institute of Justice, 1996) offers useful guidelines to the states in this regard, and dialogues have begun among the many persons who work with and on behalf of stalking victims, including law enforcement personnel and the treatment community.

Although the psychopathological characteristics of nondomestic stalkers need further examination, the dynamics of stalking in situations involving persons who are known to each other appear similar to those of abusive relationships. In stalking situations involving people who know one another, the number of male perpetrators is disproportionate, the motives seem to be power and control, and the former relationship between the stalker and victim may have been emotionally and/or physically abusive. Individuals who have worked in the domestic violence community for the past 30 years can undoubtedly relate stories of women who were stalked by their ex-husbands or ex-partners. Hence, the sociopolitical context of stalking, like domestic violence, should not be ignored in the focus on stalkers’ psychopathology or victims’ characteristics.

Just as there is a growing awareness that dating relationships can be violent, greater attention is being paid to people of high school and college age who are being stalked by ex-boyfriends or ex-girlfriends. Through our work with college students and contacts with victim advocacy centers on college campuses, we have found that cases of stalking routinely come to the attention of advocates and counselors. Although little has been written about persons seeking counseling in the community at large, Meloy (1997) offered some beginning guidelines for clinical practice with stalking victims. It is hoped that the growing literature on the characteristics of stalkers and the effects of stalking on victims will lead to research on the effectiveness of interventions with both victims and stalkers. Such research should include diverse and large enough samples to allow the examination of the effect of factors like gender, sexual orientation, disability, and race-ethnicity on the effectiveness of treatment.
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