Stalking: Patterns, motives, and intervention strategies

Laurence Miller *

Independent Practice, Boca Raton, FL, United States

**ABSTRACT**

Stalking is generally defined as an intentional pattern of repeated intrusive and intimidating behaviors toward a specific person that causes the target to feel harassed, threatened, and fearful, or that a reasonable person would regard as being so. Motivations for stalking include a delusional belief in romantic destiny, a desire to reclaim a prior relationship, a sadistic urge to torment the victim, or a psychotic overidentification with the victim and the desire to replace him or her. Stalkers may carry a variety of diagnostic labels, including psychotic disorders, delusional disorders, or cluster-B personality disorders, and are generally refractory to conventional psychological treatments. Risk factors for violence in a stalking scenario include a prior intimate relationship, the stalker’s feeling of being rejected or humiliated, and generic risk factors for violence such as low educational level and substance abuse. Cyberstalking can be as distressing, if not more so, to victims as physical stalking due to the concealment and anonymity afforded by electronic communication. Victims may adopt varying strategies for dealing with stalkers, such as avoiding, confronting, seeking third party assistance, and accessing the legal system. Threat management specialists have offered certain recommendations that can make it easier for a victim to deter and discourage a stalker.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Contents

1. Introduction .............................................................. 496
2. Stalking: description and demographics ................................................. 496
3. Stalking typologies ........................................................... 497
      3.1.1. Simple obsessional stalker ........................................................................... 497
      3.1.2. Love obsessional stalker ........................................................................... 497
      3.1.3. Erotomanic stalker ................................................................................... 497
      3.1.4. False victimization syndrome ..................................................................... 497
   3.2. Mullen, Pathe, Purcell and Stuart (1999); Mullen, Pathe and Purcell (2000); Mullen et al. (2006) stalker typology ......... 497
      3.2.1. Intimacy seeker ......................................................................................... 497
      3.2.2. Incompetent suitor ................................................................................ 497
      3.2.3. Rejected stalker ...................................................................................... 497
      3.2.4. Resentful stalker ..................................................................................... 497
      3.2.5. Predatory stalker .................................................................................... 497
   3.3. Holmes (2001) stalker typology ............................................................. 497
      3.3.1. Sexually driven stalker ............................................................................... 497
      3.3.2. Unrequited love stalker ........................................................................... 497
      3.3.3. Rejected revenge-seeking stalker ................................................................. 497
      3.3.4. Celebrity stalker ..................................................................................... 497
      3.3.5. Political stalker ....................................................................................... 497
      3.3.6. Professional contract killer ....................................................................... 497
   3.4. Sheridan and Boon (2002) stalker typology ............................................ 497
      3.4.1. Stalking by a former spouse or partner ......................................................... 498
      3.4.2. Stalking based on love ............................................................................... 498
      3.4.3. Stalking based on delusional fixation .......................................................... 498
      3.4.4. Sadistic stalkers ....................................................................................... 498

* Plaza Four, Suite 101, 399 Camino Gardens Blvd., Boca Raton, FL 33432, United States. Tel.: +1 561 392 8881.
E-mail address: docmilphd@aol.com.

1359-1789/$ – see front matter © 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/j.avb.2012.07.001
1. Introduction

Song lyrics, movies, TV shows, and popular culture all seem to laud the persistent romantic who sets his sights on the woman of his dreams and doesn’t give up, pursuing her against all odds, until her resistance is worn down, and she realizes that she does really love him. But at what point does romantic pursuit, or celebrity fandom, or political expression start to become harassment and turn into an act of criminal aggression?

2. Stalking: description and demographics

Stalking is generally defined as an intentional pattern of repeated intrusive and intimidating behaviors toward a specific person that causes the target to feel harassed, threatened, and fearful, or that a reasonable person would regard as being so. Stalking is one of the last interpersonally threatening behaviors to have been criminalized; a little over two decades ago, in many places in the U.S., stalking was not technically a crime. California was the first state in 1990 to pass an anti-stalking law, prompted by several high-profile cases of celebrity stalking and murder. By 2000, all 50 U.S. states, the federal government, and many other countries had passed similar legislation, and most of these statutes include both physical stalking and electronic stalking, or cyberstalking (Blauuw, Winkel, Arensman, Sheridan, & Freeve, 2002; Dennison, 2007; Dennison & Thomson, 2000, 2002; Dressing, Kuehner, & Gass, 2006; McNaney, Curless, & Abeyta-Price, 1993; McEwen, Mullen, & MacKenzie, 2009; Petrocelli, 2005; Saunders, 1998; Sheridan & Davies, 2010; Sheridan, Davies, & Boon, 2001b; Southworth, Finn, Dawson, Fraser, & Tucker, 2007; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007).

Stalking is not a rare crime. Up to 16% of women and 7% of men report having been stalked sometime in their life, and this number may approach 20% of college undergraduates (Haugard & Sari, 2003). This translates into more than one million victims stalked annually. The largest number of stalking scenarios develops from pre-existing family relationships, with stranger stalking being the least common. Eighty percent of stalkers are known to their victims in some way. Across studies, women are far more likely to be the victims, and men the pursuers, in stalking situations. The more intimate the prior relationship, the longer the stalker is likely to persist in his pursuit. Victims tend to be disproportionately younger women, in their late teens and early 20s. Stalkers can be of any age, from children to senior citizens, but most are in their 30s (Blauuw, Sheridan, & Winkel, 2002; Haugaard & Sari, 2003; McCann, 1998, 2000, 2001; Purcell, Pathe, & Mullen, 2002; Sheridan, Blauuw, & Davies, 2003; Sheridan & Davies, 2010; Spitzberg, 2002). A growing subcategory of this crime consists of mental health clinicians who are stalked by current or former patients (Ashmore, Jones, & Jackson, 2006; Galeazzi, Elkins, & Curci, 2005; Gentile, Asamen, & Harmell, 2002; Lion & Herschler, 1998; McIvor & Petch, 2006; McIvor, Potter, & Davies, 2008; Miller, 1998b, 1998c, 2008; Pathe, Mullen, & Purcell, 2002; Purcell, Powell, & Mullen, 2005; Sandberg, McNiel, & Binder, 2002; Tardiff, 1997, 1998, 2001).

Many authorities agree that there appears to be a watershed period of 2–4 weeks, beyond which most stalkers abandon their pursuit and move on, especially in the case of stranger stalkers. However, if the stalking persists for longer than 4 weeks, it is likely to continue for another 6–12 months, and in some cases, as long as 76 months; this is more common in cases involving a prior relationship of some kind. The intensity and intrusiveness of the stalking is also likely to be greater in these cases of persistent stalking, while in about half of cases, the stalker may desist for a while and then begin stalking again, after a period ranging from 2.5 to 13 years. This type of recurrent stalking is especially likely to occur where some circumstance results in a subsequent meeting between the pursuer and the target, such as a child custody exchange or court appearance, although it can occur spontaneously due to changes in the mental state of the stalker. Highly persistent stalkers tend to be over age 30, to have a narcissistic, borderline, paranoid, or antisocial personality disorder, to target a female victim, and to be motivated by intimacy seeking or resentful revenge (Blauuw, Sheridan, et al., 2002; Brewster, 2003; Finn, 2004; McEwen et al., 2009; Meloy, 1998, 1999; Mohandie, Meloy, McGowan, & Williams, 2006; Mullen et al., 2006; Orion, 1997; Pathe, 2002; Pathe & Mullen, 1997; Pathe et al., 2002; Purcell, Pathe, & Mullen, 2001, 2004a,b; Rosenfeld, 2003; Sheridan, Gillett, Blauuw, Davies, & Patel, 2003; Sheridan et al., 2001b; Sheridan et al., 2003; Spitzberg & Cadiz, 2002; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

Across several studies (Blauuw, Sheridan, et al., 2002; Brewster, 1997, 2000; Hall, 1998; Pathe & Mullen, 1997; Sheridan et al., 2001b), involving diverse demographic samples in four different countries, nine distinct stalker activities were found by Sheridan and Davies (2010) to be the most common: (1) telephone calls;
(2) harassing letters; (3) surveillance of the victim's home; (4) following the victim; (5) unlawful entry to the victim's home; (6) destruction or theft of the victim's property; (7) direct unwanted approaches toward the victim; (8) threats to harm or kill the victim; (9) physical assault. Note that most of these studies occurred before the widespread use of emailing, texting, and social media; no doubt a current replication of these studies would find a higher use of these electronic modalities for stalking purposes.

3. Stalking typologies

Over the past several decades, forensic behavioral scientists have developed a number ofure stalking typologies.


3.1.1. Simple obsessional stalker

This is typically a male stalker with a personality disorder and/or substance abuse problem, who is relentlessly pursuing a former romantic partner (“How dare she reject me!”) or is retaliating for a perceived injustice at work or elsewhere (“How dare he fire me!”). This is the largest group of stalkers in this typology, comprising more than 50% of the total.

3.1.2. Love obsessional stalker

In the next largest group, about 30%, is the male stalker who is delusionally convinced that he is in love with a woman either who loves him back and cannot show it, or just has been denying her love for him to herself for too long, and it is his mission to show her the light. The victim may be someone the stalker knows, but has never had an intimate relationship with, or it may be a stranger he encounters at work or on a college campus. Many cases of celebrity stalkers also fall into this category.

3.1.3. Erotomanic stalker

This minority group (10%) of stalkers is where women predominate, usually pursuing male strangers or casual acquaintances. Several cases of male celebrities having their homes broken into by “star-struck” women (e.g. George Harrison, David Letterman) seem to fit this category.

3.1.4. False victimization syndrome

In a small number of cases (2%), a person claims to be a stalking victim when he or she is not. The motivation for this may represent a bid for attention, an attempt to create an alibi for a retaliatory action, a delusional preoccupation with the alleged stalker, or to maintain a relationship with the alleged perpetrator while retaining the sympathetic role of the victim—a kind of “reverse stalking.”

3.2. Mullen, Pathe, Purcell and Stuart (1999); Mullen, Pathe and Purcell (2000); Mullen et al. (2006) stalker typology

3.2.1. Intimacy seeker

This stalker usually has not had a prior relationship with the object of his obsession, but he wants one. He has convinced himself that he and his unwilling (and, in the early stages, probably unaware) paramour are destined to be together. The target, he believes, is secretly in love with him, but external circumstances, such as her profession, social class, or the inconvenience of being mated with another, get in the way of her openly professing her love. Many cases of celebrity stalkers fall into this category, and the pursuer, if sufficiently delusional, may detect “secret messages” directed at him in the words she says on screen, lyrics in the songs she sings, and so forth. Celebrity or not, he will often deluge his target with letters, electronic messages, and gifts, and he will take the slightest reaction of any kind as proof of her love (“She had the security guard punch me and throw me out because she just can’t handle her passionate feelings for me”).

3.2.2. Incompetent suitor

Like the intimacy seeker, this type is infatuated with the object of his affection, but is simply seeking a date or sexual encounter, not an eternal soul-melding. He is typically a socially inept male who is more likely than other stalker types to be deterred by a firm, forthright rejection, and to then turn his attentions to a new target.

3.2.3. Rejected stalker

This minority group (10%) of stalkers is where women predominate, usually pursuing male strangers or casual acquaintances. Several cases of male celebrities having their homes broken into by “star-struck” women (e.g. George Harrison, David Letterman) seem to fit this category.

3.2.4. Resentful stalker

This is typically a male stalker with a personality disorder and/or substance abuse problem, who is relentlessly pursuing a former romantic partner (“How dare she reject me!”) or is retaliating for a perceived injustice at work or elsewhere (“How dare he fire me!”). This is the largest group of stalkers in this typology, comprising more than 50% of the total.

3.2.5. Predator stalkers

This term implies, this stalker engages in covert surveillance and pursuit of his victim, usually as a prelude to a more serious behavioral pattern, such as serial rape or serial homicide (Miller, 2000; Schlesinger & Miller, 2003; Schlesinger, 2002).

3.3. Holmes (2001) stalker typology

3.3.1. Sexually driven stalker

He pursues women to have sex with them, sometimes consensual, other times forced.

3.3.2. Unrequited love stalker

He haunts the object of his affections, who stubbornly refuses to return his ardor.

3.3.3. Rejected revenge-seeking stalker

Once having had a relationship with the victim, he is outraged at her rejection and swears vengeance: “How dare she dump me! I’ll teach her a lesson she’ll never forget!”

3.3.4. Celebrity stalker

He (and sometimes she) targets famous people. In some cases, the stalker believes the celebrity is in love with him (e.g. the Madonna stalker); in other cases, he has mentally fused his identity with that of the celebrity to the point that he resents the very existence of his “rival” (e.g. Mark David Chapman who gunned down John Lennon).

3.3.5. Political stalker

Anger, not affection, drives this person, who harasses, threatens, and may attack public officials (e.g. John Hinckley, who attempted to assassinate President Reagan). This may sometimes be a political subtype of the celebrity stalker, if political figures are targeted for their popularity more than their policies.

3.3.6. Professional contract killer

This is a professional hit man who is motivated strictly by profit, making it questionable whether he belongs in a typology of stalkers at all—any more than a police detective who hunts and tracks a criminal,
or a government espionage agent who pursues a terrorist. Nevertheless, there must be a psychological reason (thrills, power) why someone chooses this type of vocation over others.

3.4. Sheridan and Boon (2002) stalker typology

This typology was developed specifically for use by law enforcement authorities and includes the following categories:

3.4.1. Stalking by a former spouse or partner

This may be characterized by verbal abuse, damage to property, and/or physical violence.

3.4.2. Stalking based on love

Here, the threat potential for violence is lower because the victim, usually a stranger or casual acquaintance, is viewed by the pursuer as an object of love to be won over, not a rejecting partner to be punished.

3.4.3. Stalking based on delusional fixation

This involves the fantasy that a “special relationship” exists between the stalker and his target, and that it is just a matter of time until his persistent efforts bring the two lovers together. Most targets are strangers or casual acquaintances, and celebrity stalkers are most likely to fall into this category.

3.4.4. Sadistic stalkers

These perpetrators derive pleasure from intimidating and terrorizing their victims. These stalkers are on a power trip and carry a high potential for danger.

3.5. Stalking behaviors

A typology, not of stalkers themselves, but of the tactics and strategies used by stalkers in pursuit of their victims, has been proffered by Spitzberg and colleagues (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Spitzberg, 2002; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007), who identify eight categories of stalking behavior. In some stalkers, these may represent a progression in the seriousness of the stalking, while for others, one or more particular tactics may be utilized throughout the stalking episode.

Hyperintimacy behaviors are extensions of typical romantic courtship behaviors, but are pursued to an extreme level, such as showering the target with cards, emails, flowers, endless phone calls, and so on. Though kind of cute at first, the relentless love barrage begins to take on a creepily desperate and confrontational quality over time.

Mediated contacts are increasingly common and enlist the use of technology, including cell phones, email, instant messaging, text messaging, and so on. In its more extreme forms, this may develop into cyberstalking.

Interactional contacts involve efforts at direct interpersonal encounters. This can range from sitting a few tables away at the victim’s favorite restaurant, to registering for the same classes the victim takes at college, to getting a job where the victim works, to trying to reach the victim through third parties.

Surveillance tactics are essentially espionage. The stalker follows the victim around, takes photos and videos, breaks into her mailbox, hacks into her Internet account, attaches a GPS device to her car, and so on. Sometimes this is done clandestinely to gather intelligence about the victim; other times the stalker may let the victim know she is a target, but without revealing the pursuer’s identity, as a way of further frightening and intimidating the victim.

Invasion tactics escalate the intrusiveness of the stalking. The victim’s home or workspace may be broken into, computer files may be hacked or infected, and information or physical property may be stolen or vandalized.

Harassment and intimidation represent a more severe form of interpersonal intrusiveness. The stalker may verbally insult the victim, may harass her friends and relatives, may attempt to damage the victim’s reputation through third parties, or may try to jeopardize her work status.

Coercion and threat behaviors represent an even more serious escalation with a high potential for danger to the victim. The stalker may now directly threaten to harm the victim, her family, friends, or pets, or to damage her car or home. Conversely, in a desperate bid to influence the victim, the stalker may threaten to kill himself (“See what you’ve driven me to!”), in some cases accompanied by threats of harm (“If I go, I’m taking you with me”).

Physical aggression and violence represent the most severe, and potentially lethal, outcome of stalking. This may include seriously destructive vandalism or arson, physical assault, sexual assault, murder, suicide, murder–suicide, and attacks on friends, workmates, or family members of the victim.

3.6. Stalker typologies: commonalities

Integrating the various typologies, a basic categorization emerges that includes: (1) stalking for the purpose of acquiring a new relationship; (2) stalking for the purpose of intimidation, harassment, coercion, and/or punishment of a prior relationship rejection; and (3) stalking primarily motivated by power and control. Overlaps between categories are probably common. In the first category are the love obsession and erotomaniac stalkers (Zona et al., 1993), the intimacy seeker and incompetent suitor (Mullen et al., 1999, 2000, 2006), the sexual desire, unrequited love, and celebrity stalker; some types of political stalkers (Holmes, 2001), and the love-based and delusional stalker (Sheridan & Boon, 2002). Here, the stalker’s first choice is clearly to gain the love, attention, or admiration of the target, but if continually rebuffed, the stalking may change in quality to that of the second category, which includes the simple obsessional stalker (Zona et al., 1993), rejected and resentful stalker (Mullen et al., 1999, 2000, 2006), the rejected stalker (Holmes, 2001), and the former intimate partner stalker (Sheridan & Boon). In the third category are the predatory stalker (Mullen et al., 1999, 2000, 2006) and the sadistic stalker (Sheridan & Boon, 2002). A residual category might include those types of stalkers that are either atypical or do not truly represent the psychological dynamics of stalking per se, such as the false victimization syndrome perpetrator (Zona et al., 1993), the contract killer, and some types of political stalkers (Holmes, 2001), although it could be argued that the latter’s fixation on public figure shares certain features with the celebrity stalker.

A pattern not explicitly described in these typologies is what I (Miller, 2012) have called the identification stalker, probably a subtype of the celebrity or political stalker. Some degree of imitative identification with a high-status person is a natural human trait, (e.g., wearing a facsimile of a favorite ballplayer’s jersey, or forming a tribute band to a beloved musical group). However, the identification stalker so enmeshes himself psychologically with the target that he patterns his entire life after that person’s. For example, Mark David Chapman dressed like John Lennon, learned to play guitar, and even married a Japanese woman who resembled Lennon’s wife, Yoko Ono. At first the stalker tries to fuse his identity with the target by such imitation tactics, and later by making personal contact with the target, visiting his/her home, getting autographs, collecting memorabilia, and so on. Many celebrity stalkers remain at this level, in which case it would not be considered stalking per se, because the primary activity is not harassment, but merely ardent fandom.

However, for some, the desire to be like or be with the target person transmogrifies into the compulsion to be that person, the subject now having fused his identity with the target. In these cases, the stalker actually comes to believe that he is the one who embodies the essence of that celebrity’s life and work even more than the celebrity himself, and that, consequently, he really deserves to be that person more than the actual celebrity. This leads to a sense of entitled resentment and anger that foments the delusional idea that eliminating the
“imposter” is the only way for the stalker to be recognized as the real thing. In cases where the stalker has pursued a similar vocation as the target (e.g., acting, music, politics), this may be further fueled by simple jealousy that the celebrity has become famous while the stalker has not. In other cases, the stalker may feel additionally spurned if he had previously tried to be recognized by the target, as in sending a famous musician song lyrics or recordings made by the stalker and thereby expecting to be “discovered,” or at least given special treatment by the target because he is the target’s “biggest fan.” When this fails to materialize, the stalker’s identity is further assaulted and degraded, leaving him feeling betrayed and seeing retributive elimination of the celebrity as the “only choice.”

4. The psychology of stalking

4.1. Diagnostic categories of stalking

Up to half of stalkers studied have some form of diagnosable mental disorder (Mullen et al., 1999; Whyte et al., 2007; Zona et al., 1998). According to some estimates, the distinction between stalkers of strangers and stalkers of prior intimates seems to apply to diagnostic distinctions as well. Thus, although there is some overlap, stalkers who pursue strangers, including casual acquaintances or celebrities, tend more often to be characterized by a mood disorder, delusional disorder, or outright psychotic disorder. Stalkers of prior intimates are more likely to be nonpsychotic, but to have narcissistic, borderline, paranoid, or compulsive personality disorders, along with substance abuse problems, mainly involving alcohol and psychostimulant drugs such as cocaine and amphetamines. Thus, the easily bruised egos, flimsy interpersonal boundaries, smoldering rage and jealousy, and relentless tenacity of these personality types, often fueled by stimulant drugs, accounts for their ceaseless pursuit of their quarry, either to win her back or to punish her for deserting and betraying them. Having invested their entire identity in the relationship, its rupture now threatens to unravel their entire life’s purpose, accounting for the white-hot, life-and-death quality of their pursuit (Boon & Sheridan, 2001; Farnham et al., 2000; Kienlen et al., 1997; McCann, 2001; Meloy, 1996, 1998, 2001a;b; Meloy, 2003a; Meloy et al., 2000; Mullen & Pathe, 1994; Mullen et al., 1999; Segal, 1989; Sheridan & Davies, 2010; Zona et al., 1998). This also explains the general sense of pessimism surrounding efforts to clinically “treat” stalkers through psychotherapy or other modalities (Boon & Sheridan, 2001; Mullen et al., 2000; Sheridan & Davies, 2010).

Interestingly, antisocial personalities are found to make up less than 10% of stalker diagnostic categories, compared to their higher rate in criminal populations generally (Meloy, 2001b; Meloy et al., 2000). This is probably because the essence of prior intimate stalking is pathological attachment, and the antisocial personality does not become truly attached to anything or anybody. He may be temporarily fuming that his partner would insult him by leaving, and he might impulsively fly into a murderous rage when confronted by a partner’s unaccommodating behavior or the presence of a rival. However, he is far less likely to invest the time and effort needed to make a career of pursuing any particular person, precisely because this cuts into his enjoyment of other exploitive and predatory activities. Any acts of retaliation are likely to occur in the immediate aftermath of the relationship disruption, and the more time that passes, the more he is apt to default to a face-saving rationalization: “If she doesn’t want me, forget her—it’s her loss.” Then, he moves on to his next conquest.

4.2. Biological factors in stalking

As with many classifications of criminal behavior, there is no distinctive “biological stalker profile.” Rather, different types of underlying personality and psychopathology features may be associated with the biological indices already familiar from the description of other types of offenders (Miller, 2012). For example, progressive dementia or other organic brain syndromes may be associated with delusional jealousy that might fuel intimate-partner stalking. Brain syndromes may be precipitated or aggravated by alcohol and drug abuse. These substances can have a disinhibiting effect, as with alcohol, barbiturates or benzodiazepines, or, in the case of stimulant drugs like cocaine or amphetamine, can produce a manic-like psychosis. Substance abuse is also associated with mood disorders and personality disorders, all of which are known to have their unique neurobiological correlates (Cobb, 1979; Kingham & Gordon, 2004; Langfeldt, 1961; Michael et al., 1995; Mullen & Maack, 1985; Pillai & Kraya, 2000; Shepherd, 1961; Shrestha et al., 1985).

More specifically, the aggressive and obsessive nature of stalking has been hypothetically linked to abnormally increased dopaminergic activity combined with abnormally low serotonergic activity in the brain (Meloy & Fisher, 2005). Stimulant drugs, as noted above, are one method of exogenously heightening dopaminergic activity, and many stalkers use these substances. Another, far more rare cause is a neurologic disorder that affects these brain systems. Recently, a case of stalking associated with Huntington’s disease has been described by Soliman et al. (2007). This is a genetically transmitted, progressive, degenerative disease of the basal ganglia, specifically, a structure called the caudate nucleus, that typically produces progressive impairment in movement and a worsening mood disorder, obsessive symptoms, and delusional psychosis, sometimes accompanied by antisocial behavior (Anouizerate et al., 2004; Aron et al., 2005; Rosenblatt & Leroi, 2000).

In the present case, the patient was a woman whose mental symptoms preceded the onset of the motor symptoms, and were characterized by obsessive romantic thoughts about her therapist, followed by stalking of the clinician. The stalking behavior began with multiple gifts and telephone calls to the therapist’s home, later escalating to following and making threats toward the therapist. Fortunately, in this case, the symptoms were successfully treated with antipsychotic medication. Thus, Huntington’s disease may act as a neurological analogue to more common occurrences of disordered neurophysiology in stalking (Meloy & Fisher, 2005), and obsessive-aggressive behavior more generally.

4.3. Attachment theory

Attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980; Dutton & Golant, 1995; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kienlen, 1998; Lewis et al., 2001; Meloy, 1992, 2003b; Miller et al., 2010; Morrison, 2008; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007; Tonin, 2004) has been used to explain dysfunctional relationships in general and stalking behavior in particular. Essentially, the theory posits that one’s adult attachment style is strongly influenced by the quality of the parent–child relationship the individual has experienced from infancy onward. Infants who develop a secure attachment with parents or other early caregivers develop a feeling of security and confidence in later interpersonal relationships. Insecurely attached infants come to perceive the relational world as a cold, rejecting place, and may develop an avoidant attachment style, defensively decoupling themselves emotionally from the caregiver, or an anxious/ambivalent attachment style, in which they simultaneously crave attachment to a caregiver, but then recoil in fear of having that connection torn or pushed away.

As adults, securely attached individuals view both themselves and other people in a mainly positive light and are able to form mature relationships, with a healthy balance of intimacy and independence. Insecurely attached individuals may develop a dismissive attachment style, protecting their fragile egos by maintaining an aloof, standoffish, and sometimes confrontational attitude toward others, as with antisocial and narcissistic personalities. Individuals with a predominantly preoccupied attachment style desperately look to others for approval and reassurance to counteract their inner feelings of unworthiness and self-loathing. Their bottomless need for validation will sooner or later go unfulfilled, resulting in feelings of abandonment and betrayal, along with angry blaming of the partner for “ruining” the relationship,
as often occurs with borderline personality disorder. Finally, those with a fearful-avoidant attachment style try to protect themselves by avoiding interpersonal entanglements altogether (avoidant personality disorder) or by trying to find the one attachment figure that they can totally enmesh their egos with and trust will take care of them (dependent personality disorder).

According to this model, insecure attachment styles, predominantly the preoccupied style, characterize stalkers who pursue former intimate partners. The breakup is perceived as a stinging rejection and repudiation of the stalker’s entire identity and self-worth, subconsciously tapping into his own self-loathing, and prompting a morbid jealousy expressed in desperate measures to either reclaim the relationship to prove his worthiness, or, alternatively, to punish, humiliate, and ultimately destroy the rejecter who he perceives as holding his ego hostage by refusing to bend to his will (Cupach et al., 2000; Davis et al., 2000; Dutton & Golant, 1995; Dutton et al., 1994; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kienlen, 1998; Kingham & Gordon, 2004; Lewis et al., 2001; Meloy, 1989, 1992, 1998, 2003b; Morrison, 2001, 2008; Schlesinger, 2002; Sinclair & Frieze, 2005; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007; Tonin, 2004). A similar dynamic exists in the psyches of some types of intimate partner batters and, indeed, many of these men become stalkers when their partners try to leave the relationship (Dutton & Golant, 1995; Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Dutton et al., 1994; Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994; Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 2000; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2000; McFarlane et al., 2002; Mechanic et al., 2002).

4.4. Evolutionary psychology of stalking

Pursuit of romantic targets is hardly itself a pathological phenomenon, otherwise none of us would be here. According to evolutionary psychology theory (Buss, 2003; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Duntley & Shackelford, 2008; Schmitt et al., 2001; Shackelford & Duntley, 2008; Trivers, 1972; Walsh & Beaver, 2008), males and females of many species, including humans, have evolved divergent reproductive strategies. The grossly disparate investment that each sex makes in perpetuating the species means that males seek to maximize the dissemination of their DNA by coupling with as many females as possible; therefore, they tend to be relatively indiscriminate in their mating activities. Females, however, must invest a tremendous amount of time, energy, and material resources to conceive, carry, bear, and raise a child; therefore, they tend to be far more selective about whom they pair up with. They want to pick someone with the strength and status to be a good provider, while at the same time, being as sure as possible of his fidelity, so they are not quickly abandoned for another female.

Females utilize and enhance their physical attractiveness because, for most of human history, this has been their primary currency for survival. In the preindustrial natural world in which ancestral humans evolved, once having left her family of origin, a mateless female might be unable to provide for her own physical needs, much less for a baby she is carrying or children she is raising. Having a male mate who is able and willing to provide resources for his family could literally prove a matter of life and death, which explains why, at all ages, most human females pay very close attention to the way they look. They want to pick someone with the strength and status to be a good provider, better be here when I get home, and if you have to go out, call me every hour on the hour.”

Fending off rivals who want to steal one’s mate, i.e. preventing mate-poaching: “Hey, bird dog, get away from my quail” (Bird Dog by the Everly Brothers, 1958).

Attempting to steal (poach) someone else’s mate: The well-known “double-standard.”

Re-acquiring ex-mates: “Every move you make, every step you take, I’ll be watching you” (Every Move You Make by Sting, 1983).

Evolutionary selection also has favored stalking as a strategy in some females, although it is less common than male stalking. Female stalkers tend to target high-status men, even considerably older ones, for whom, in evolutionary survival terms, it may be worth the risks of relentless pursuit (arrest, injury) for the chance of securing a long-term relationship with such an alpha male (trophy wife) or at least a chance for high-status mating (groupie hook-up). Within any given human population, the diversity of personalities means that multiple strategies for mating and other survival needs will occur across the spectrum (Miller, 1990, 2012). A naturalistic evolutionary model of stalking also implies that extreme forms of this behavioral trait do not represent a “mental disorder” that can be treated like depression or psychosis, but rather constitute an ingrained core feature of certain personalities, whose behavior may be controlled, but not cured, which explains the known imperviousness of stalking behavior to standard psychotherapeutic or pharmacologic interventions.

5. Stalking and violence

For both the safety of victims and decisions regarding sentencing and parole of the offenders, the question of stalkers’ potential for violence is crucial, especially in light of the attention given to high-profile cases in the media where victims have been brutalized and/or killed.
5.1. Prevalence and type of stalker violence

The general consensus of research and clinical experience is that most stalkers do not become interpersonally violent. Between 30 and 60% of victims are threatened with violence by their stalkers, and about 25 and 50% of stalkers physically attack their victims. Violence is more likely to occur the longer the stalking persists, and both threats and violence are more common with prior-intimate victims than with public-figure victims, with either male or female stalkers, which is probably related to the factors of familiarity and proximity: It is easier to get at someone you already know and who is less likely to have a security system surrounding them. Of those stalkers who do commit violence, serious physical injury to the victim is rare, the attacks consisting mainly of grabbing, choking, pulling, throwing, slapping, punching, kicking, or sexually fondling the victim, possibly leaving bruises and abrasions, but seldom severe wounds. A weapon is used in less than a third of cases, most commonly a handgun, knife, or automobile. Interestingly, these weapons are most commonly used to intimidate, terrify, and control the victim, and are less likely to be used to seriously injure her. For all the publicity it garners, stalking-related homicide appears to be a rare event, occurring in only 2% of stalking cases; however, this statistic may under-represent the lethality of stalking in domestic violence scenarios, because these cases are not typically classified as stalking per se, even though stalking may be a component of the abuse (Blaauw, Sheridan, et al., 2002; Blaauw, Winkel, et al., 2002; Brewster, 2000; Dietz, Matthews, Martell, Stewart, Hrouda & Warren, 1991; Dietz, Matthews, Van Dunye, Martell, Parry, Stewart, Warren & Crowder, 1991; Dressing et al., 2005, 2006; Finch, 2002; Hall, 1998; Harmon et al., 1998; McEwen et al., 2007; Meloy, 1989, 1996, 1997, 2001a,b, 2002, 2003a; Meloy, Davis & Lovette, 2001; Meloy & Gothard, 1995; Meloy, Hempel, Mohandie, Shiva & Gray, 2001; Meloy, Rivers, Siegel, Gothard, Naimark & Nicolin, 2000; Monahan et al., 2001; Morrison, 2001, 2008; Mullens et al., 1999, 2000, 2006; Patte & Mullens, 1997; Rosenfeld, 2004; Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002; Zona et al., 1993).

Not just the chosen victim may be in danger, but collateral damage may involve any others who may try to help her, who may be currently romantically involved with her, or who in any way tries to impede the stalker’s access to her. This may include friends, relatives, and workmates of the victim in prior-intimate stalking or law enforcement or private security personnel in public-figure stalking. In some cases, the stalker builds a delusional system placing these third parties in a psychologically triangulated role, making it “necessary” for him to remove these impediments to his noble pursuit (Auchincloss & Weiss, 1992; Meloy, 1996).

5.2. Risk factors for stalker violence

Factors that have been found to predict stalking violence are: (1) a prior intimate relationship with the victim; (2) multiple targets pursued concurrently; (3) having been a batterer of the victim; (4) being highly obsessed with the victim; (5) feeling humiliated by the victim; (6) being angry at the victim; (7) having made a large number of verbal threats to the victim; (8) being less than 30 years of age; (9) having less than a high school education; and (10) a general history of antisocial behavior, including past convictions for any kind of violence. These traits probably reflect the behavior of a generally aggressive and unstable subject, with significant psychopathology or personality disorder, who has made a lifestyle out of pursuing and harassing virtually everyone who has rejected or offended him in some way. Personality disorder, especially paranoid, antisocial, borderline, histrionic, or narcissistic types, is associated with greater risk for stalker violence, but psychotic illness actually decreases the risk of violence, perhaps because these individuals’ obviously disturbed behavior is likely to get them noticed and apprehended more quickly, or because psychotic disorganization makes it difficult to carry out a goal-directed, protracted campaign of surveillance and pursuit (Burgess et al., 1997, 2001; Douglas & Webster, 1999; Farnham et al., 2000; Harmon et al., 1998; Kienlen et al., 1997; Kropp et al., 2002; Meloy, 1999; 2001a,b; Menzies et al., 1995; Mullens et al., 1999, 2000, 2006; Palarea et al., 1999; Rosenfeld, 2003, 2004; Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002; Schwartz-Watts & Morgan, 1998; Sheridan & Davies, 2001a; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; Zona et al., 1993, 1998).

6. Cyberstalking

Stalking need not be physically confrontational to shatter a victim’s life. Our grandparents may have had to endure anonymous letters, our parents put up with phony-phone calls, and we cope with abusive emails, instant messages, and text messages. With advances in communication technology come more dubious advances in the ability to harass, intimidate, and terrorize other people. The term cyberstalking has been used to describe a set of behaviors that involve repeated threats, harassment, or other unwanted contact, by the use of computer or other electronic communication-based technology that has the effect of making another person feel afraid, intimidated, or concerned for his or her safety. In essence, electronic stalking combines the immediacy of a phone call with a shield of anonymity for the stalker and the depersonalization of the victim, making the harassment all the more relentless and frightening (Bocci & McFarlane, 2003; Burgess & Baker, 2002; D’Ovidio & Doyle, 2003; Finn, 2004; Finn & Banach, 2000; Lee, 1998; Lloyd-Goldstein, 1998; Meloy, 1998; Petrocelli, 2005; Southworth et al., 2007).

Forms of cyberstalking include: (1) monitoring the victim’s email communication; (2) sending insulting or threatening emails, sometimes anonymously, sometimes not; (3) disrupting the victim’s email communications by flooding the victim’s inbox; (4) disrupting the victim’s email by sending a virus or other malware program; (5) using the victim’s email identity to send false messages to others or to purchase goods and services (often pornography) in the victim’s name; (6) using information-gathering Internet services to compile personal, financial, and other information about the victim; (7) using spyware software or keystroke hardware (where the stalker has access to the victim’s computer, such as with an ex-intimate partner or workmate) to monitor the victim’s communications; (8) using social networking sites to harass the victim or impersonate the victim to others; (9) sending harassing text messages by cell phone; (10) taking surreptitious photos or videos of the victim, or using previously recorded private intimate images, and sending them to third parties (Burgess & Baker, 2002; Finn, 2004; Finn & Banach, 2000; McGrath & Casey, 2002; Southworth et al., 2007; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002).

Cyberstalking is frequently used in conjunction with physical stalking and, in these cases, can be considered an extension of it. In other cases, electronic media may be the preferred or sole means of stalking. In some instances, victims have been horrified to discover that intimate partners or workmates that they interact with every day have been the ones secretly stalking and harassing them electronically for months or years. Prior intimate partner stalkers are somewhat less likely to be cyberstalked than physically stalked, probably because the stalker and his victim already know each other; cyberstalking may be more likely used to monitor a victim with whom the stalker desires a relationship, although it may also be used to harass and punish an ex-intimate partner. Cyberstalking may also be the preferred pursuit and harassment methodology of women stalkers because of the relative safety and anony

7. Victim responses and stalking intervention strategies

7.1. Effect of stalking on victims

Most serious crimes such as rape, robbery, and assault, are isolated events in the lives of victims, and the experiences, however horrible, have a beginning, middle, and end. There is an expected emotional
aftermath to almost any kind of criminal victimization (Miller, 1998a, 2008, 2012); however, what distinguishes stalking is the added layer of ambiguity, uncertainty, and nonfinality of the ordeal: the victim frequently does not know who is stalking her, how bad it will get, or when it will end. Even when the identity of the stalker is known or strongly suspected, the victim often finds that there is very little she can do to stem the multiple streams of abuse knocking at her door, haunting her phone, or poisoning her email. Thus, the psychological toll of living with a stalking scenario can be a constantly traumatizing nightmare that may persist for months or years. Even when the stalker is apprehended or eventually gives up, the economic, emotional, and social devastation he has wreaked may follow the victim for a long time.

Victim hypersensitivity is often cited in defense of a stalker’s “harmless” romantic or friendly overtures toward her, with the charge that she is blowing normal socialization behaviors out of proportion and overreacting to the stalker’s well-meaning overtures. Yet, studies (Dennison & Thomson, 2000, 2002; Sheridan, 2001; Sheridan & Davies, 2001b, 2010; Sheridan, Davies & Boon, 2001a; Sheridan et al., 2001b) confirm that the most people can reliably distinguish between the courtship behavior of someone who is “trying too hard” to secure a date (calling too often, sending gifts) and activities which are subtly or overtly intrusive and aggressive (spying, appearing unexpectedly, acting in an intimidating or generally “creepy” manner).

Clinical syndromes seen in stalking victims can range from anxiety disorders, to depression, to full-blown posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including intrusive recollections, flashbacks, nightmares, and impaired sleep and appetite. Victims may become more cautious and wary even years after the stalking episode has ceased, limiting their travel to public places, reducing employment options and socializing opportunities, and interfering with other activities. Naturally, any preexisting psychological vulnerabilities will likely be exacerbated by this increased stress. The effects may be either severe for victims of physical stalking or cyberstalking, and as noted earlier, the two often go together (Hall, 1998; Meloy, 1996; Meloy, 2001a, Meloy, 2001b; Mullen et al., 2000; Pathe & Mullen, 1997; Petrocelli, 2005; Sheridan, 2001; Sheridan, Blauw, et al., 2003; Sheridan, Gillett, et al., 2003; Sheridan & Grant, 2007).

Based on an analysis of the existing victimology literature on this crime, Spitzberg and Cupach (2007) have identified several categories of impact that stalking can have on victims.

**General disturbance:** overall effects on the victim’s lifestyle and emotional concomitants.

**Affective health:** increase in anger, anxiety, depression, fear, jealousy, paranoia.

**Cognitive health:** confusion, distrust, suspiciousness, impaired self-esteem, suicidal ideation.

**Physical health:** impaired sleep or appetite, substance abuse, unhealthy lifestyle patterns.

**Social health:** impact of the stalking on the victim’s relationships with family, friends, workmates, and other people.

**Resilience effects:** though less common, this refers to the recognition of inner strengths and social support systems that allow the victim to withstand and transcend the stalking ordeal.

### 7.2. Victim coping responses

From a review of the stalking victimology literature, a number of victim coping strategies have been identified (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Cupach et al., 2000; Spitzberg, 2002), some with greater or lesser degrees of helpfulness in mitigating the stalking scenario.

Moving-with tactics represent the victim’s well-intentioned, if naïve, attempts to reason, implore, or negotiate with the stalker to leave her alone (e.g., “Let’s just be friends and go our separate ways”). Unfortunately, for the love-obsessional stalker, this keeps the flame of hope alive that, by his persistent contact, he will eventually wear her down and make her realize how much she truly loves him. For the revenge-motivated prior-intimate stalker, this puts additional power in his hands to rebuff the peace offering and continue the campaign of harassment and intimidation.

**Moving-against strategies** are efforts to quietly or forcefully deter the stalker, often resorted to when the moving-with tactics have proven fruitless. Direct activities include threatening the stalker, actually attempting to injure the stalker (rare), or enlisting the aid of third parties, such as friends, relatives, employer, or law enforcement to intervene. Direct threats and interventions by the victim are generally discouraged for several reasons. First, they positively reinforce the stalker’s activities because now he knows how important he is in the victim’s life and, if he is seeking to intimidate and terrorize the victim, this will usually result in an escalation and expansion of harassment activities. Second, threats are only as good as the ability to back them up, and failure to follow through will only further embolden the stalker who now feels he can get away with anything without repercussions. Finally, some stalkers may become enraged and seek to escalate their abuse from harassment to physical harm.

**Moving-away tactics** involve attempts to escape from the stalker’s orbit, including changing to an unlisted phone number, using a post-office box for mail, changing or blocking e-mail addresses, altering travel routes, not going out without other people present, even changing jobs or residences. Unfortunately, through a combination of malevolent persistence and cleverness, and with the aid of ever-expanding electronic databases, many stalkers have little trouble tracking down their victims and reinstating the harassment. Indeed, there is little any of us can do to “stay off the grid” in such a way as to be relatively invisible and untraceable, yet still live any semblance of a normal life. Also, where the stalker is an ex-intimate partner or ex-workmate, he will already have access to many details about the victim’s life. He may even be a current workmate, boss, or ex-spouse with whom the victim must at least occasionally interact over issues of finances or child custody.

**Moving-inward activities** refer to attempts by the victim to cope through denial, distraction, redirection, or redefinition. These include ignoring the problem (good if it discourages the stalker, bad if it leads to neglect of safety precautions), restricting one’s range of activities, using prescribed medications or unprescribed substances, turning to religion or meditation, seeking psychotherapy, or immersing oneself in distracting business matters or hobbies. Some of these activities may temporarily relieve stress and, if safe, are recommended to help the victim cope with the ordeal (e.g., proper medication or psychotherapy). However, they do little to directly address the problem and may even make the victim more vulnerable if she prematurely relaxes her vigilance and softens her resolve to deter the stalker.

**Moving-outward activities** involve the recruitment of third-party intervention in the form of friends, mental health professionals, law enforcement, or the criminal justice system. Approximately one-half of stalking victims contact the police at some point, and, when the stalker is known, one of the common measures recommended is for the victim to go to court and take out an order of protection, or restraining order, which places legally enforceable restrictions on the types of contact and proximity the parties may have with one another. Aside from the fact that these orders are not always easy to obtain without proof of a direct threat, their overall effect depends on how rigorously they are enforced and how relentlessly determined the stalker is to circumvent them. In general, restraining orders are effective in about 85% of stalking scenarios (Meloy, 2001b), in which the stalker, dedicated though he may be, will not go so far as to risk arrest in pursuit of his quarry. The remaining 15% of stalkers, however, may be so disturbed and relentless in their ardor or thirst for vengeance that they care little about consequences, and will do anything to get at the victim. In these cases, restraining orders may only further inflame the stalker and reinforce the pursuit behaviors, which is why the decision to use this recourse is always a
careful judgment call. In addition, stalkers are often quick learners when it comes to observing the letter of the law while circumventing its spirit and exploiting constitutional freedoms of speech and privacy to stay just within the circle of legal behavior, while still finding ingenious ways to torment the victim.

7.3. Stalker deterrent strategies

Still, victims need not be helpless. The following recommendations are distilled from the work of anti-stalking and threat management experts (Dennison, 2007; Mullen et al., 2000; Pathe, 2002; Pathe & Mullen, 2002; Resnick, 2007), along with some of my own comments and suggestions. These strategies are best utilized in the context of a well-informed and individualized assessment of a victim’s particular stalking scenario and life circumstances. Although the gender is expressed in terms of a male stalker and female victim to reflect the predominant type of stalking relationship, the recommendations apply to male victims as well.

7.3.1. Send a clear message and cut off contact

Especially in cases of prior intimate stalkers or stalkers that the victim knows from work, it is easy for the stalker to rationalize that, “If she didn’t want me to bother her, she’d tell me so.” So tell him so. Whatever medium is used—phone, email, written letter—have the victim calmly but very firmly make it crystal clear that she does not want him to contact her again at any time, in any way, (e.g., “To John Jones from Jane Smith: Do not contact me again at any time, for any reason”). Have the victim keep a record of this communication and, no matter what the stalker’s response, advise the victim not to communicate with him again, ever. The victim should ignore all further messages, but document and save each one. As much as feasible, she should avoid spending time with the stalker’s friends, at least some of whom will likely be collecting intelligence for him. If she is forced to make periodic contact with him for work or childcare reasons, advise her to discuss only pertinent practical matters and end each interaction as quickly as possible. For anonymous stalkers, forgoing a formal statement and simply not responding to any of the messages may be the most effective option; this should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

7.3.2. Keep a paper (and/or electronic) trail

Have the victim maintain copies or originals of everything the stalker sends by surface mail, electronically, telephonically, or otherwise. Advise of victim to create and maintain a file, on disk and on paper, and store it in a secure place, but not to respond to any of the stalker’s communications following her unambiguous no-contact statement, where this has been sent. Deliveries of flowers or gifts should be refused and given back to the delivery person. If they are left for the victim, she should remove and discard them immediately, or have someone else do it (the stalker may be surveilling the premises) and not respond, no matter how many of these “gifts” pile up. Have the victim convey these instructions to neighbors or workmates who may become surrogate recipients of the stalker’s gifts or messages to her.

7.3.3. Reduce target salience

Advise the victim to get a new phone number and give it to a select few people on a need-to-know basis, but to keep the old one connected to an answering system, so the stalker will (at least temporarily) think he is leaving messages on an active line. If the victim is being harassed at work (Miller, 1998c, 1999, 2007), have the victim try to get her phone extension or physical work site changed. If the victim believes she is being followed, advise her to change routes periodically. If her mailbox is unsecured, ask her to consider having her mail delivered to a post office box, to keep the stalker from stealing her mail or putting things in her mailbox. Wherever she goes, the victim should have her cell phone readily available.

7.3.4. Protect yourself

When necessary, this involves proper training and practice with self-defense tactics and weapons used for personal protection. Some stalking victims will be more comfortable with these measures than others, so they should always seek expert advice, and be considered on an individual basis. Also victims should secure their homes and workplaces as much as possible with locks, alarm systems, a dog, and so on. Travel routes should be carefully planned out to avoid isolated areas, and, if possible, varied periodically to reduce predictability. It may not be necessary to maintain a total fortress mentality, but the victim should use common sense and plan her security system to be commensurate with the level of threat posed by her stalker.

7.3.5. Enlist aid

Report all violations or suspected violations to the police. Anti-stalking laws aside, some actions by the stalker (vandalism, explicit threats to the victim’s safety) may constitute crimes in themselves and lead to the stalker’s arrest or at least questioning by the police. Some stalkers may be deterred by law enforcement intervention, but many will not. The victim should remember never to respond to the stalker directly. Also, she should enlist the aid of mental health counselors, support groups, friends, and family members who can serve as practical and emotional buffers while she is coping with this ordeal.

7.3.6. Use the criminal justice system

Although threat management professionals differ somewhat on the details, most recommend taking out a restraining order or order of protection when the stalker is known and the harassment has escalated to dangerous levels. On the other hand, if the pattern has stabilized to a few calls or emails every month, and the victim is comfortable just ignoring these, then there is probably little to be gained by stirring up the pot, which will only be interpreted by the stalker as evidence of the victim’s increased interest in him. If the stalker is arrested and criminally prosecuted, advise the victim to cooperate with the criminal justice system to the best of her ability, but to feel free to enquire as to what type of security she can expect in return for her participation.

7.3.7. It’s not fair

Many a victim will rightly chafe at the idea that she should have to be the one to turn her life upside down to accommodate one “malevolent creep” who will not leave her alone. However, like car crashes, hurricanes, or unexpected illnesses, bad things do happen and victims must be prepared to take action to protect themselves. The good news is that, in most cases, most stalking episodes remain relatively nonviolent and do not persist much longer than a year and a half. If the victim can maintain her resolve for that long, hopefully she will eventually get her life back. In the meantime, more needs to be done to counteract advances in illicit surveillance and harassment technologies with commensurate improvements in stalker deterrence.

8. Summary and conclusions

Romantic pursuit is a natural part of human behavior, but when pressed to an extreme degree, it becomes a form of aggression. Because it can occur so insidiously, stalking is a crime that frequently operates under the radar. A stalker may pursue his victim out of a delusional belief in their common romantic destiny, because they used to be together and he wants her back, out of a sadistic desire to torment the victim, or because of a psychotic overidentification with the (often famous) victim and the resultant desire to become him by eliminating and replacing him. Stalkers may carry a variety of diagnostic labels, including psychotic disorders, delusional disorders, or cluster-B personality disorders. There are generally impervious to conventional forms of psychological treatment because stalking may constitute an extreme point on the continuum of otherwise evolutionarily adaptive mate-selection behaviors. Risk factors for violence
in a stalking scenario include a prior intimate relationship, the stalker’s feeling of being rejected or humiliated, and generic risk factors for violence such as low educational level and substance abuse. Cyberstalking can be as distressing to victims as physical stalking due to the concealment and anonymity afforded by electronic communication. Victims may adopt varying strategies for dealing with stalkers, such as avoiding him, confronting him, seeking third party assistance, and accessing the legal system. Although no plan is perfect, threat management specialists have proposed several recommendations that can make it easier for a victim to deter and discourage a stalker.

References


