

About Stalkers and Stalking - White Paper

A recent study by the National Institute of Justice found that stalking was far more prevalent than anyone had imagined: 8% of American women and 2% of American men will be stalked in their lifetimes. That's 1.4 million American stalking victims every year. The majority of stalkers have been in relationships with their victims, but a significant percentage either never met their victims, or were just acquaintances - neighbours, friends or co-workers.

Types of Stalkers

There is tremendous confusion in the stalking research literature about how to classify stalkers. Everyone uses different terms. For the purposes of this paper, we have broken down types of stalkers into three broad categories: **Intimate partner stalkers**, **delusional stalkers** and **vengeful stalkers**. Obviously, there is overlap. Since studies show that the overwhelming number of stalkers are men and the overwhelming number of their victims are women, we will be referring to stalkers and their victims accordingly.

Intimate partner stalkers are typically known as the guy who "just can't let go." These are most often men who refuse to believe that a relationship has really ended. Often, other people - even the victims - feel sorry for them. But they shouldn't. Studies show that the vast majority of these stalkers are not sympathetic, lonely people who are still hopelessly in love, but were in fact emotionally abusive and controlling during the relationship. Many have criminal histories unrelated to stalking. Well over half of stalkers fall into this category.

In these types of stalking cases, the victim may, in fact, unwittingly encourage the stalker by trying to "let him down easy," or agreeing to talk to him "just one more time." What victims need to understand is that there is no reasoning with stalkers. Just the fact that stalking - an unreasonable activity - has already begun, illustrates this fact. When the victim says, "I don't want a relationship now," the stalker hears, "She'll want me again, tomorrow." When she says, "I just need some space," he hears, "If I just let her go out with her friends, she'll come back." "It's just not working out," is heard as "we can make it work out." In other words, the only thing to say to the stalker is "no." No explanations, no time limits, no room to maneuver.

Delusional stalkers frequently have had little, if any, contact with their victims. They may have major mental illnesses like schizophrenia, manic-depression or erotomania. What they all have in common is some false belief that keeps them tied to their victims. In erotomania, the stalker's delusional belief is that the victim loves him. This type of stalker actually believes that he is having a relationship with his victim, even though they might never have met. The woman stalking David Letterman, the stalker who killed actress Rebecca Schaeffer and the man who stalked Madonna are all examples of erotomaniac stalkers. Another type of delusional stalker might believe that he is destined to be with someone, and that if he only pursues her hard enough and long enough, she will come to love him as he loves her.

These stalkers know they are not having a relationship with their victims, but firmly believe that they will some day. John Hinckley Jr.'s obsession with Jodi Foster is an example of this type of stalker.

The typical profile of delusional stalkers is that of an unmarried and socially immature loner, who is unable to establish or sustain close relationships with others. They rarely date and have had few, if any, sexual relationships. Since at the same time they are both threatened by and yearn for closeness, they often pick victims who are unattainable in some way; perhaps she is married, or has been the stalker's therapist, clergyman, doctor or teacher.

These delusional stalkers have almost always come from a background which was either emotionally barren or severely abusive. They grow up having a very poor sense of their own identities. This, coupled with a predisposition toward psychosis, leads them to strive for satisfaction through another, yearning to merge with someone who is almost always perceived to be of a higher status (doctors, lawyers, teachers) or very socially desirable (celebrities). It is as if this stalker says, "Gee. If she loves me, I must not be so bad." As Dean Martin compellingly crooned what could be considered the delusional stalker's anthem: "You're Nobody 'Til Somebody Loves You."

Some studies show that delusional stalkers are the most tenacious of all. Erotomantic delusions themselves last an average of ten years. How is this possible when the stalker has had little if any contact with his victim? As if drawn from the National Organ Donor Registry, the victim becomes the perfect match, with the potential to save the stalker's life. When the victim says "no," he rationalizes it away, believing that, "her husband made her get that restraining order, she really loves me," or "her agent told her it would be bad for her career if we dated, but she really loves me." Therefore, as with every type of stalker, ***it is imperative that victims have no contact.***

The final category of stalker is not lovelorn. He is the **Vengeful stalker**. These stalkers become angry with their victims over some slight, real or imagined. Politicians, for example, get many of these types of stalkers who become angry over some piece of legislation or program the official sponsors. But, disgruntled ex-employees can also stalk, whether targeting their former bosses, co-workers or the entire company. Some of these angry stalkers are psychopaths, i.e. people without conscience or remorse. Some are delusional, (most often paranoid), and believe that they, in fact, are the victims. They all stalk to "get even."

Former intimate partner stalkers and delusional stalkers can become vengeful for a variety of reasons. For example, when their victims get restraining orders, or marry. In general, for any type of stalker, the less of a relationship that actually existed prior to the stalking, the more mentally disturbed the stalker.