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# Stalker typologies and intervention strategies

*Lorraine Sheridan & Eric Blaauw*

## Introduction

Many countries have recently adopted legislation that criminalise stalking behaviours, or are in the process of adopting anti-stalking legislation. As a result, law enforcement professionals are increasingly confronted with the victims of stalking. Some of these claims may be false (e.g. see Sheridan, Blaauw & Winkel, 2002) or may address only moderately disturbing behaviours, but many claims do describe seriously disturbing nuisance behaviours and even assaultive and life-threatening behaviours. The police and the Crown Council have the difficult duty of

selecting those reports that are suitable for prosecution, and they often have at least some responsibility for helping victims deal with their situation, either by referring them to relevant victim support groups or by more directly helping the victims by trying to terminate the stalking.

Stalking victims are rarely subjected to just one harassing behaviour. A sample of Dutch victims reported that they experienced a mean number of six stalking behaviours (Blaauw et al., 2002) and in a large British community sample almost 50 per cent of victims reported that they

## Zusammenfassung

Es gibt verschiedenen Gruppen von Stalkern, die sich auch hinsichtlich ihrer Gefährlichkeit und ihrer Beeinflussbarkeit durch polizeiliche und andere Maßnahmen voneinander unterscheiden lassen. In diesem Beitrag wird ein Kategoriensystem für Stalker vorgestellt (s.a. Boon & Sheridan, 2001; Sheridan & Boon, 2002), welches eine Gefährlichkeitseinschätzung unterstützt und auch Hinweise für das Management solcher Fälle und mögliche Interventionsstrategien anbietet. Infatuation harassers – Belästiger aus Verliebtheit – (ca. 18.5%) sind die ungefährlichsten Stalker und auch diejenigen, bei denen eine Intervention am meisten Erfolg verspricht. Ex-Partner-Stalker stellen die größte Gruppe dar (ca. 50 Prozent). Sie sind aufgrund ihrer Wut und Impulsivität häufiger gewalttätig und weniger leicht durch eine Intervention zu beeinflussen. Wahnhaft fixierte Stalker (ca. 15%) sind entweder vergleichsweise gefährlich oder wenig gefährlich. Sadistische Stalker (ca. 13 %) stellen dagegen die Kategorie mit dem höchsten Gewaltrisiko überhaupt dar. Interventionen in diesen Fällen können zu einer zusätzlichen Gefährdung des Opfers führen.

**Stalking, Stalker, Typologie, Gewalt, Fall-Management, Intervention**

## Abstract

Certain types of stalkers appear more dangerous and less responsive to police intervention and other sanctions than do other types. This article addresses a stalker categorisation (cf. Boon & Sheridan, 2001; Sheridan & Boon, 2002) that provides information about stalker dangerousness and offers associated implications for case management and intervention strategies. Infatuation harassers (+ 18.5%) are the least dangerous stalkers and are most responsive to intervention. Ex-partner stalkers/harassers are the largest group (+ 50%). They are more often violent due to anger and impulsiveness and are less responsive to intervention. Delusional fixation stalkers (+ 15%) can be either dangerous or less dangerous, but sadistic stalkers (+ 13%) form the most dangerous category of stalkers, and interventions with these stalkers can prove dangerous for the victim. Several implications of the typology for police practice and intervention are discussed.

**Stalking, Stalker, typologie, violence, case management, intervention**



had been subjected to between two and five distinct stalking behaviours (Budd & Mattinson, 2000). A majority of victims are subjected to being followed, experiencing repeated telephone and/or written contact, direct unwanted approaches, home surveillance, and destruction of personal belongings and other property (Sheridan, Blaauw, Davies & Winkel, 2002). In addition, it seems that the general public tend to agree that stalking includes following a target, repeated telephone and/or written contact, and various approach behaviours (Sheridan, Gillett & Davies, 2000; Sheridan, Davies & Boon, 2001b). These findings suggest that the depiction of certain behaviours as constituent of stalking is usually not very problematic. Working with victims to try and end stalking does present challenges, however, more so as it has been consistently shown that stalking victims can be subjected to stalking for periods of months or even years (for a brief overview see Sheridan, Blaauw & Winkel, 2002) and that some stalkers are resistant to attempts to prevent them from stalking (e.g. Mullen, Pathé & Purcell, 2000).

There is reason to believe that certain types of stalkers are more dangerous than other types and also that certain types of stalkers are more responsive to police intervention and other sanctions. The current article addresses a stalker categorisation that provides information about stalker dangerousness and offers associated implications for case management and intervention strategies. The category, developed by Boon and Sheridan (2001, see also Sheridan & Boon, 2002) was empirically based on 124 real-life stalking cases and also on the wider experiences of its authors (one a Chartered Psychologist who had written her PhD on stalking, and the other a Chartered Forensic Psychologist and accredited offender profiler). The 124 stalking cases had been detailed on purpose designed pro formas that explored diverse aspects of each case, including: demographic data for the victim and stalker; full details of the stalking: how it began, qualitative changes and constants over time; how the stalking ended (where applicable); perceived exacerbating and alleviating factors; the primary emotions experienced by victims and how these evolved over time; the reactions of significant others in the victim's life; and the response and impact of the professional agencies involved. Four stalker categories emerged (for full details of the methodology concerning the construction of the typologies see Boon & Sheridan, 2001, Sheridan & Boon, 2002) and these will be outlined in some detail. In each instance, the characteristics of each stalker type will be discussed, followed by associated implications for case management.

### **Typology 1: Ex-partner stalking or harassment**

What is now clear from the stalking literature is that the largest proportion of stalkers are ex-partners, and further, that they are also those most likely to act out violently against their victims. A majority of stalker categorisations, regardless of their aims or format, testify to the volume and dangerousness of those who stalk ex-intimates. This is regardless of the possibility that ex-intimates were under-represented in the early stalking-related research, due to a focus on psychiatric disorders and also a selection bias on the part of law enforcement officers to arrest and prosecute 'high profile' or 'stranger' stalkers (Meloy, 1997). Spitzberg (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of the stalking literature and reported that 49 per cent of the stalkers examined by 32 studies were ex-partner stalkers. Further, ex-intimates appear to be more likely to engage in acts of violence than stranger or acquaintance stalkers (e.g. Farnham, James & Cantrell, 2000; Harmon, Rosner & Owens, 1998; Kienlen et al., 1997; Mullen, Pathé, Purcell, & Stuart, 1999; Palarea, Zona, Lane & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1999; Pathé & Mullen, 1997; Schwartz-Watts & Morgan, 1998; Sheridan & Davies, 2001; Zona, Sharma & Lane, 1993). In accordance with these findings, the Boon and Sheridan categorisation also found ex-partners stalkers to be the most numerous stalker sub-category, representing 50% of the total sample.

#### **Characteristics**

All of the ex-partner stalkers identified by Boon and Sheridan (2001) were male. However, females who stalked their male ex-partners have been identified in other samples (see Mullen, Pathé & Purcell, 2000 pp. 82-85), as have homosexual stalkers of both sexes (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; Sheridan, 2001). In the Boon and Sheridan sample, perpetrator age emerged as diverse and was reflective of the point in time in which the relationship had ended. Although ex-partner stalkers do present the overall highest risk of violence, they are not all necessarily dangerous. To reflect this diversity, the title 'stalker or harasser' has been applied to this sub-category. One of the main difficulties associated with any analysis of 'stalking' is defining what is actually meant by the term. Stalking is now widely considered to be a particular form of 'harassment', particularly in the United Kingdom where the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 deals not only with stalking crimes, but all crimes that may be considered as 'harassing' in nature ('harassing' incidentally is not defined by the Act). In the current context, however, the term 'harassment' is employed in its widest sense, whilst the term 'stalking' is reserved for acts of a more serious and obsessive nature.



One of the primary features of the ex-partner stalker or harasser is that the motivation for the stalking is firmly rooted in the history of the former relationship with the victim. Typically, the prior relationship will have involved domestic violence that, now that the abuser has lost control of his victim, will turn to more public (rather than private) violence and verbal abuse. Thus, the motivations and behaviour of this sub-type are oriented towards the past. Numerous recent empirical works have identified that domestic violence does not necessarily end along with the conclusion of a relationship, but may continue in the form of stalking. Such studies include those by Blackburn (2000), Brewster (2000, 2002); Burgess et al. (1997, 2001) Coleman (1997), Coulter, Kuehnle, Byers and Alfonso (1999); Douglas and Dutton (2001); Frieze (2000), Kurt (1995), Logan, Leukefeld and Walker (2002), McFarlane, Campbell and Watson (2002), Mechanic, Weaver and Resick (2000), Scocas, O'Connell, Huenke et al. (1997), and Tjaden and Thoennes (2000), (see also Baldry, 2002, Walker & Meloy, 1998). The ex-partner stalker/harasser then, is driven by feelings of bitterness and hatred arising from a loss of control over the victim. Motivating issues commonly relate to the custody of children or property and finance, given that losing custody, property and financial control decreases the stalker's power and control whilst also increasing the victim's power and freedom. The ex-partner stalker or harasser will engage in acts that are hot headed and also hostile in quality. These features contrast sharply with the activities engaged in by the sadistic stalker, which will be described in detail below. The sadistic stalker, while also presenting a risk of violence to the victim, has a cold and calculated need for control, and is oriented in the present but is also working towards a regimentally planned future.

The actual stalking behaviours engaged in by the ex-partner stalker or harasser typically involve overt threats, particularly where such threats are placed in conjunction with recrimination and reference to perceived issues of contention. For instance, conditional demands may be made where the stalker threatens violence unless his ex-partner agrees to sign full financial control of the marital home, car and bank balance over to him immediately. The nature of the harassment is also frequently characterised by: high levels of physical violence, high levels of verbal threat, and property damage. This stalker sub-type is most likely to recruit friends and family to perpetuate a campaign of hatred towards the intended victim. Domestic violence is often a hidden crime, with only household members being aware of its existence (e.g. Bradley, Smith,

Long & O'Dowd, 2002; Mooney, 1993). This paves the way for a batterer to convince friends and relatives that his wife has suddenly deserted him for no apparent reason. Where the reason for desertion is known, high levels of partisanship are likely to be seen on both sides. Third party abuse, both verbal and physical, is also common. For instance, family members and known supporters of the victim may be harassed, sometimes in connection with the stalker trying to locate the victim via intimidation of those friends and family who are aware of her location. Should the victim form a new romantic relationship, or often even a friendship with a person not familiar to the stalker, jealous retaliation and aggressive reactions are likely to ensue. Triggers for the ex-partner or harasser's activities are likely to be both spontaneous and pre-meditated. For instance, verbal, physical or sexual harassment may take place following a chance encounter in a public place, or the stalker may furtively surveil his victim in order to discover details of her current whereabouts and activities.

#### *Case management implications*

In terms of managing the ex-partner stalker or harasser, one positive aspect for law enforcement professionals is that this stalker's activities tend towards being anger driven and impulsive. Given this general lack of premeditation, there is frequently a corresponding lack of concern about coming to police attention. As a result, evidence is easier to collect and indeed, the stalker is often likely to be still at the scene when police arrive in response to an emergency call. The downside is that ex-partner stalkers or harassers are the most likely subgroup to be violent, and there also exists a high risk of property damage. The victim's property is most likely to be damaged if she has been awarded the property by the courts where the stalker was contesting for a greater share. The property of the victim's new partner or other associates is also at risk, particularly if she is being sheltered by or living with a third party. Although the anger and violence demonstrated by ex-partner stalkers or harassers is generalised and often impulse-driven, Boon and Sheridan's (2001) results show a need to take seriously any specific threats that are made. For instance, in one case, the stalker threatened that he would "torch the car" of his ex-wife if he saw her out with a man. Three weeks later he saw his ex-wife in a bar drinking with a male friend. The stalker left the bar, purchased petrol, poured the petrol over and set fire to what he believed was her car (although it actually wasn't) which was parked around the corner from the bar.



Victims of an ex-partner stalker or harasser should be advised to keep any unnecessary retaliation, whether it be a financial, legal, physical or verbal response, to an absolute minimum. As far as possible, the victim should avoid frequenting the same venues as the offender. Clearly, this is very difficult advice for the victim to follow. Given that the former relationship may have continued for many years, the victim may have a large financial and emotional investment in the relationship. Equally, it is not easy to ignore constant verbal abuse or a telephone that rings, for instance, thirty times per day. However, if the victim were to answer the telephone on the thirtieth time that it rang in one day, this would only enforce the offender's belief that he needs to dial her number at least thirty times in order to force her to talk to him. In extreme circumstances, it is recommended that victims of an ex-partner stalker or harasser should consider re-location. In this circumstance, given the impulsive and reactive nature of this stalker sub-type, physical distance is considered to be more important than secrecy of location. However, it should be borne in mind that victims are likely to share children with their stalker, rendering an absolute severing of contact problematical. Research by Hester et al. (1994) has demonstrated that issues of child custody may lead to further emotional or even physical victimisation of victims of domestic violence and their children.

## Typology 2: Infatuation harassment

As previously noted, issues of definition have clouded stalking-related research since stalking was first outlawed by California in 1990. The main difficulty is that the term 'stalking' may be applied to almost any behaviour, as long as that behaviour is persistent and of a harassing nature. Stalking then, may often consist of no more than the targeted repetition of ostensibly ordinary or routine activities. The major source of difficulty is that the term 'stalking' does not apply to a single action or actions which can easily be defined: rather, it embraces a host of activities. For example, stalkers can harass via actions that are usually outlawed outside of anti-stalking legislation, such as making obscene phone calls or physically assaulting their victim. Frequently though, stalkers do not overtly threaten, but use behaviours which may appear routine and harmless, and not by themselves illegal. Examples include following somebody around a supermarket, or frequently driving past their home. This definitional confusion makes it difficult to reliably separate stalkers from those who are genuinely attempting to start a relationship in a manner in which their actions

should not reasonably be considered harassing. The 'stalker' sub-category to be outlined below, the infatuation harasser, is particularly difficult to distinguish from an individual seeking to begin a romance via a benign approach. Even though the sample upon which Boon and Sheridan's (2001) typology is based likely represents the more severe extreme of the stalking continuum, this sub-category, the least dangerous of the four, accounted for 18.5% of stalkers. The majority of infatuation harassers were found to be male, although 13% – the highest proportion for any of the four categories – were female. It is a reliable finding across the literature that most stalkers are male, and most stalking victims are female. Spitzberg, in his 2002 meta-analysis, found the respective rates to be 79% and 75% across more than 40 combined samples. The possibility has been noted, however, that males may be less likely than females to consider themselves to be stalking victims because they feel less intimidated by stalking behaviours (Emerson, Ferris & Brooks Gardner, 1998; Hall, 1998; White, Kowalski, Lyndon & Valentine, 2002). Large-scale representative population studies, however, would suggest that the lifetime risk for becoming a victim of stalking is between 8-16% for females and 2-7% for males (with the lower figures deriving from Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998 and the higher figures deriving from Budd & Mattinson, 2000). The age of the infatuation harassers was found to be bi-modal, with perpetrators typically being in their teens or mid-life.

### *Characteristics*

The target of the attentions of the infatuation harasser may be labelled as his or her 'beloved', rather than his or her 'victim'. This is because the infatuation harasser, unlike the other three stalker sub-types described by this typology, does not intend any harm towards the target. The motivations and behaviour of the infatuation harasser may be conceptualised as stemming more from an infatuation akin to a 'teenage crush' than from psychiatric disorder, revenge or a sadistic desire for control. The infatuation harasser, unlike the ex-partner stalker or harasser, is oriented towards the future, with particular emphasis on a hope that s/he and the target will ultimately share a mutually acquiescent romantic union. The harasser's 'beloved' is pervasive in all their thoughts, to the extent that the world and its events are interpreted primarily in relation to the beloved target. For instance, should the infatuation harasser happen upon a holiday advertisement, she/he will fantasise about taking an exotic holiday with the target. What is important to note here is that the focus of the harasser's fantasy is positive and romantic.



Fantasies rooted in coercion, control or revenge will not be present. Whereas the ex-partner stalker or harasser is fuelled by anger, the infatuation harasser is fuelled by intense feelings of yearning, with the result that the infatuation harasser presents low levels of danger to the target. However, the infatuation harasser is included in this typology because their behaviour is deviant and may well be classed as stalking by observers.

It is important to note that in the early stages of the stalking or harassment, sharp quantitative differences may always not be seen between the infatuation harasser and other, infinitely more dangerous, stalker types. It is likely that the target of the infatuation harasser will not know him or her, or know them merely as a low level acquaintance. Thus, the target will not be aware that the harasser has non-threatening intentions and can understandably become concerned about being targeted. Although infatuation harassers seek out their targets almost exclusively via non-malicious ruses, they may still appear unpredictable and possibly dangerous. Their typical behavioural pattern involves the delivering of romantically-themed notes to the target's home or work address or perhaps left on their car – these notes will often be anonymous in the early stages of the harassment. In addition, infatuation harassers frequently follow their target and then reveal themselves under the pretence that the encounter is accidental. This tactic serves as an attempt to convince the target that they and the harasser are alike and share interests. An additional tactic is for the harasser to try and get to know friends and associated of the target, quizzing them to obtain further knowledge of any aspect of the target. Although this form of harassment is not characterised by threats, macabre gifts and negative intervention, victims can easily become intimidated by the sheer volume of gifts or notes that they receive, and by the regularity with which they are aware of the physical presence of the harasser.

#### **Case management implications**

As noted above, infatuation harassers tend to be either teenaged or in middle age. Case management implications need to be tailored to suit these two disparate age groups. In the case of youthful infatuation harassers, it is recommended that the cognitive perspective be elevated. That is, given that the harasser is usually unaware of the distress that they may be causing the target, it is necessary to provide a careful and thorough explanation of the negative impact of his or her actions. Although a sympathetic stance should be adopted in explaining how the relationship has been misconstrued, the harasser needs

to be clearly informed that should their activities continue, then criminal charges may be brought against them. In the case of midlife harassment, again, an elevation of the cognitive perspective is most likely to lead to an immediate cessation of the harassment. However, given that such infatuations can be more deep-rooted in an older perpetrator, intervening authorities should, where necessary, explore the possibilities of placing physical distance between harasser and target. One such example would be a work transfer. Staleness in any existing long-term relationship that the harasser is part of should also be explored where appropriate, for instance, via marriage guidance counselling.

### **Typology 3: Delusional fixation stalking**

Psychiatric disorder has been recognised as an important antecedent of stalking behaviour. As a group, stalkers are likely to be co-morbid for a range of disorders (e.g. Farnham, James and Cantrell, 2000; Kamphuis and Emmelkamp, 2000; Meloy, 1996; Mullen, Pathé and Purcell, 2000). Prominent among these are delusional disorders (Abrams & Robinson, 1998; Anderson, 1993; Goldstein, 1987; Harmon, Rosner & Owens, 1995; Kienlen et al., 1997; Mullen, Pathé, Purcell & Stuart, 1999), particularly among those who stalk strangers or those with whom they have previously had nothing more than a low level acquaintance (e.g. Coleman, 2000; Meloy et al., 2000). This third category in the Boon and Sheridan (2001) categorisation represents these delusional stalkers who constituted 15.3% of the total sample. The category is further sub-divided into 'dangerous' and 'less dangerous', to reflect differences in the nature of the delusions and motivations that drive these particular stalking perpetrators.

#### **(i) Where dangerous**

##### **Characteristics**

In cases where the delusionally fixated stalker is likely to present a high level of danger to their victim, the perpetrator is likely to have already attracted the attention of police and mental health services due to a history of severe mental disorder and inappropriate sexual activity. The most likely psychiatric diagnoses for this type of offender include episodic schizophrenia along with borderline personality disorder. The stalker tends to be incoherent, yet firmly fixated on the victim. The orientation of the delusionally fixated stalker will be towards the present – unlike the fixations of the previous two sub-groups that will be respectively fixated in the past and the future. The



delusionally fixated stalker presents a high risk of physical and sexual assault and is likely to have a history of sexual problems and offences, including stalking. It is difficult to predict the behavioural patterns of this stalker sub-type, as they will lack coherence, with the stalker appearing in diverse places at irregular times. It is most unlikely that the stalker will be in gainful employment, and he (all delusionally fixated stalkers in the Boon and Sheridan sample were male) is far more likely to live a marginalised lifestyle on the fringes of society.

The most frequently occurring activities of this stalker will be characterised by incessant bombardment, whether it take the form of telephone calls, incoherent written communications, or visits to the victim's home or workplace. The content of material sent by and the conversation of the perpetrator will be unsubtle, sexually obscene and semantically disjointed. Delusionally fixated stalkers tend to couch their statements of 'affection' in terms of sexual intent towards victim, differing dramatically from the romantic stance adopted by the infatuation harasser. It may be the case that delusionally fixated stalkers will hold a firm belief in a genuine relationship with the victim, even though there may have been no prior conversation or other form of contact. Victims were found to be either male or female and tended to have some form of elevated or noteworthy status. National and international celebrities were likely to be targeted, but so were other non-famous but local and attractive figures. These included counsellors, university lecturers and general practitioners. Previous studies have noted that patients may form unhealthy attachments to health professionals (e.g. Lion & Herschler, 1998; Orion, 1997).

#### Case management implications

It should be understood from the outset of any investigation into a case involving a delusional fixation stalker that, due to psychiatric disorder, this offender will not be responsive to reason or rejection in any form. It is imperative that the perpetrator be referred to a forensic psychiatrist for assessment, although it is likely that they will have been assessed previously. Detainment on mental health grounds is the most viable option.

#### (ii) Where less dangerous

In the early days of stalking-related research, stalking was linked to various mental conditions, chiefly De Clerambault's syndrome and erotomania. De Clerambault, a French psychiatrist, identified a condition in 1927 which he labelled "psychose passionnelle". De Clerambault stated

that sufferers were primarily female who laboured under the delusional belief that a man, with whom she may have had little or no contact, returned intense feelings of love towards her. The target of affections was said to be usually of much higher socio-economic status and likely to be unobtainable to the sufferer, and often a person of elevated status such as a television star or a politician. Erotomania, a DSM-IV delusional disorder, has the same predominant theme, and research has suggested that diagnoses are primarily given to females (see Bruene, 2001; Fitzgerald & Seeman, 2002; Kennedy, McDonagh, Kelly & Berrios, 2002; Lloyd-Goldstein, 1998), although diagnoses may also be given to men (see e.g. Mullen et al., 2000). Less dangerous erotomaniac stalkers of both sexes are described by the current category.

#### Characteristics

The primary characteristic of this sub-group is that the stalker holds the delusional conviction that there is an extant, idealised relationship between him or herself and the victim. The stalker behaves as though victim is in full accord with this relationship, and that the romance is mutually consensual. Thus, the less dangerous delusional fixation stalker has an orientation that is rooted in both the present and the future. It will also be evident that the stalker either has had no previous contact with, or scarcely knows, the victim. The stalker's activities will not be characterised by threats, but rather by a firm and unshakeable belief that the stalker and the victim are in a genuine romantic relationship. Because of the strength of this delusional fixation, the stalker will not be amenable to reason from the victim. This contrasts sharply with the opportunity for reason presented by the infatuation harasser, where an explanation of reality can attenuate the problematic behaviour. A contrast may also be seen with the sadistic stalker, where the perpetrator consciously exploits a non-response to victims' appeals as a means of demonstrating the victim's helplessness.

Although the stalker is capable of the complete construction of a fantasy reciprocated loving relationship, they may eventually realise that the relationship is not actually working. In the event of a submerged perception that the relationship is not fitting with the perpetrator's delusion, the stalker may rationalise that this is the fault of a third party. For instance, they may come to believe that the victim's husband is putting demons into her head. In the event that such an individual is identified as being the obstacle to the relationship, there exists an element of danger. This is particularly likely to be the case where that individual is perceived by



the stalker as being dangerous to victim. Victims of these stalkers tended most often to be female professionals.

#### **Case management implications**

It is recommended that the victim of a less dangerous delusional fixation stalker should seek a legal remedy, rather than a mental health remedy. Further, the victim should be advised not to respond as far as possible. Indeed, this is recommended in all cases of stalking – regardless of stalker type. If, however, it is absolutely necessary for the victim to respond to the offender, then they should be advised to do so with a clear negation of the situation and non-angry requests for the stalker to leave him or her alone. The victim should never seek to argue with the offender, and should aim to keep any encounter as brief as is possible. Both the victim and legal agencies should be aware that the stalker is not responsive to reason or rejection.

#### **Typology 4: Sadistic stalking**

The final stalker sub-type in the Boon and Sheridan (2001) categorisation deals with personality-disordered offenders. Personality disorders usually come to the attention of legal and mental health agencies because of a gross disparity between the behaviour of the personality disordered individual and prevailing social norms. The personality disorder most commonly associated with the sadistic stalker is psychopathic personality disorder, also known as amoral, antisocial, asocial, dissocial and sociopathic personality (disorder). Psychopathic personality disorder is a serious chronic disorder with symptoms usually first evident in childhood or adolescence. It is characterised by interpersonal, affective and behavioural abnormalities. Psychopaths are glib, superficial, arrogant, manipulative and deceitful in interactions with others. Their emotions are shallow and they neither show empathy for others nor have feelings of guilt or remorse and their behaviour is impulsive, irresponsible, parasitic and prone to criminality. The majority of stalkers do not meet these characteristics (see Kropp, Hart, Lyon & LePard, 2002) but a small percentage of stalkers can be considered psychopathic.

In Boon and Sheridan's sample, 12.9% of the stalkers were categorised as the sadistic sub-type. However, given that the victim sample upon which the typology was based was self-referring, it was arguably more likely to represent more serious instances of stalking. Therefore, the true proportion of sadistic stalkers is likely to be lower than this 12.9% figure. Given that the categorisation is

aimed towards law enforcement, however, this loading towards the more serious end of the stalking continuum may be appropriate, reflecting the profile of cases most likely to be pursued by police authorities. All sadistic stalkers described by the sample were male with female victims, bar one whose victim was also male.

#### **Characteristics**

For the sadistic stalker, the victim is an obsessional target who is viewed as an object to prey upon. The orientation of this stalker is incremental, in that the stalker plans to establish more control over the victim as time goes on. The sadistic stalker's selection criteria are primarily rooted in the victim being someone who is worthy of spoiling. That is, someone who is perceived by the stalker at the commencement of the stalking as being happy, content, stable and 'good'. Thus, the victim and those around her would lack any perception as to why she in particular was targeted. Usually, stalker and victim have an initial low-level acquaintance, for instance, they may live near each other or have occasional interpersonal exchanges due to one or the other's profession. The sadistic stalker usually appears to be benign during the initial stages, and the activities of a sadistic stalker may not be immediately indistinguishable from those of the infatuation harasser. Unlike the infatuation harasser, however, the sadistic stalker's means of intervention tend to have a negative orientation and are strictly designed to disconcert, unnerve, and as a result remove power from the victim.

Sadistic stalkers frequently employ subtle, rather than overt, stalking techniques. For instance, they may leave evidence of having been in contact with the victim's personal items by rifling underwear drawers, re-ordering or removing private letters, or using toilets or ashtrays. Their activities are designed to unsettle the target, for example, by leaving notes inside the victim's locked car. The infatuation harasser, on the other hand, tends to leave overt romantic messages that would be placed on the outside of the victim's vehicle. Sadistic stalkers are the most secretive stalkers and their identity may remain unknown for months or even years. This allows the stalker to engage in such activities as 'helping' to mend the victim's car that they themselves previously disabled, further adding to the stalker's sense of power and control. Later on, the sadistic stalker seeks progressive escalation of control over all aspects (i.e. social, historical, professional, financial, physical) of the victim's life. Offender gratification is rooted in the desire to extract evidence of the victim's powerlessness with inverse implications for his own power. This is the core aspect of sadism.



In attempts to further isolate and therefore enhance control over the victim, sadistic stalkers tend to also target the victim's family and friends. They frequently spread rumours in attempts to turn family and friends against the victim and vice versa. Any communications tend to constitute a blend of loving and threatening (but not hateful) content, designed to confuse and de-stabilise. Threats can be either overt (for instance, "We're going to die together") or subtle (for instance, the delivery of dead roses). Any sexual content of communications is aimed primarily to intimidate through the victim's humiliation, disgust and general undermining of self-esteem.

Unlike the hot headed and impulsive ex-partner stalker or harasser, the sadistic stalker will operate with emotional coldness, deliberateness and psychopathy. The sadistic stalkers identified by Boon and Sheridan (2001) tended to have a history of stalking behaviour and the controlling of others. They were unlikely to offend after the age of 40 years if they had not engaged in such stalking before. Sadistic stalkers can be highly dangerous, especially in terms of perpetrating psychological violence specifically geared to the controlling of the victim via fear, loss of privacy and the curtailment of her social world. Physical violence, however, should never be ruled out, especially by means designed to undermine the victim's confidence in matters normally taken for granted (such as the disabling of brake cables, or the disarming of safety equipment). Finally, victims in the Boon and Sheridan study were likely to be re-visited after the stalking appeared to have ended.

### Case management implications

All cases of sadistic stalking must be taken very seriously. It must be acknowledged from the outset that the stalker's activities will be very difficult to eradicate and that there is nothing to be gained from appealing to the offender. Indeed, appeals to the offender will exacerbate the problem as they represent admissions that the victim is firmly within his control and that therefore the stalker's intentions have been realised. The sadistic stalker is the most difficult stalker to prosecute, given that their activities are carefully constructed and calculated to simultaneously minimise the risk of intervention by authorities while retaining maximum impact on the victim. Further, they are the least likely stalker category to leave behind physical evidence – many will be highly forensic aware. This makes it most difficult for the victim to be believed and taken seriously by friends, family and legal authorities. In addition, sadistic stalkers will be almost impervious to

intervention since the overcoming of obstacles provides new and potent means of demonstrating the victim's powerlessness against him. Any assurances or alternative versions of events that may be provided by the offender should not be believed, but should, however, be recorded for possible usage in later legal action. The victim should be given as much understanding and support as can be made available, but should not be given false or unrealistic assurance or guarantees that she will be protected. It is further recommended that victims should carefully consider relocation. Unlike cases where an ex-partner stalker or harasser is involved, geographical emphasis should be less on distance and more on where the offender is least able to find the victim. Legal authorities should bear in mind that, if jailed, sadistic stalkers are the most likely stalker category to continue the stalking both personally and vicariously via the use of a network.

### Conclusions

The reader should conclude from the text that stalkers are not a homogenous group, and that different stalker types are associated with quite different motivations and behaviours. This conclusion has important implications for law enforcement and intervention. At least four implications for law enforcement can be identified. Firstly, police should be aware that certain types of stalkers tend to disguise their negative intentions more (i.e. sadistic stalker) than do other types of stalkers (i.e. infatuation harasser), which makes it more difficult to gather usable evidence and to catch the offender in the act. Secondly, certain types of stalkers are more likely to admit to their behaviour (i.e. infatuation harassers and delusional stalkers) than are other types of stalkers (i.e. ex-partner stalkers and sadistic stalkers), thereby rendering confessions and the provision of information during interrogations more or less likely. Thirdly, some types of stalkers may provide the police with more seemingly plausible reasons for their behaviours (i.e. ex-partner stalkers and sadistic stalkers) than may other types (i.e. infatuation harassers and delusional stalkers), which may lead the police to believe that the behaviours are not in fact 'stalking' behaviours. Fourthly, from a proactive enforcement perspective, certain types of stalkers are more likely to persist in their campaigns or even increase the intensity or frequency of their behaviours following being reported to the police or even after police intervention (i.e. certain ex-partner stalkers, delusional stalkers and sadistic stalkers) than are other types of stalkers (i.e. certain ex-partner stalkers or harassers and infatuation harassers). The police should be sensitive to this.



With regard to intervention, for some types of stalkers psychotherapeutic intervention would be the most effective course of action (i.e. delusional stalkers) whilst for other sub-types, police intervention would be more strongly advocated (i.e. infatuation harassers and certain ex-partner stalkers). Thus, certain types of stalkers are more responsive to legal intervention (i.e. certain ex-partner stalkers and infatuation harassers) than are other types. Moreover, adverse effects arising from police or therapeutic interventions may be particularly expected with sadistic stalkers and some ex-partner stalkers. In some cases, creating a physical distance between stalker and victim (i.e. in cases involving ex-partner stalkers) or having the victim hide from their stalker (i.e. in cases involving sadistic stalkers) are the only real solutions. In all cases, the police should be aware of the fact that there is a high likelihood that the victim needs psychological counselling because of the serious deleterious effects stalking can have on their emotional well-being (e.g. see Blaauw et al., 2002; Pathé & Mullen, 1997). All in all, the police should not only pay attention to the behaviours that are reported but also to the characteristics of the stalker (i.e. the type of stalker) and the physical and emotional well-being of the victim.

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