

Stalking or what may explain this 'one-sided craving for contact'

Violeta Kunovska

Stalking is a complex social problem involving a “one-sided craving for contact” (Hirtenlehner et al., 2012:207). The definitions of stalking are numerous in both legal and psychological context (Ravensberg & Miller, 2003). One definition of the phenomenon is that stalking is “the course of conduct, by which one person repeatedly inflicts on another, unwanted intrusions to such an extent that the recipient fears for his or her safety” (Purcell et al., 2004:157). However, other researchers chose to not use the term “stalking”, substituting it with “obsessional following” i.e. long-term harassment directed toward a specific individual (Meloy & Gothard, 1995) – or obsessional harassment, showing that stalkers may not follow their victims, but employ other forms of pursuit such as sending messages/letters (Rosenfeld, 2000). Research has defined some stalking behaviours from which most common are telephone calls, visiting work places or residences, letter writing, following, buying gifts (Meloy, 1997). The unpredictability of the stalker makes him/her look threatening (Hirtenlehner et al., 2012). The degree of threat is difficult to predict as many behaviours associated with stalking are not illegal - and even welcomed under different circumstances, which makes stalking very subjective and highly problematic to define (Fox et al., 2011). The popular perception is that stalkers are underachieving, middle-aged loners with persistent social awkwardness (Morrison cited in Fox et al., 2011). Surveys also suggest that more often, it is younger people who are victims of stalking (Björklund et al., 2010).

Much research has been carried out that considers the psychological side of stalking. Researchers who study what may predict stalking concluded that it could be from insecure attachment, or many other psychological abnormalities and disorders (Ménard & Pincus, 2012). Stalkers are frequently associated with violent behaviour (Spitzberg & Cadiz, 2002). They have included parts of all perspectives of psychology, including evolutionary psychology. An interesting theory from social psychology that has been considered is the 'just world' theory (Sheridan et al., 2003). Significant research showed that ex-partners are prevalent as stalkers (Weller et al., 2013) and the just world hypothesis suggests that victims are to be blamed as well (Sheridan et al., 2003). However, the research on this topic does have its limitations regarding methodology, samples, and definitions of the phenomenon, which suggests that further research is needed for better understanding and testing of the theories (Fox et al., 2011).

Studies on stalking are mainly based in the US (70%) with just 8% from UK (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). In the US stalking has been criminalised since 1996 in the Violence Against Women Act (Ravensberg & Miller, 2003). In UK, although the first anti-stalking legislation was in 1997 – The Protection of Harassment Act following the media attention on some celebrity stalking cases and the consequent public concern, a legal definition of stalking had not been provided (Sheridan et al., 2001). The scope was broad and could have been applied to a wide range of situations such as neighbourhood nuisance, bullying and so on, where the purpose was intervention before actual harm could take place. However, on 25 November 2012 two new specific offences of stalking were introduced. This was in answer to the lack of confidence in the criminal justice system, particularly in relation to victims of

stalking (Strickland, 2013). The term stalking however, has not been clearly defined which is problematic for those who wish to study this area (Fox et al., 2011). Researchers cannot develop an inclusive operationalisation. Stalking is a combination of behaviours which makes it much harder to be measured than many other crimes (Fox et al., 2011). Many researchers chose not to refer to the phenomenon as 'stalking' because assessed behaviours do not always meet the legal standards for stalking (Dutton & Winstead, 2006). Moreover, there is a hypothesis that stalking is as a result of the termination of a violent relationship, yet the findings on the connection between domestic violence and stalking are rare (O'Connor & Rosenfeld, 2004). Fox and his colleagues (2011) criticised much of the data on the topic, saying that the use of varying definitions has led researchers to use differing approaches when measuring it, which may even lead to questioning whether the researchers are observing the same phenomenon.

Research supports the idea that stalking evolves from some form of pathological attachment (MacKenzie, 2008). This theory is one of the earliest and one of the most vigorously promoted (MacKenzie et al., 2008). Attachment is a bond that endures overtime and focuses on the quality of the relational tie (Ainsworth et al. cited in Wilson et al. (2006)). Wilson and her colleagues stated that a secure attachment meant that people can detach from others and recognise that other people have their own personal beliefs and expectations. It is insecure attachment however, that is most commonly associated with this type of criminal behaviour (Ménard & Pincus, 2012). The stalkers are believed to be 'a unique subgroup of insecurely attached individuals' (Wilson et al. 2006:143). It was also said that insecure attachment could lead to attention-seeking behaviours such as dramatic

displays of emotion (crying, anger), enhanced proximity (clinging), or pursuit behaviour. An insecure attachment style impairs the ability to manage relationships in adulthood (MacKenzie et al., 2008). Primary reasons for insecure attachment are found to be parental abuse, separation and loss of the primary caregiver (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2000) and overprotective fathers (Tonin, 2004). In MacKenzie et al.'s study (2008) stalkers reported significantly less caring and more emotionally neglectful parents. When testing the attachment bonds of stalkers, researchers apply the Bartholomew and Horowitz model suggesting that there are four attachment styles – secure, preoccupied, dismissing and fearful (1991). Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) stated that individuals with fearful attachment style are characterised with negative model of self and of others, and the preoccupied – negative model of others and positive one of others. Both styles are dependent on other people's approval and may avoid intimacy in order not to be rejected. Some researchers such as MacKenzie et al (2008) found that stalkers are more likely to identify themselves with having an insecure attachment style (more specifically the fearful style) and to look at themselves more negatively. But others such as Dutton and Winstead (2006) found that people with preoccupied attachment styles are engaging in most pursuits. Moreover, their study found that different stalker types view their fathers in a different way. For example, motivational types view them as less controlling, while the resentful group, whose behaviour is viewed as a response to injustice, view them as more controlling. Results for the latter group also support the perspective of overprotective parents; it cannot reflect the majority of stalkers' feelings to their fathers. Nevertheless, researchers have found that attachment may have direct or indirect effect on stalking. Some researchers combine attachment, need for control, responses to break-up and psychological abuse in the relationship in order to investigate whether they could be predictors of stalking (Davis et

al., 2000). They found that attachment results in stalking indirectly through anger or jealousy. Their findings are supported by Dye and Davis's (2003). They found out that insecure attachment predicted need for control, break-up anger, or jealousy, which directly resulted in unwanted pursuit. However, in Dutton and Winstead's study (2006) insecure attachment could be a direct predictor of pursuit.

Researchers also looked at the connection between psychological disorders and stalking. Stereotypically, people often see stalking as evolving from mental illnesses (Spitzberg & Cadiz, 2002). Mullen et al. (2001) suggest that every stalker whose behaviour has become overly intrusive has a mental disorder. Research is done mostly on forensic or clinical samples of stalkers (Ménard & Pincus, 2011). The most frequently reported disorders are antisocial, borderline, histrionic and narcissistic, which are part of DSM Axis II Cluster B (Ménard & Pincus, 2011). Stalkers also show a fairly broad representation of Axis I disorders (Douglas & Dutton, 2001). Some of the disorders are schizophrenia, mood disorders, major depression, or bipolar disorder - however research is controversial. Douglas and Dutton (2001) review some research whose findings suggest that stalkers could have these disorders, but they are not prevalent in comparison to other people with the same disorders. Their conclusion from the data is that stalkers may be slightly more psychologically maladjusted compared to other offenders because they have higher scores on several items, including anxiety, depression, and grandiosity. Evidence suggests that approximately 50% of stalkers have a personality disorder (Douglas & Dutton, 2001). Narcissism is one of the most researched disorders associated with stalking (Menard & Pincus, 2011). Narcissists focus on what cost them in terms of lost time, spent resources and

personal humiliation (Mullen et al., 2001). Rosenfeld (2003) looked at mental disorders and reoffending and whether there is a connection between them. His research shows that Cluster B diagnosis is substantially more likely to reoffend than other personality disorder diagnosis. He added that people with other personality disorders are not at substantially greater risk of reoffending compared to offenders without a personality disorder.

Rosenfeld's study shows also that an interaction between substance abuse and psychosis (particularly delusional disorder) do not influence reoffending - although the combination of a personality disorder and a history of substance abuse leads to a rise in reoffending.

Moreover, mental disorders are linked to violence (Miller, 2012). It is suggested that personality disorders are associated with high risk of violence, while psychotic illness decreases violence risk. A plausible explanation for this data is that psychotic offenders are more likely to receive aggressive psychiatric treatment, such as hospitalization and treatment with medication (Rosenfeld, 2003).

Stalking is also associated with violence (Spitzberg & Cadiz, 2002). Although most of the stalkers do not become inter-personally violent data indicates that between 30 and 60% of the victims are threatened with violence and between 25 and 50% of them are actually physically attacked (Miller, 2012). He also suggests that violence correlates positively with the length of the stalking. Miller (2012) says that serious physical injuries are rare; grabbing, choking, pulling, shaking, slapping and etc. are the usual acts of violence. Moreover, weapons such as handguns, knives and cars are used mostly to intimidate and control the victim - but rarely to injure. Data shows that weapons are actually used in less than a third of cases. Violence is more often used when stalking prior-intimate victims (Miller, 2012).

Other factors that may result in violence are obsession with the victim, humiliation and anger. A study revealed that women who were stalked by their partners were also abused in some way - sexually, physically, emotionally - by those partners (Mechanic et al., 2000). Stalking has been considered a subtype of psychological abuse (Basile & Hall, 2011). Mechanic et al. stated that through emotional abuse stalkers show their power and are able to instil fear in their victims. Although this has been recognised as an important part in intimate partner relationships, researchers have difficulty reaching a consensus on whether stalking should be a distinct component of violence against women. Violence is associated with alcohol use among stalkers (Melton, 2007).

Researchers hypothesised that stalking may be explained through evolutionary theory (Miller, 2012). Evolutionary theory suggests people seek to maximise their chances of reproduction through enhancing physical attractiveness (females), or maximising image of strength and status (males) (Miller, 2012). Some researchers such as Spitzberg and Cupach (2007) see stalking as an extension of normal interpersonal courtship. Nevertheless, a combination between stalking and psychosis, anger, jealousy and impulsivity, the pursuit may turn into a dangerous stalking, which could be connected to evolutionary theory through characteristics such as skills of stealth, patience, surveillance, cognitive strategising and physical prowess - which are all traits of successful hunting (Miller, 2012). This theory is actually seen as favourable to women, who are searching for a high-status in order to be more secure. However, this is a theory that cannot be tested.

Stalking is viewed from another perspective as well. The Lerner's just world hypothesis states that people want to live in a fair world where everyone gets what they deserve in order to have a stable and orderly environment (Lerner & Miller, 1978). This hypothesis fits the stalking as many people could perceive victims as deserving and to deny their right of being the victim (Weller et al., 2013). Sheridan et al. (2003) suggest that ex-intimate stalkers are seen as entitled to stalk their victims because of something negative that the victim has done. They also suggest that strangers do not have this entitlement because there is no history between them and the victim. This hypothesis is connected to the fundamental attribution error because when people's perception of a just world is threatened, they produce dispositional explanations (Weller et al., 2013). Although ex-intimate victims are most likely to seek help from the police and other legal authorities, they are also the group which is being helped the least (Sheridan et al., 2003). They explain these findings through the just world hypothesis. In a just world, there is no need for police to intervene in domestic disputes – the way ex-intimate stalking is seen – and both perpetrator and victim should deal with the situation on their own (Sheridan et al., 2003). This explains the finding that ex-intimate stalkers are less likely to be arrested or convicted than stranger stalkers (Scott et al., 2013).

On the other hand, the research on attachment theory has many limitations. One of them is that most of the data is not general to all stalkers (Tonin, 2004). Tonin's findings, for example, are representative samples only for stalkers detained under the Mental Health Act (1983). MacKenzie and her colleagues stated (2008) that one of the biggest problems with most research about stalking is that stalkers have been studied as a single homogeneous

group, when in reality, as a complex social problem, stalking can be driven by many different motives. This means that stalkers with different drivers may not share the same characteristics and their behaviour can be considered from different perspectives. Other limitations are that most of the data is taken from self-reports and it is based on retrospective reinterpretation (Dutton & Winstead, 2006). Dye and Davis (2003) suggest that some of the data could be emotionally coloured by anger and jealousy. Self-reports are also criticised by people who believe it is not a valid way of assessing adult attachment as it is an unconscious and automatic process (Carlson et al., cited in Tonin, 2004). Moreover, some respondents may not share important information, or may change other information to look good (Dutton & Winstead, 2006). However, Bartholomew and Moretti (2002) believe that self-reports are predictive of dynamic processes that are related to attachment - although they acknowledge that self-reports may work when assessing samples from the normative population. Clinical samples though are characterised with insecurity, which may distort the quality of self-reports. When talking about mental health issues and whether stalkers have some psychological disorders, a big limitation is that little research is done on nonclinical stalkers (Ménard & Pincus, 2011). This focuses the research on one particular group of people which eventually is one of its limits. The early research on stalking was psychologically biased as many of the typologies depended heavily upon DSM (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007). The other topic broadly discussed when talking about stalking is violence. Studies on this mainly include forensic samples, which are considered a highly selective sample where certain characteristics are more often than in non-forensic samples (Roberts, 2005). A forensic sample usually includes individuals who are considered by courts to be more violent, to have more extensive criminal histories, and to have been violent while stalking (Roberts, 2005). This limits the sample and predicts the prevalence of particular

characteristics. Another important limitation is related to methodologies used in studies. Rosenfield (2004) suggests that most of the researchers use such methodologies that prevent them from comparing their studies with others.

British Home Office defines stalking as “a course of conduct involving two or more events of harassment causing fear, alarm or distress, of three types: phone calls or letters; loitering outside home or work; damaged property” (Walby & Allen, 2004: 4). However, definitions of stalking vary throughout different legislations and studies, which makes it confusing where their findings can be juxtaposed to one another (Fox et al., 2011). Insecure attachment and mental disorders can result in stalking behaviours (Spitzberg & Cadiz, 2002). Violence is also associated with stalking. Moreover, there are two hypothesis which are difficult to test – evolutionary perspective of stalking (Miller, 2012) and the just world hypothesis (Weller et al., 2013). However, all the perspectives and theories have many limitations and all the ideas need far greater research for a better understanding on the topic (Fox et al., 2011).

References

Bartholomew K and Horowitz L M (1991) Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four-category model. *Journal of personality and Social Psychology* 61:226 – 244.

Bartholomew K and Moretti M (2002) The dynamics of measuring attachment. *Attachment & Human Development* 4:162 – 165.

Basile K C and Hall J E (2011) Intimate partner violence perpetration by court-ordered men: Distinctions and intersections among physical violence, sexual violence, psychological abuse, and stalking. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 26:230 – 253.

Björklund K, Häkkänen-Nyholm H, Sheridan L and Roberts K (2010) The prevalence of stalking among Finnish university students. *Journal of interpersonal Violence* 25:684 – 698.

Davis K E, Ace A and Andra M (2000) Stalking perpetrators and psychological maltreatment of partners. *Violence and Victims* 15:407 – 425.

Douglas K S and Dutton D G (2001) Assessing the link between stalking and domestic violence. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour* 6:519 – 546.

Dutton L B and Winstead B A (2006) Predicting unwanted pursuit: Attachment, relationship satisfaction, relationship alternatives, and break-up distress. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationship* 23:565 – 586.

Dye M L and Davis K E (2003) Stalking and psychological abuse: Common factors and relationship-specific characteristics. *Violence and Victims* 18:163 – 180.

Fox K A, Nobles M R and Fisher B S (2011) Method behind the madness: An examination of stalking measurements. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour* 16:74 – 84.

Hirtenlehner H, Starzer B and Weber C (2012) A differential phenomenology of stalking: Using latent class analysis to identify different types of stalking victimization. *International Review of Victimology* 18:207 – 227.

Langhinrichsen-Rohling J and Rohling M (2000) Negative family-of-origin experiences: Are they associated with perpetrating unwanted pursuit behaviors?. *Violence and Victims* 15:459 – 71.

Lerner M J and Miller D T (1978) Just world research and the attribution process: Looking back and ahead. *Psychological Bulletin* 85:1030 – 1051.

MacKenzie R D, Mullen P E, Ogloff J R P, McEwan T E and James D V (2008) Parental bonding and adult attachment styles in different types of stalkers. *Journal of Forensic Science* 53:1444 – 1449.

Mechanic M B, Weaver T L and Resick P A (2000) Intimate partner violence and stalking behaviors: Exploration of patterns and correlates in a sample of acutely battered women. *Violence and Victims* 15:55 – 72.

Meloy J R (1997) The clinical risk management of stalking. *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 51:174 – 184.

Meloy J R and Gothard S (1995) A demographic and clinical comparison of obsessional followers and offenders with mental disorders. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 152:258 – 263.

Melton H C (2007) Predicting the occurrence of stalking in relationships characterized by domestic violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 22:3 – 25.

Ménard K S and Pincus A L (2012) Predicting overt and cyber stalking perpetration by male and female college students. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 27:2183 – 2207.

Miller L (2012) Stalking: Patterns, motives, and intervention strategies. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour* 17:495 – 506.

Morrison K A (2001) Predicting violent behavior in stalkers: A preliminary investigation of Canadian cases in criminal harassment. *Journal of Forensic Science* 46:1403–1410.

Mullen P E, Pathe´ M and Purcell R (2001) The management of stalkers. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* 7:335 – 342.

O’Connor M and Rosenfeld B (2004) Introduction to the special issue on stalking: Finding and filling the empirical gaps. *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 31:3 – 8.

Purcell R, Pathe´ M and Mullen P (2004) Stalking: Defining and prosecuting a new category of offending. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 27:157 – 169.

Ravensberg V and Miller C (2003) Stalking among young adults: A review of the preliminary research. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour* 8:455 – 469.

Roberts K A (2005) Women’s experience of violence during stalking by former romantic partners: Factors predictive of stalking violence. *Violence Against Women* 11:89 – 114.

Rosenfeld B (2000) Assessment and treatment of obsessional harassment. *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 5:529 – 549.

Scott A J, Gavin J, Sleath E and Sheridan L (2013) The attribution of responsibility in cases of stalking. *Psychology, Crime & Law* pp. 1 – 17.

Sheridan L, Gillett R, Davies G M, Blaauw E and Patel D (2003) 'There's no smoke without fire': Are male ex-partners perceived as more 'entitled' to stalk than acquaintance or stranger stalkers?. *British Journal of Psychology* 94:87 – 98.

Sheridan L, Davies G M and Boon J C W (2001) Stalking: Perceptions and prevalence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 16:151 – 167.

Spitzberg B H and Cadiz M (2002) The media construction of stalking stereotypes. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* 9:128 – 149.

Spitzberg B H and Cupach W R (2007) The state of the art of stalking: Taking stock of the emerging literature. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour* 12:64 – 86.

Strikland P (2013) Stalking. Home Affairs Office

<https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=4&ved=0CEgQFjAD&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.parliament.uk%2Fbriefing-papers%2Fsn06261.pdf&ei=wX-jUqXwNqXJ0QWluoGoCg&usg=AFQjCNFt8tSLmZgQlvm-HmdAqBzt8d3ZJQ&sig2=d7UfXhcsup-Tq3yFYIT6xA&bvm=bv.57752919,d.d2k> (assessed 10/12/2013).

Tonin E (2004) The attachment styles of stalkers. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology* 15:584 – 590.

Walby S and Allen J (2004) Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: findings from the British Crime Survey. Home Office Research Study 276. London: Home Office.
<http://web.archive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218135832/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/hors276.pdf>

Weller M, Hope L and Sheridan L (2013) Police and public perceptions of stalking: The role of prior victim – offender relationship. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 28:320 – 339.

Wilson J S, Ermshar A L and Welsh R K (2006) Stalking as paranoid attachment: A typological and dynamic model. *Attachment and Human Development* 8:139 – 157.

Aberystwyth University Law and Criminology Student Journal (AULCSJ), 1st Edition published online by the Department of Law and Criminology, Aberystwyth University on behalf of the AULCSJ. August 2014. Article downloaded from <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/law-criminology/informationforcurrentstudents/studentactivities/auslcj/>