

## Stalking and Violence

The perverse beauty of the crime of stalking is that it provides a fertile Petri dish for the study of interpersonal violence. Stalking per se does not include any violent behaviour, if we understand violence to be an intentional act of aggression against another human being that results in, or is likely to result in, physical injury. Stalking, instead, has historically been defined as a pattern of threat or harassment that induces fear of harm in the victim (Meloy, 1999a). There is a logical relationship between the two—why would someone be fearful of a pattern of threat or harassment if he or she didn't think there might be an attack? But violence does not have to be an aspect of stalking behaviour, and is not an element of the crime of stalking in most jurisdictions. In fact, the crime itself was codified to prevent acts of violence that were, in retrospect, sadly predictable (Saunders, 1998). Therefore, we have two independent variables—stalking and violence—that can be empirically measured to see if there is, in fact, a relationship between them. The independence of variables in research is important, but in all violence research, the frequency of acts of violence is also critical to study. For example, the United States is a well-chosen geographical area in which to study violence because of its high base rate, especially in southern and coastal cities. Taiwan, on the other hand, would not be a good place to study violence because of its very low frequency. Canada is even better, not because its rate exceeds that of the US, but because there is one federal database of violent crime and criminals, making the task of longitudinal research not only possible, but also quite productive (Quinsey et al., 1998). People research when they

observe phenomena that interest them, and the more observations, the better the research. Unfortunately for victims, individuals who stalk are often violent, a finding which paradoxically bodes well for research.

## FREQUENCY OF STALKING VIOLENCE

There has been a substantial amount of research on stalking violence during the past decade. Table 1 summarizes much of the data, with frequencies of interpersonal violence listed in the far right column.

What is most striking about these data is the large proportion of individuals who stalk who are violent, usually toward the object of pursuit, at some point during their stalking crime. In most studies of violence, on the other hand, base rates<sup>1</sup> usually do not exceed 30% per year, even in the most violent groups (Meloy, 2000). For example, if we had the power to pardon 100 men from death row at San Quentin State Prison in California, and released them to the community, at least 70 of those men would not be physically violent during the subsequent year. Another pattern that emerges from this table is the increase in frequency of violence across samples of stalkers as more recent studies are cited. This may be an artifact of data gathering, or it may be a true finding. What is most disconcerting is the rate of violence when stalkers who are prior sexual intimates of the victim are extracted from the overall samples—violence among prior sexually intimate stalkers usually exceeds 50%. This means that it is more likely than not that an ex-girlfriend, boyfriend or estranged spouse of a stalker will be physically assaulted by that stalker at some point during the pursuit.

This startling finding is not from one research group who may have unwittingly reported biased or inaccurate data. In a period of three years, four research groups in four urban areas on two continents (Harmon et al., 1998; Palarea et al., 1999; Meloy et al., 2001; Mullen et al., 1999) reported frequencies of violence among their prior sexual intimate stalking samples which were 67%, 78%, 89% and 59%, respectively. The only other subsample of stalkers in which violence frequencies approach those of prior sexual intimates are the "predator" stalkers, a name given by Mullen et al. (2000) to those individuals who stalk with the intent to sexually assault the victim. The stalking in these cases may be covert, such as observation, surveillance or following from a distance, or deliberate deception, such as a con or a ruse to falsely convince the victim she is desired for something

<sup>1</sup>Base rates control for time, frequencies do not. There has yet to be a study of base rates of stalking violence, because data gathering has not controlled for time.

**Table 1.** Frequencies of interpersonal violence among obsessional followers, stalkers and criminal harassers

Study	Sample	Location	Frequency(%)
Meloy & Gothard (1995)	20	California	25
Harmon et al. (1995)	48	New York	21
Garrod et al. (1995)	100	British Columbia	0-42
Kienlen et al. (1997)	25	Missouri	32
Schwartz-Watts et al. (1997)	18	South Carolina	39
Meloy et al. (2000)	65	California	46
Mullen et al. (1999)	145	Australia	36
Harmon et al. (1998)	175	New York	46
Schwartz-Watts & Morgan (1998)	42	South Carolina	48
Palarea et al. (1999)	135	Los Angeles	76

other than sexual assault. This subsample is the smallest of their five types in their published studies to date (Mullen et al., 1999, 2000).

### THE NATURE OF STALKING VIOLENCE

There have been a few studies which have attempted to gather data on the actual acts of violence that are perpetrated by stalkers. Meloy (1992b) reported a small sample of violent stalkers ( $n = 6$ ), of whom two subjects murdered their victims, one a prior boyfriend and one a brief dating companion. The prior girlfriend killed her boyfriend with a .357 magnum revolver. The dating companion, a young Persian woman, was stalked for three years and then murdered through the use of acid, gasoline and fire by a 37-year-old male. In only two of the six cases was the stalker a complete stranger to the victim, and in both cases he did not injure her. Meloy and his colleagues (Meloy, 1992a; Meloy & Gothard, 1995; Meloy et al., 2000) reported in two samples of "obsessional followers" ( $n = 85$ ) gathered from the same court diagnostic clinic that the violent subjects typically grabbed, choked, hair pulled, threw, shook, hit, slapped, kicked or punched the victim, usually without using a weapon. When a weapon was used in less than one out of three cases, it was a firearm, knife or automobile, and yet in all cases of weapons use the victim was neither shot, cut, nor run over. Most of the violent stalkers in their studies were prior sexual intimates or acquaintances of the victim. Harmon and colleagues (Harmon et al., 1995, 1998) found in a large sample of 175 "obsessional harassers" a variety of personal and property violence. Unfortunately, they noted the specific nature of the violence only in their first 48 subjects (Harmon et al., 1995). Acts included chasing a taxi and pounding on its hood, throwing bottles, following and grabbing, beating with fists, hitting

on the back of the neck, kicking and lunging with a knife, stabbing with a knife, and dragging one young woman whose handbag was subsequently grabbed and masturbated upon.

Mullen and colleagues reported in a series of studies (Mullen & Pathe, 1994a, b; Mullen et al., 1999, 2000) the violent behaviour of several samples of stalkers totaling 168 subjects in their recent publication. In the majority of their cases, "the attacks constituted an impulsive lashing out in response to rejection or perceived insult" (Mullen et al., 2000, p. 212). They reported assaults that caused mostly bruises and abrasions, but also included in their sample individuals who had sexually assaulted, usually stopping short of rape, and in one case, the murder of a 25-year-old female singer who was publicly stabbed to death by a 49-year-old erotomaniac stalker (Mullen & Pathe, 1994b). When this research group introduced their typology of stalkers (Mullen et al., 1999, 2000), the rejected group had the highest assault frequency (59%), followed in descending order by the predatory (50%), resentful (29%), intimacy (24%) and incompetent (21%) groups ( $p = 0.001$ ). Property assaults were also highest in the rejected group (62%), of whom most were ex-partners. In a related study of 100 victims of stalking (Pathe & Mullen, 1997)—it is unclear if any of these subjects were victims of their large sample of stalkers—they reported similar assaults against 31% of the victims: blows to the face, kicks to the groin, attacks with a broken bottle, strangulation, strychnine poisoning, abduction, false imprisonment and rape.

It appears from these studies that most stalking violence is *affective*: a mode of violence which is preceded by autonomic arousal, accompanied by anger or fear, reactive to an imminent threat (usually rejection), and unplanned (Meloy, 1988, 1997a). This mode of violence has been researched in both animals and humans for the past thirty years, is referred to by some researchers as "impulsive" or "reactive" violence (Barratt et al., 1997; Cornell et al., 1996) and appears to be biologically based (Mirsky & Siegel, 1994; Eichelman, 1992; Raine et al., 1998).

There is, however, another mode of violence called *predatory*: it is not preceded by autonomic arousal, and it is unemotional, planned, purposeful and carried out in the absence of an imminent threat. The evolutionary basis of predatory violence is hunting. Predatory violence has also been researched, although not as thoroughly as affective violence, and appears frequently among certain clinical groups, such as psychopaths (Cornell et al., 1996), and in certain kinds of targeted violence, such as mass murder (Hempel et al., 1999) and bombing (Meloy & McEllistrem, 1998). Others refer to this mode of violence as "instrumental" (Cornell et al., 1996). Military training is often an attempt to teach predatory violence where affective violence would normally reign (Grossman, 1995). Forensic criteria for discriminating between affective and predatory modes of violence are listed in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Forensic criteria for differentiating affective and predatory violence

Affective violence	Predatory violence
1. Intense autonomic arousal	Minimal or absent autonomic arousal
2. Subjective experience of emotion	No conscious emotion
3. Reactive and immediate violence	Planned or purposeful violence
4. Internal or external perceived threat	No imminent perceived threat
5. Goal is threat reduction	Variable goals
6. Possible displacement of target	No displacement of target
7. Time-limited behavioural sequence	No time-limited sequence
8. Preceded by public posturing to reduce the threat	Preceded by private ritual to fuel narcissism/reduce paranoia
9. Primarily emotional/defensive	Primarily cognitive/attack
10. Heightened and diffuse awareness	Heightened and focused awareness

Sources: Meloy, 1988, 1997a, 2000.

There is one study which suggests that individuals who stalk and attack public figures are likely to engage in a predatory mode of violence. Fein & Vossekuil (1998, 1999) assembled a large sample of 83 individuals who near-lethally approached, attacked or assassinated a public figure during the second half of the twentieth century in the United States. They were able to clinically interview approximately one quarter of their sample who were still living, incarcerated and consented to participate in the research. The pattern of behaviour which preceded the actual attack was very consistent with predatory violence: it was typically planned, purposeful, carried out over the course of weeks or months, and motivated by the idea of assassination which was gradually translated into a behavioural plan. Intense emotion, such as anger, and heightened autonomic arousal in response to an imminent threat, were conspicuously absent at the moment of violence. Weapons use was also common, with the majority using a firearm to carry out their attack.

This study begs an important question: is there a fundamental difference between stalkers who are violent toward a private party, often someone they have intimately known, and a public figure, often a celebrity or political figure who is perceived in the public domain, but actually known only through fantasy? I think there is, although there will always be exceptions to this general supposition. Here is an example of affective violence toward a private party from my case files:

Mr A was a financial advisor in a brokerage firm who developed bipolar disorder in his late 20s. Initially resistant to medication and psychotherapy, he experienced deterioration in his work and marriage to the point where his wife left him and he was terminated from his position. Desperate for contact with his estranged spouse and their two young children, he kept visiting her home despite her protestations to

keep his distance. On one occasion, she let him in to discuss their situation in the dining room. He erupted in rage during their conversation concerning visitation and punched a hole in the wall. He then stormed out of the house. Now frightened of his behaviour, the wife obtained a restraining order, and Mr A was confronted by the police that if he continued his attempts to contact her, he would be considered stalking her. He persisted in his pursuit, however, for six months, approaching the house and calling her at all hours. Unwilling to arrest for violation of the restraining order, the police finally caught up with him at her home after a violent encounter in the garage: Mr A accosted his wife as she pulled her car into the garage. The children stayed in the car while she attempted to persuade him to leave. Suddenly he grabbed her by the shoulders and threw her against the wall. She attempted to brace herself, but in the process, fractured a finger. Mr A was arrested and charged with assault and battery with injury. He was subsequently not prosecuted following his compliance with psychiatric treatment, return to his job, and desire of his wife to see him remain as the father of the children and a source of financial support for them. They did not reconcile as husband and wife.

Here is an example of predatory violence in a public stalker:

Mr B idealized a man who was attempting to win his party's candidacy for President of the United States. His idealization was based upon his Palestinian roots and this public figure's support for his people in the Middle East. One day, however, he was confronted with a horrible reality: his idealized figure had voted for the sale of fighter bombers to Israel. He was furious at this betrayal, and shortly resolved that this public figure must die. Over the course of the next six months, he put his plan into action: he got a .22 caliber pistol from a relative and began practicing at a local shooting range. He began to track the appearances of the candidate. He used self-hypnosis to maintain his motivation and the certainty of his goal. In the weeks before the planned assassination, he physically approached the public figure on at least four occasions in several cities. He never communicated a threat directly to his target, but did refer to his desire to kill the target in several conversations with friends. On 8 June 1968, he successfully hid in the pantry of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, and subsequently shot the public figure in the back of his head while more than 70 people crowded into the small space that had been chosen as his exit path moments before. The public figure died the next day.

Some of you will recognise this case as the assassination of Robert Kennedy by Sirhan Sirhan. This was a politically motivated attack, but there were also many psychiatric and psychological problems on the part of Sirhan which were testified to at trial (Kaiser, 1970; Meloy, 1992b). Nevertheless, the predatory mode of violence in this case should be quite evident, and the stalking behaviour—although there was no such crime at the time—should be equally obvious.

There are other recent cases of the stalking of public figures which culminated in predatory violence: the firearm killing of Rebecca Schaeffer by Robert Bardo, the firearm killing of John Lennon by Mark Chapman, the firearm wounding of President Ronald Reagan by John Hinckley, Jr, and the knife wounding of Teresa Saldana by Richard Jackson. All of these attacks and assassinations were preceded by a thoughtful plan, involved pre-offense stalking behaviour, were carried out in the absence of an imminent threat, and utilized a lethal weapon. Most of these subjects were also diagnosed with a schizophrenic disorder and the plan, although organized, was motivated by a delusion. A fifth case involving a public figure, however, the 1995 stalking of the singer Madonna by Robert Hoskins, culminated in affective violence. Ironically, the victim of the violence was the stalker in this latter case, shot at point blank range by Madonna's security guard during a struggle for his .45 caliber semi-automatic pistol in her backyard. Hoskins physically assaulted the guard, demanding that he be allowed to see his "wife" (Meloy, 1997b; Saunders, 1998 ).<sup>2</sup>

Predatory violence has also been documented in stalking cases involving private parties (Meloy, 1997a, 1999b), and both modes of violence should be considered in every case. Further research, however, may support the presumption that I am suggesting: if stalkers of public figures attack, it will likely be a predatory mode of violence; if stalkers of private figures (everyone else) attack, it will likely be an affective mode of violence.

## **STALKING AND HOMICIDE**

Meloy estimated in earlier work (Meloy, 1996, 1998, 1999a) that homicide rates among stalkers were less than 2%. Mullen et al. (2000) pointed out that this estimate grossly exaggerates the risk of homicide in stalking cases, and they are correct. In 1998 there were 1830 murders (the willful killing of one human being by another) in the United States attributable to intimate partners, a category which includes spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends, ex-spouses, and ex-boyfriends or ex-girlfriends (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000). A random probability sampling telephone survey of 16,000 adult men and women (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1997) determined that approximately 1 million women and 0.4 million men are stalked each year

<sup>2</sup>Although Hoskins purportedly used methamphetamine extensively during his stalking of Madonna in 1995, which may have accounted for his waxing and waning delusional belief that Madonna was his wife, videotaped interviews of him after five years in custody also suggest a chronic schizophrenic or schizoaffective diagnosis. His thought content is still grandiose, delusional and religious, and he evidences a severe formal thought disorder (author's personal viewing and discussions with K. Mohandie, November 2000). He receives no psychotropic medication in prison.

in the US. Fifty-nine per cent of the women (590,000) and 30% of the men (120,000) were stalked by current or former sexual intimates. Even if we assume that all intimate partner homicides were preceded by stalking—a likely exaggeration—then the proportion of prior sexual intimates who were stalked and then killed would be 0.25% of the total number of individuals stalked. In other words, the highest estimation is that one in four hundred individuals who are stalked by prior sexual intimates will be intentionally killed by them.<sup>3</sup>

### STALKING AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Although stalking is not limited to prior sexual intimates, a growing body of research suggests that there is a strong empirical relationship between stalking and domestic violence. Tjaden & Thoennes (1997), for example, found that 81% of the women who were stalked by husbands or cohabiting partners were physically assaulted by the same partner, and 31% had been sexually assaulted by the same partner. Twenty-one per cent of these stalking victims said that the stalking occurred *before* the relationship ended, and 36% reported that the stalking occurred both before and after the relationship ended.

Although the association between stalking and domestic violence needs further research, trends in violence toward current or former intimate partners may be useful data for suggesting risk of violence during stalking. Between 1993 and 1998, women experienced intimate partner violence at five times the rate of men. For the women, being black, young, divorced or separated, earning lower incomes, living in rental housing, and living in an urban area were all associated with higher rates of victimization. Among men, being young, black, divorced or separated, or living in rented housing increased the risk of intimate partner victimisation. Violence was most likely to occur in the victim's home between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. Although physical attacks occurred a majority of the time when the victim was female, most injuries were minor, involving cuts or bruises (simple assault). Only 8% of the female victims required emergency care at a hospital. Half of the intimate partner violence was reported to the police; the most likely reason for non-reporting was characterization of the incident as a "private or personal matter" (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000). An adult woman in the US was slightly more likely to be victimized by a simple assault than by stalking when the perpetrator was a current or former sexual intimate.

<sup>3</sup> In this computation I have limited my inquiry to the stalking group with the highest rates of violence toward their victims.



## MOTIVATIONS FOR VIOLENCE

The reasons for violence during stalking are as complex and multi-determined as the reasons for all violence: they likely encompass social, psychological and biological factors, and are much more confidently dissected after the violent act than before. Notwithstanding the empirical problems of postdiction and prediction of any violence, it is important not to be simplistic in considering this question, and also to appreciate that both unconscious and conscious motivations likely determine whether or not the stalker will be violent.

Affective violence among those who stalk private parties is typically triggered by an imminent threat, usually an actual or perceived rejection by the object of pursuit or a third party who is communicating the wishes of the object. Rejection is a threat because there is an emotional investment in the object, and abandonment inflicts a wound that cuts deeply, often into the feelings about the self, which may be defensively inflated and thus vulnerable to such attacks. A metaphor often used to describe the self-esteem of such pathologically narcissistic individuals, which includes many stalkers, is an inflated balloon which can be easily pricked by the tiniest needle. This sudden deflation is often accompanied by acute feelings of shame or humiliation—the public exposure of the self as bad—which envelops the body like porcupine quills and must be quickly eradicated. The emotion which defends against this acute sense of deflation and vulnerability is anger, or more precisely rage, which often fuels a sudden, physical lashing out toward the object interfering with the pursuit and instills a momentary sense of omnipotence.

The generic purpose of all affective violence is to reduce the threat and return to homeostasis, or optimal physiological arousal. From an evolutionary perspective it ensures the survival of the organism, and is often referred to as defensive violence. Although it may appear as if the affectively violent stalker initiated the physical attack, there is usually an environmental stimulus that triggered the emotions I have described in the seconds before the attack. This is not an excuse for the violence, but the behavioural—emotional—cognitive sequences are important in understanding the internal thoughts and feelings that result in violent behaviour.

Borderline personality organization (Kernberg, 1984) is often present among stalkers in the manifest form of various diagnosable personality disorders, with narcissistic, histrionic, borderline, antisocial, paranoid, dependent and compulsive traits. In one study the modal Axis II personality disorder diagnosis among 65 stalkers was Personality Disorder NOS with narcissistic, paranoid and compulsive features (American Psychiatric Association, 1994; Meloy et al., 2000). The majority of this sample had a personality disorder diagnosis. Borderline personality organization is characterized by part-object representations, impaired reality testing, and

developmentally less mature psychological defenses. All three aspects facilitate affective violence. Part-object representations suggest that the working models (Bowlby, 1969) of self and others are defined in relatively simple and polarized ways: the stalker may conceive of his object as a classic beauty, a quintessential goddess deserving only of his attention. (In a non-romantic context he might idealize a work promotion that he has been denied.) The self may likewise be partially conceived as the perfect intimate, the partner of destiny. When rejection occurs, devalued representations of the self and the object may be activated, and suddenly neither the object of his pursuit, nor himself, deserves to live. What is missing in this representational world are whole conceptions of the self and other which are anchored in the various shades of reality, thus supporting the toleration of ambiguity, or simply put, mixed feelings.

Impaired reality testing—the inability to clearly demarcate between internal and external stimuli—likewise muddies the stalker's perceptual world and facilitates affective violence (Meloy, 1992a). In borderline personality organization this can mean that the origin of emotional stimuli is misperceived. For example, rage may be sensed as coming from the object of pursuit, when in fact she is feeling and communicating intense fear. Instead of accurately perceiving the fear in her, and the rage in himself, and thus restraining his behaviour, the stalker suddenly feels threatened and escalates his attack. Likewise his propensity to be jealous of her behaviour with other men—despite, for example, a divorce that was finalized two years ago—leads to surveillance of her home and accusations of infidelity that leave the stalking victim and her new husband angry and confused.

The third aspect of borderline personality organization that facilitates affective violence is developmentally immature defenses (Vaillant, 1993). Psychological defenses are like the immune system of the soma. They protect us from the attack of internal or external toxins. In stalking cases a wide range of defenses may appear, from the most primitive, such as denial and projection, to higher level defenses, such as minimization and rationalization. What is most germane to affective violence among stalkers is the manner in which defenses predispose to violence, or instead, provide plausible explanations for it afterwards. For instance, one stalker, a 38-year-old female divorcee, described her palpable fear as she entered her ex-husband's home and shot him and his new wife to death while they slept in their beds. She was convinced that he controlled the local court system—he was a successful civil lawyer—and was constantly plotting against her, a likely product of her own projective identification.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Projective identification is an incomplete projection. An aspect of the self is attributed to and perceived in another, but it is then felt as a threat. In the Broderick case, she attributed her fury to her husband, and then through her magnification of his power, perceived him as a malevolent, omnipotent force in her life. Projective identifications in stalkers contribute to their increased aggressive controlling of the object of the pursuit, as if the latter is the

Subsequent evidence at her trial, despite her histrionics on the witness stand, did not support her perceptions (*People v. Elizabeth Broderick*, San Diego County Superior Court; Stumbo, 1993).

Higher level defenses, such as rationalization and minimization, will be utilized to explain the violent behaviour in its aftermath. One domestically violent stalker, when confronted with photos of his battered and estranged wife, said that she must have had a "bad makeup" day. O. J. Simpson commented to a reporter four years after he was tried for the murder of his ex-wife: "Let's say I committed this crime ... Even if I did do this, it would have to have been because I loved her very much, right?" (*Esquire*, February, 1998, p. 58). In many cases, the excuses prompted by these higher level defenses appear plausible, but are ultimately false when considered and weighed with other evidence.

Predatory violence also occurs among stalkers, and typically the motivations are more varied. Fein & Vossekuil (1998) identified a number of motivations in their sample of attackers and assassins of public figures: to achieve notoriety and fame; to bring attention to a personal or public problem; to avenge a perceived wrong; to end personal pain; to save the country or the world; to develop a special relationship with the target; to make money; and to bring about political change. Dietz et al. (1991a, b) reported in two large studies of threatening and otherwise inappropriate letters that subjects who approached Hollywood celebrities were primarily motivated by romantic or sexual fantasies, while those who approached US Congressmen were motivated by a desire for beneficence. Calhoun (1998) studied threats toward federal judicial officials in the US between 1789 and 1993 and found that attacks were invariably motivated by personal anger or a desire for revenge against a specific judge. John Hinckley, Jr., shot President Ronald Reagan in 1981 to win the love of actress Jodie Foster and to be linked with her forever in history (Meloy, 1989; Caplan, 1987). Mark David Chapman assassinated John Lennon in 1980 to become the Holden Caulfield of his generation: "I've always known I'd be different and I've always known I was destined for greatness ... I always knew the whole world would know who I was. I always felt different and felt special and felt odd and peculiar" (Jones, 1992, p. 247).

What appears to be shared by stalkers who are predatorily violent is a pathological narcissism that is distinguished from the affectively violent stalker's narcissism in two ways: a grandiose fantasy of shared notoriety is pursued through the attack on the public figure, and a sense of entitlement, often accompanied by a callousness and indifference to the suffering of the targeted person, translates into a belief that he has a right to attack and kill. Because stalkers of public figures are typically not severely

principal threat. In some cases this defense has resulted in the stalker seeking a protection order against the victim (Grotstein, 1981; Meloy, 1992a)!

psychopathic (Hare, 1991), these narcissistic traits are often surrounded by emotional turmoil and conflict, such as anxiety and depression, yet may also be burnished by envy: the wish to destroy the goodness of the object of pursuit. Fein & Vossekuil (1999) noted that these subjects are not the high velocity, smoothly functioning, conflict-free assassins of film and cinema, but instead have beleaguered histories of psychiatric impairments and social failures.

Although pathological narcissism appears to play a central role in the psychodynamics of stalkers of both public and private targets, the inflated sense of self in the affectively violent, private stalker is more emotional and *free-floating*: he is vulnerable to painfully felt humiliation in a variety of circumstances because his grandiosity attaches to whatever he says or does. A young woman, for example, characterized her stalker in this manner: "He gets real smart with you about it, like why not me, am I not good enough for you, what's the problem? And when he talks to you he always gets up right in your face and nothing gets on my nerves any more than somebody gets up in my face". Her pursuer, a 32-year-old male, subsequently made obscene calls to her home for a period of several months (author's files).

The predatorily violent, public stalker, on the other hand, has a pathological narcissism that evidences a fantasy-based and *structured* grandiosity: he has given thought to his attack, imagined it in his mind, perhaps delusionally magnified the reasons for its justification, and has attached a specific, grandiose meaning to its outcome. Sirhan Sirhan made the conscious decision to kill Robert Kennedy five months before the assassination when he wrote in his diary, "RFK must die" (Kaiser, 1970, p. 549). He later testified, "how you can install a thought in your mind and how you can have it work and become a reality if you want it to" (*People v. Sirhan Sirhan*, 1969, trial transcript, p. 4905). Svrakic (1989) has elaborated upon this difference between free-floating and structured grandiosity in his excellent theoretical work on pathological narcissism.

## COMMUNICATED THREATS

A directly communicated threat is a written or oral communication that implicitly or explicitly states a wish or intent to damage, injure or kill the target (Meloy, 1999a). Communicated threats are expressive or instrumental. Expressive threats are used to regulate affect in the threatener. For example, a spouse ventilates her anger toward her husband by telling him that she'd like to kill him, and then feels both relieved and guilty for expressing herself. Instrumental threats are intended to control or influence the behaviour of the target through an aversive consequence. For example,

a physically and sexually abusive husband threatens to murder his wife if she attempts to leave him (Meloy, 1997a).

Mental health and criminal justice professionals believe as a matter of convention that all threats increase the risk of subsequent violence by the threatener. This assumption, however, appears more relative and ambiguous than expected. Macdonald (1968), for instance, found in a study of homicidal threats that 3% of his psychiatrically hospitalized subjects killed someone following return to the community, but in all cases it was not the person threatened. Dietz et al. (1991a, b) found no relationship between threats in letters and approach behaviour among those who inappropriately wrote to Hollywood celebrities, and a negative relationship between threats in letters and approach behaviour among those who inappropriately wrote to members of the US Congress. Recent studies of individuals who stalk, however, have found a positive and significant relationship between communicated threats and violence risk (Harmon et al., 1995, 1998; Meloy et al., 2000, 2001; McNiel & Binder, 1989; Mullen et al., 1999; Palarea et al., 1999). The strength of this relationship, however, appears to be weak, with reported beta weights of 0.15 and 0.26 in two studies (Palarea et al., 1999; Meloy et al., 2001).

One way to empirically approach these data that sheds light on the usefulness of threats in risk managing stalking cases is to study false positive and false negative rates. In this context, a false positive rate represents the proportion of subjects in a sample of stalkers who directly threatened but were not subsequently violent toward the target. A false negative rate represents the proportion of subjects who were violent toward the target but did not directly threaten beforehand. These rates, displayed as percentages, represent predictive failures, and appear in Table 7.3.

**Table 3.** False positive and false negative rates of communicated threats and subsequent violence among various samples of persons who stalk and attack public and private targets

Study	Sample	False positive rate (%)	False negative rate %
Meloy & Gothard (1995)	20	73	22
Harmon et al. (1995)	48	68	13
Kienlen et al. (1997)	25	68	—
Harmon et al. (1998)	175	41	19
Fein & Vossekuil (1999)*	83	—	90
Mullen et al. (1999)	145	52	23
Palarea et al. (1999)	223	75	14
Meloy et al. (2000)	65	72	15

\* In this study, the violence was an independent variable, rather than a dependent variable, therefore, false positive rates are unknown (the proportion of subjects who directly threatened and who were not subsequently violent).

I have listed eight studies, which include seven independent samples of stalkers gathered from different research groups in San Diego, New York, Los Angeles, Missouri, Washington and Australia.

As expected, virtually all the studies indicate false positive rates  $>50\%$  and false negative rates  $<23\%$  for directly communicated threats and subsequent violence: most individuals who directly threaten are not subsequently violent, and most individuals who do not directly threaten are not subsequently violent.

The one exception to these findings is the study by Fein & Vossekuil (1999) of subjects who near-lethally approached, attacked or assassinated a public figure, wherein the false negative rate was 90%—only one out of ten of their subjects communicated a direct threat to the target or to law enforcement before they were violent. The sensitivity rate—the proportion of violent subjects in their study who directly threatened—was only 10%. The sensitivity rate for the other studies in Table 7.3, excluding Keinlen et al. (1997), averaged 82.3%.

This striking difference between public and private stalkers in their patterns of threatening communications toward the target is more empirical evidence that the mode of violence among public and private stalkers is different. Stalkers of public figures, if they are violent, will engage in a *predatory* mode of attack, as I have theorized above, and will not communicate a threat beforehand to heighten their probability of success. As Fein & Vossekuil (1999) wrote,

Mounting an attack on a person of public status requires preparation and planning... Persons intending to mount attacks follow paths to their attacks. They often engage in "attack related" behaviours, that is, discernible activities that precede an attack. They may demonstrate interest in previous assassins and assassination attempts... Similar thinking and analysis may hold true for persons who engage in "stalking" behaviours and for those who commit certain kinds of workplace violence (p. 332).

On the other hand, stalkers of private targets, usually an acquaintance or prior sexual intimate, will engage in an *affective* mode of violence, which is usually unplanned, highly emotional and impulsive. They do not prepare for a violent attack, it is usually a reaction to perceived rejection, and they often have articulated an expressive threat to their object of pursuit before the violence. The private stalker threatens attack, but may not consciously intend to do so. The public stalker does not threaten attack because he intends to successfully carry it out.

## **PREDICTION OF STALKING VIOLENCE**

There have been two studies which have used statistical models to attempt to predict stalking violence. Mullen et al. (1999) used log-linear modeling,

a form of regression analysis, to predict the relationship between violence and the independent measures of typology, diagnosis, history of substance abuse, and previous criminal convictions (28% were convictions for interpersonal violence) in a sample of 145 stalkers. Property damage was independently predicted by both substance abuse and previous convictions, although only substance abuse remained significant when all four variables were considered. Assault was predicted by prior criminal convictions and substance abuse, and there was a non-significant trend for typology. Only previous convictions remained significant when all four variables were considered. Although ex-partners were significantly more likely to assault the stalking victim when compared to other relationships, and non-psychotic stalkers were more likely to assault than psychotic stalkers, neither of these dichotomous variables was entered into their regression analysis.

Meloy et al. (2001) studied 59 "obsessional followers" charged with the crime of stalking and related offenses to determine risk factors for violence. Six dichotomous variables—prior sexual intimacy with the victim, major mental disorder (e.g. schizophrenia, mood disorder or delusional disorder), explicit threat toward the victim, personality disorder, chemical abuse/dependency, and prior criminal history—were used in a forward stepwise logistic regression to attempt to predict personal and property violence.

Prior sexual intimacy *alone* was the most statistically significant predictor of violence. No other variables were entered into the model. This resulted in a correct classification of 90.20% of the total cases, with a sensitivity of 96.97%, a specificity of 77.78%, a positive predictive power of 88.89%, and a negative predictive power of 93.33%. Even with the most pessimistic estimation, prior sexual intimacy with the victim resulted in an 11-fold increase in the potential for personal and/or property violence.<sup>5</sup> There were no age or gender differences between the violent and the non-violent stalkers. In a separate analysis, the phi coefficient between relationship type and violence was 0.81, indicating a substantial and strong association. The *absence* of a major mental disorder ( $-0.31$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), the presence of a personality disorder (0.14), an explicit threat (0.26,  $p < .05$ ), prior criminal history (0.01) and chemical abuse/dependency (0.18) showed much weaker correlations with violence risk.

It appears that the very limited predictive research to date has ferreted out three variables which significantly and strongly predict personal and/or property violence among stalkers: prior criminal convictions, substance abuse and prior sexual intimacy with the victim. Two other variables are significantly, although less strongly, related to violence risk

<sup>5</sup> Because the sampling distribution of the odds ratio tends to be skewed when sample sizes are small, the 95% confidence interval for this parameter estimate was calculated. The lower limit was 11.46 and the upper limit was 1093.95.

among stalkers: the absence of a major mental disorder and the articulation of an explicit threat. Both the Mullen et al. (1999) and the Meloy et al. (2001) studies focused upon stalkers who pursued private targets. There is no research to date on predictive factors for violence among stalkers of public targets.

A third study by Menzies et al. (1995), despite its attempt to predict "dangerous behaviour" among erotomaniac males, should not be used as a source of knowledge in this area for a number of reasons: it combined two disparate groups of subjects, it included subjects who had only threatened in the "dangerous" group, and it tested an excessive number of predictor variables given its small sample size ( $n = 29$ ).

### **RISK ASSESSMENT OF VIOLENCE AMONG STALKERS**

The current state of the science in risk of violence among stalkers, and its application to risk assessment, can be summarized through a number of findings and opinions. It is my hope that these points of reference will serve as clinical and forensic guidelines, whether they are formally expressed to a trier of fact, or prove useful in the criminal justice risk management of specific stalking cases.

First, stalkers evidence high frequencies of violence, averaging 25—40%, which is usually directed at the object of pursuit. When samples of stalkers of prior sexual intimates are parialed out from the known universe of stalkers, violence frequencies substantially exceed 50%. Risk management of prior sexually intimate stalking cases should assume that an act of interpersonal violence toward the object of pursuit will occur at some point in the stalking crime.

Second, interpersonal violence in most stalking cases where a private figure is targeted will be done without a weapon, and a minor injury not requiring medical care will result. Homicide rates among stalkers are less than 0.25%, meaning that less than one in four hundred stalking cases will result in the intentional killing of the victim by the stalker.

Third, there is evidence that stalkers of public figures will engage in a mode of violence which is predatory; there is also evidence that stalkers of private figures will engage in a mode of violence which is affective. The latter mode of violence is much more easily managed through criminal justice and mental health intervention, and accounts for most of the stalking violence.

Fourth, most stalkers who are affectively violent toward a private target will have directly communicated a threat to the target beforehand. Most stalkers who are predatorily violent toward a public target will not directly communicate a threat to the target or law enforcement beforehand. In private cases, stalkers who *pose* a threat will often make a threat. In public cases, stalkers who *pose* a threat will usually not make a threat.



Fifth, there are three predictive factors for stalking violence which have been identified: prior criminal history (often interpersonal violence), drug abuse/dependence, and prior sexual intimacy with the victim. There are two other related factors—no mental disorder and threats—which have been associated with an increased risk of violence among stalkers of private targets. Articulated threats should always be taken seriously in risk management of a stalking case, but are typically not acted upon unless the stalker is a prior sexual intimate of the victim.

Sixth, given the limited nature of predictive research on stalking violence, and the likely presence of both psychiatric and criminal histories among stalkers, clinically and actuarially based risk assessment instruments should be utilized, such as the HCR-20 Version 2 (Webster et al., 1997) and the VRAG (Quinsey et al., 1998) in all risk assessments (Meloy, 2000).

Finally, the assessment of violence risk, a continuous process in most cases, should focus on both static (unchangeable) and dynamic (changeable) factors. Two of the three predictive factors currently identified are static (prior criminal history and prior sexual intimacy with the victim). The presence of dynamic factors in a particular stalking case (such as delusions in a schizophrenic stalker of a public figure) bodes well for treatment intervention. As I have noted elsewhere, however, mental health treatment and criminal justice intervention are both necessary, but each alone insufficient, for the effective risk management of most stalking cases (Meloy, 1997b).

Our desire to understand the relationship between the stalker and his violence—and the careful work that will answer our future questions concerning this perplexing and obsessive behaviour—can derive wisdom from the words of William Shakespeare: "Mad in pursuit, and in possession so; Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme" (Sonnet 129).

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