

CASE REPORT

PSYCHIATRY & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

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Identifying and Classifying Juvenile Stalking Behavior

ABSTRACT: Despite the growing research in the area of stalking, the focus has been on adults who engage in this behavior. Unfortunately, almost no studies investigate the prevalence of this behavior in adolescents. Two cases are presented demonstrating not only that stalking occurs during the period of adolescence, but also that there is a significant difference in the motivation underlying this behavior that can be classified similarly to that of adult stalkers. Further, a suggested classification based on these two cases as well as our experience with other juveniles who have exhibited stalking behaviors is proposed. The first case involves a narcissistic youth who also possesses psychopathic traits, while the second involves a lonely, severely socially awkward teen. Juvenile stalking is a societal problem that has not yet garnered the attention that deserves, and all systems that deal with juvenile delinquency (juvenile court, law enforcement, and mental health personnel) as well as the school system must be educated to the prevalence and severity of this yet-to-be-recognized problem.

KEYWORDS: forensic science, stalking, adolescence, psychopathy, bullying, teen dating violence, delinquency

Very little research has been devoted to the stalking behaviors of adolescents. It is not known if adolescents engage in behaviors that are similar to adult stalking behaviors. McCann (1) has illustrated through case studies that stalking behaviors are evidenced during the period of adolescence. He also posited the need to establish the base rate for this behavior in adolescents as well as the need for continued research to determine whether adult stalking typologies adequately reflect stalking patterns and behaviors committed by adolescents. Recent data indicate the highest rate for being stalked occurs for persons between the ages of 18 and 19, followed by person between the ages of 20–24 (2). Data also indicate that stalking victims are likely to be stalked by persons between the ages of 18–20.

While there are numerous typologies of adult stalkers, there is currently no such classification system of juvenile stalkers due not only to the lack of research in this area, but mainly to the current sociolegal view that adolescent stalking is not a pervasive legal problem. This is a classic catch-22 situation, because forensic research usually begins with an identified criminal problem, while social policy is shaped by such research. While the case subjects in McCann's (1) research demonstrate that stalking does occur during adolescence, he applied an adult typology. In this article, we have proposed a classification scheme based on adolescent normative behaviors. While it should be considered provisional at this point in time as it is based upon two case studies, we feel it holds much promise as the research eventually catches up with this yet-to-be-recognized behavior.

Case 1

Nathan is a 16-year-old Caucasian male who was court ordered to undergo a psychological evaluation after being adjudicated on a charge of assault. The victim was his 16-year-old girlfriend. They had been dating for 4 months. Although Nathan described this relationship as exclusive, he admitted to engaging in sexual activity with three other girls during this time. He stated that he does not believe that his girlfriend had ever cheated on him, but reported it made him angry when he saw her talking to other boys at school. The incident that led to his involvement with the juvenile court stemmed from his punching his girlfriend in the face and throwing her on the ground. He did this because she broke up with him after she was told by multiple friends that he had been cheating on her. During the interview, he stated that it was not the relationship coming to an end at that made him angry, but the fact that she initiated the breakup that threw him into a rage. He stated that he comes from a very affluent family; his mother is an attorney and his father a physician. She comes from a lower middle-class background: the mother is a schoolteacher and her father a custodian. He made this distinction between the two family's economic statuses as a further indication that she was lucky to have had an opportunity to date someone of a higher standing. Despite this, she attended the same private school as Nathan. He said that throughout their relationship, despite his professions of love for her, he never really meant it. He stated that he told her this because this was the only way that she would engage in sexual intercourse. He smiled as he talked about how easily she had believed this and reported that he laughed silently to himself every time he said it to her. He said he never had feelings for her, and that she pressed charges against him because she was angry at him, "About how I played her."

A telephone interview with the victim, Julie, revealed a much different story. She reported that Nathan had pursued a romantic

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relationship with her for “a few months,” and that he was “relentless.” Eventually, she agreed to go on a date with him. She said that she told her that he loved her on the first date and stated that he did not make any sexual advances that night, although they did kiss goodnight. He also called her on her cell phone at night to tell her what a good time he had with her and that he was looking forward to their next date, which she agreed to earlier in the evening. The next morning she discovered he had sent three text messages and made one cell phone call during the night. Later that day, he came to her house unannounced, but she had gone to the grocery store with her mother. She reported that from that day forward, he would send her at least three e-mails and multiple text messages throughout the day and would also call her on her home phone at night. She stated that she later figured out that he called her on her home phone rather than on her cell phone at night to make sure that she was actually at home.

Their next date occurred the following weekend. Julie stated that Nathan again told her that he loved her and that he wanted their relationship to be exclusive. When she told him that he was moving too fast and she wanted to “see how it goes,” he became angry and asked her repeatedly why she did not love him. He reminded her how rich his family was, how popular he was, and how the other girls at school would “love to be in your shoes right now.” He told her that she should feel “special.” Ultimately, they did develop a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship, although she never felt comfortable around him. Looking back, she stated that, “it was the worst mistake I ever made.” His obsessiveness increased over time. He constantly checked her cell phone to see who had called her or sent her a text message. If he did not recognize a number, he would call it and ask who was calling her. He did the same thing to people who sent her text messages. The phone calls to her home also increased to three times a night between 8 and 11 p.m. He also frequently drove by the house to see if the light was on in her room. He also was able to change his lunch period so that they could eat lunch together. He would get angry if she refused a ride to school from him, as she frequently was driven to school by her mother.

Julie quickly became tired of Nathan’s smothering behavior and eventually became interested in another boy that she worked with. Word quickly got back to Nathan that Julie and this boy had become close. Nathan began showing up at her work as a waitress. Sometimes he would just look in the window to see what she was doing, while at other times he would come in and order something to eat. During this time, Julie stated that he began making threats to her such as, “You guys will both be sorry,” or, “If you break up with me, that’s it.” Even though Julie and her coworker never formally dated, Nathan began threatening this boy at school. Julie stated that this boy became so afraid that, “He backed off on our friendship.” Nathan would frequently ask this coworker for information about Julie, such as if they had ever kissed, or if she had ever talked about interest in any other boys. Most frequently however, Nathan asked this coworker how often she talked about Nathan.

After Nathan assaulted her, she became increasingly fearful as his behavior became even more erratic. He began making threats to harm her if she would not reestablish the relationship. She did not know why he continued to engage in this behavior because he began dating someone else shortly thereafter. Nathan also enlisted his friends to help badger Julie at school. She was frequently taunted and called names. When she officially filed charges against Nathan, his friends backed off, but Nathan’s behavior got worse. He began leaving messages on her phone saying that he loved her and that he was suicidal. She would not return his phone calls, so

he began sending her text messages and e-mails stating the same. Nathan denied ever doing so during the psychological evaluation, and when presented with copies of such e-mails, he stated that she had a friend send those from his cell phone, which he claimed to have lost. Nathan continued to drive past her house at night and also continued to show up at her place of employment. He tried to get her fired on one occasion, by telling the manager that she had a sexually transmitted disease. Eventually, Julie’s father took out a restraining order against Nathan, which he apparently honored, although they continued to pass each other in the halls and ate lunch at the same time. The taunts and jeers from his friends continued. Other girls approached Julie and reported similar problems with Nathan, but not to this degree. They told her that he constantly accused them of cheating on him, although he was the one actually cheating. They described him as controlling, and once he had their full attention and affection, he became bored with them and showed very little interest in them. It was not until they began to withdraw from the relationship that he again showed any interest in maintaining it and did so in a threatening manner. At other times, he would be overly dramatic, telling them, “I don’t want to live without you,” or “I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”

Psychological Test Results

Nathan’s cognitive abilities were within the average range. On the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-IV, he received a full-scale IQ score of 108. Academically, Nathan had always been a solid student, and his accumulative grade point average was 2.9. School records described him as a lazy student with little ambition. His extracurricular activities were restricted to athletics. He was also described by one teacher as “haughty.” Nathan expressed a strong interest in going to an Ivy League school and hoped to become either a physician or an attorney.

Nathan was administered the MMPI-A, which is an objective measure of psychopathology. His clinical profile indicated that he was a narcissistic and selfish individual. His interpersonal relationships were likely to be shallow and short lived. He was manipulative and viewed others in terms of how they can be manipulated. His profile also indicated a significant deficit in his ability to empathize with others. He had difficulties with authority figures and was not likely to be deterred by negative consequences. He was easily bored and prone to sensation seeking.

On the Millon Adolescent Clinical Inventory, Nathan’s profile indicated narcissistic traits and that he was likely to be overly self-confident and self-assured. Others were likely to see him as arrogant and conceited. His perception of his abilities was likely to be inflated and not reflective of his actual accomplishments. Because others were not likely to recognize his “talents,” he was likely to respond with irritability or a dismissiveness of others when they failed to admire him. Further, he has a sense of entitlement and feels justified in exploiting others to obtain desired recognition. Further, he is likely to have very little respect for others and may appear pleasant only when it leads to obtaining a desired outcome. He is likely to be focused on fantasies of unlimited success or rewards. He is also likely to be very resistant at admitting that he has any problems or that he has caused anyone else problems. Lastly, he is likely to harbor chronic feelings of being unappreciated and taken for granted.

Nathan’s score on the Psychopathy Checklist: Youth Version indicated that he is likely to be severely self-absorbed, manipulative, callous, and indifferent to the suffering of others. His total score was 30 and places him at the 90th percentile when compared

to youths in the normative sample. This score indicates that he is likely to continue to engage in a wide variety of delinquent behaviors and is also likely to display a callous and indifferent attitude to the needs or feelings of others. The scores on factor one and factor two (Interpersonal and Affective) were at the 98th and 94th percentile, respectively.

Case 2

Walter is a 17-year-old male who had been referred for a psychological evaluation after being charged with trespassing and voyeurism. He had been looking into the bedroom window of a 13-year-old girl upon whom he had become fixated. The neighbors called the police and reported that they had seen him doing this on multiple occasions.

Walter came to the appointment wearing sandals, black socks, checkered shorts, and a Spiderman T-shirt. His hair was unkempt, and personal grooming was poor. He had a foul body odor. His grandmother drove him to the evaluation. Walter reported that his biologic parents never married and that he had never met his father. He stated that he had limited contact with his mother and had been living with his maternal grandmother since the age of seven—but did not know why. A review of his court file revealed that his mother had battled alcohol, heroin, and marijuana addictions and also had an unspecified mental illness. The Department of Children and Family Services became involved with the family because of maternal neglect. His grandmother was awarded full legal custody, which his mother never contested. Walter estimated that he saw his mother, “a few times a month,” but these visits would typically be very brief. He stated that his relationship with his grandmother was quite poor, but could not expand upon that. He did admit that all of his physical needs were met, such as clothing and food.

When asked, Walter said that he became involved with the court because, “I like a girl but she doesn’t like me.” When asked about the age difference, he stated that, “It shouldn’t matter since we love each other.” Walter was asked why he believed that this 13-year-old girl loved him, and he stated, “I know she does.” He was unaware of the contradiction of his previous statement regarding why he became involved with the court. He had no prior involvement with the juvenile court until he received these charges.

Review of court file revealed that Walter had been “harassing” a 13-year-old girl, Tina, who lived down the street from him. The middle school she attended was only one block away from their house. Walter was initially unable to state why he had developed a crush on someone who was much younger than him, but then later stated that it was because “She was nice to me.” He stated that he was from very unpopular school, had no friends, was constantly made fun of at school and at times bullied, and this girl showed him kindness. He stated that he was in a park and Tina was there with her friends. The friends began making fun of him, and Tina told them to stop. When asked for details about how he had harassed Tina, he was unable to provide any information.

In a telephone call to Tina, she affirmed that she first became aware of Walter after the incident in the park. She stated that she and her friends were having a picnic, and Walter had attempted to start a dialog with them. She stated that her friends started calling him names such as, “dork” and “freak.” She stated that she told them to stop. Walter then left them alone, but stayed near them at the park. He followed her home but did not attempt to make contact with her. He stood in her driveway for about five minutes and then eventually left. From that point on she saw him in close proximity to her house on a daily basis. At times, he would be across

the street, and at other times, he would be near the next-door neighbor’s house. She began receiving telephone calls from a male who never identified himself, and when she answered the phone, no one spoke. She also began receiving letters that were never signed. She described them as love letters but was unsure if they were from Walter because they were written on stationery that had pictures of superheroes on them. This went on for *c.* 2 weeks. He then began to follow her as she walked to and from school. This frightened her so much that she told her parents about “this weird kid who was creeping me out.” Neither parent was able to drive her to school because of their work schedule, but an older neighborhood girl had agreed to walk her to school. Walter continued to follow her to school, but had not attempted to make contact with her. Tina’s father contacted the police department, who reported that they would not be able to do anything because he had not threatened or made any contact with her. Tina’s father alerted the neighbors about Walter, and Walter was eventually caught peering into her bedroom window at night.

Psychological Test Results

On the Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale-III, Walter had received a full-scale IQ score of 83. Both verbal and performance IQ scores were similar. Although he was 17, he was still in the 10th grade. His attendance was sporadic, and school officials indicated that neither his mother nor his grandmother showed much interest in Walter’s schooling. Typically, phone calls about his absences were not returned by his grandmother. She never attended any parent–teacher conferences. School records described him as, “shy yet at times an instigator,” and “unpopular and bullied.” In class, he sometimes talked to himself or played with action figures in the back of the room. He generally displayed poor grooming and hygiene. He rarely turned in homework, and his grades were failing. No identified friends were reported, and he was not involved in any extracurricular activities.

On the MMPI–A, Walter’s profile indicated depression, low self-esteem, social introversion, and withdrawal along with feelings of inferiority. The profile suggested passivity and conforming behaviors. Adolescents with this profile are at a lower risk to engage in delinquent or violent behaviors. The most salient feature of this profile is social ineptitude and a lack of social skills. Analysis of the supplementary scales indicated feelings of social alienation and pessimism regarding future social interactions. These persons feel that they have no one to turn to or depend on and typically have no close friends.

On the Millon Adolescent Clinical Inventory, Walter’s profile described no positive life experiences. He was likely to be isolated and socially withdrawn. His affect was likely to be flat and expressionless. There is an expectation that interactions with others are likely to leave him disappointed and sad. He is likely to be described by others as lethargic and unambitious. There is a pronounced sensitivity and preoccupation with his sense of alienation and hopelessness. This profile also reveals significant concern about a lack of direction in life and confusion about a lack of identity. There is a need to affiliate with others, but fearing rejection, he would tend to remain uninvolved with others, thus avoiding anticipated rejection.

Juvenile Stalking Classification

We set forth two cases that may represent two types of adolescent stalking. As it is premature to formulate a typology, we advance the idea that these two cases may represent two general

patterns of adolescent stalking, and with the accumulation of additional cases, an empirical typology may begin to take shape. However, based upon these cases, a tentative grouping is advanced. We expect that this initial grouping will be modified and refined with the accumulation of data from future cases. The initial grouping is as follows:

Type I

Socially Awkward

Desires relations with others.
Socially awkward because of poor social skills and/or poor intimacy skills.
Lonely, has few interpersonal relationships.
Low-level depression possible.
Parental relations distant and unfulfilling.
Unpopular or feel “irrelevant” or “lost.” Not part of any particular clique; rather is on the fringe and does not fit into any particular group.

Object Relations

Has preoccupied attachment style.
Has negative view of self and overly positive view of others.
Mirroring self-objects needed for idealizing and twinship experience (or dependency needs) not experienced during infancy.

Motivation for Stalking

Limited or no prior relationship with object of pursuit.
Likely an acquaintance, coworker or neighbor.
Establishing a relationship the main motivating factor.
Targeted person more annoyed than frightened.

Stalking Modality

Obsessive following, peeping/spying, repeated phone calls, letter writing, e-mails, or text messaging.
Actual face-to-face contact may be limited because of extreme feelings of inadequacy.

Risk for Violence

Low.
No history of violence or aggression and does not threaten or aggress against targeted individual.

Type II

Angry/Disgruntled

Perpetrator is relatively popular youth.
Unrealistic (or unwarranted) high level of self-regard.
Has anger issues and is overly sensitive to criticism.
Engages in bullying activities.
Parental relationships appear good to the casual observer, but closer inspections reveal a narcissistic family pattern and parents are distant yet overly indulgent.

Object Relations

Has a dismissing quality.
Overly inflated self-esteem; views others as inferior, yet overly sensitive to criticism and reacts with anger to slight narcissistic insults.
Victims viewed as part-objects to be used for own needs until no longer fulfills usefulness.

Motivation for Stalking

Had previous relationship with targeted object.
Utilized threats, intimidation or violence to control other person or dictate the terms of the relationship.
Anger and revenge fuels this behavior, which is a cover for feelings of humiliation.

Stalking Modality

Attempts to enlist others in his campaign of public denigration of ex-partner while concomitantly and covertly try to “win back” ex-partner. This is done to show her that if she is not with him, then she is “a nobody” and will be very unpopular.
Engages in stalking behaviors at same time publically demeaning pursuit object.
Threatens or attempts to intimidate the others’ new partner.
Refuses to accept that other person terminated relationship.
Will not take “no” for an answer.
Stalking behaviors include threats to self, pursuit object or objects new partner.

Risk for Violence

Moderate to high
Violence and/or aggression likely present in that relationship, possibly including forced sexual activity. There likely has been at least one incident of violence within the relationship.
Violence can be both predatory and affective.

These two types of adolescent stalking also suggest the “rejected,” “incompetent,” and “intimacy seeking” subtypes from the Mullen et al. (3) adult typology of stalking. These two adolescent groupings also represent, respectively, the prior sexual intimate and acquaintance stalking subgroups in the Mohandie et al. (4) RECON typology. In both adult typologies, violence is significantly higher among the “rejected” and the “prior sexual intimate” types than the other types in each typology. Both typologies have also been shown to be empirically equivalent when violence is predicted across groups (5) with threats and prior violence being significant predictors. Risk of violence in stalking cases varies with the stalker’s motivation and relationship to the victim, with prior sexual intimates being the most violent (6, 7).

Discussion

These two case examples clearly illustrate that stalking does occur during adolescence, although the prevalence of this behavior is currently unknown. Juvenile stalking has yet to be recognized by the juvenile justice system as a serious problem. The adult legal system in the US began to address stalking after several high-profile murders in the 1980s. The juvenile justice system will proactively address the stalking behaviors of adolescents before a similar tragedy occurs.

The two cases in this article also demonstrate that while stalking behaviors can be similar, the motivations to engage in such behavior are entirely different. Nathan was motivated by revenge after feeling rejected and humiliated. He continued to pursue Julie even after proclaiming that he had no interest in her romantically and had already established a new relationship with another female. He also had committed acts of domestic violence in the relationship and did so when he felt that Julie was going to end the relationship. His motivation for stalking was revenge, a chance to even the score and to “save face” with his friends.

Walter’s motivation was to establish a relationship with a much younger female. He had no previous relationship with her but

quickly became fixated on her because she was essentially the first person to recognize him as a meaningful person. This seemingly innocuous act by Tina had a profound affect on Walter, and he grossly overinterpreted its meaning. He displayed a passive-pursuit style and did not threaten her and did not purposely attempt to frighten her. He had no intention of causing her bodily harm. At his court hearing, he was told to stop this behavior, which after a 6-month follow-up with probation, he had obeyed; although Tina stated that she would “every now and then” see him in the community, but had not come onto her family’s property or followed her to or from school.

Although the two youths offer a stark contrast in essentially all areas of functioning, they share similarities in the level of family functioning. While Nathan came from a privileged background in which all of his basic needs and material wants were met, his parents were emotionally absent. He reported that when he was younger, he felt that he was never listened to by either parent and felt that they were never available to for him when he was scared, upset, or angry. He reported that as he became older and more involved with sports that required his parents to provide transportation or attendance, they were unavailable. Despite being a star athlete, his parents rarely attended his games. Nathan reported that he found it confusing that his parents would at times brag about his athletic abilities to their friends at parties, yet showed little interest in supporting these activities. He also reported that they seemed very disinterested in how he was doing, both socially and scholastically. When not at work, they brought home work with them, or spent time with each other and ignored him and his older sister.

What is also notable that neither of his parents participated in this evaluation, even though they were court ordered to do so. They never returned phone messages left so that they could provide background information on their son. They were unable to even provide transportation, and this parental duty was delegated to his sister.

Walter, on the other hand, had been neglected by both biologic parents and was raised by a maternal grandmother whose interest in him was at best indifferent. She provided for his basic needs, but Walter stated that her existence mainly centered on smoking cigarettes and watching television. He stated that she received social security supplemental income for an unknown disability as her sole means of income. Walter’s parents never married, and his father had never been involved with Walter and had been in and out of prison since his birth. Walter’s mother was an alcoholic who was incarcerated for periods of time, usually on charges of drunk and disorderly or domestic violence. Walter stated that as far back as he could remember, his mother would bring new boyfriends to the house who would stay for a few weeks at a time. These relationships were volatile, and their drunken arguments would keep Walter up late, he would oversleep and then miss school. Walter said that his mother never allowed him to go outside and play with neighborhood children or have other kids over his house because they were “no good” or that “they’ll hurt you if you put your trust in them.” Walter also believed that his mother did not want kids over because she was frequently hung over. His grandmother did not allow him to have friends over but he was allowed to play outside. His grandmother stated during the interview that Walter was always an “odd child,” but could not give reasons or examples of odd behaviors to support this assertion.

Although there are stark contrasts in parental functioning, both sets of parents placed the child’s needs well below their own. Both of Nathan’s parents were overly involved in their own careers and had very little emotional investment in him. Walter’s parents were both physically and emotionally absent and were poor role models.

They were a source of disappointment, and he had strong feelings of rejection. He internalized the rejection and viewed himself as unworthy and worthless. He had spent a significant amount of time with her prior to the change in legal custody, but she too displayed a minimal investment in his life.

The distinction between the two groups may prove to be extremely important, as it might enable us to develop the treatment that best fits the youth classification, as opposed to having a “one size fits all” approach to treatment. For example, Walter (in the Socially Awkward group) would not need anger management, but rather social skills training and psychotherapy with the goal of raise self-esteem and social competence. Conversely, Nathan (the youth in the Angry/Disgruntled group) would not need such a treatment regimen, but rather would benefit from treatments focusing on establishing empathy toward others and reducing physical and psychological battering. The grouping also has importance for violence risk assessment. Adolescents in the Angry/Disgruntled group are suggestively more likely to engage in violent behavior than those in the Socially Awkward group, but this would need to be empirically demonstrated.

Adolescent stalking may continue to be an unrecognized crime, and juvenile perpetrators will not be identified. Perpetrators of juvenile stalking need to be formally charged with stalking, which would require the assistance of local police departments and juvenile prosecutors. In fact, had Walter been eighteen at the time of his pursuit of Tina, he very well could have been charged with stalking since legally, he would be considered an adult. The legal system knows how to respond to adults who engage in stalking behaviors, but currently, the system not only does not know how to respond to juvenile stalkers, it has no idea that teens engage in this behavior.

McCann (1) has identified the school system currently as possibly the best resource to identify adolescents who engage in stalking behaviors, and that they also are in the best position to get the mental health system involved in these cases. Once this happens, forensic research can begin to collect aggregate data on the onset of stalking behaviors, the motivation behind stalking, the number of victims a juvenile may stalk, length of stalking behaviors, reasons for terminating the stalking of a particular subject, and methods of stalking. Until this occurs, this dangerous yet currently under-recognized behavior will continue to occur and there will continue to be more victims.

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