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PARTNER STALKING

Psychological Dominance or “Business as Usual”?

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Partner stalking may remain one of the least clearly understood forms of intimate violence. This review examines the literature guided by two main goals: (a) to examine how partner stalking is distinct from nonpartner forms of stalking and (b) to describe areas of research on partner stalking that need to be systematically addressed to deepen the understanding of partner stalking and to craft more effective mental health and criminal justice responses. These areas of research include three overarching questions: (a) Is partner stalking a unique form of psychological dominance or is it just “business as usual”? (b) What components characterize stalking differently from business as usual for women? and (c) How is psychological distress within the context of partner stalking best characterized?

Key words: *partner stalking; partner violence; domestic violence; stalking*

It’s just bizarre, he tried to keep showing (me), “I am still here, I can get you.” I am terrified. This man shows again and again and again that the rules don’t apply to him. Nothing that the court has ordered has worked . . . He can’t stop himself. If he has an off switch, he refuses to use it.¹

Steven Kreytak, 2006

IN VERY GENERAL TERMS, stalking can be described as an unwanted and repeated course of conduct directed toward a specific individual that induces fear or concern for safety (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Westrup & Fremouw, 1998). One of the most cited studies on stalking prevalence found, from a national random household survey, that 1 in 12 (8.1%) women and 1 in 45 (2.2%) men had been stalked (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). A more recent national random household survey found approximately 1 in 14 (7%)

women and 1 in 45 (2%) men reported they had ever been stalked (Basile, Swahn, Chen, & Saltzman, 2006). As is evident from these prevalence rates, females are more likely to experience stalking than males. Furthermore, stalkers, regardless of target gender, are most often male (Spitzberg, 2002b; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; White, Kowalski, Lyndon, & Valentine, 2002).

Spitzberg and Cupach (2007) found that stalking lasts an average of close to 2 years (22 months on average) across 28 studies that reported stalking duration. Other studies indicate that women are more afraid of stalking behaviors than men (Bjerregaard, 2000; Davis, Coker, & Sanderson, 2002; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; White et al., 2002). Close to 80% of stalking victims² know their stalker (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007), and the largest category of stalkers targeting females is intimate partners (including boyfriends,

ex-boyfriends, husbands, and ex-husbands; Melton, 2000; Sheridan, Blaauw, & Davies, 2003; Spitzberg, 2002b; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

Although stalking has been the increased focus of media attention, public policy, and research for over a decade, there are still many unanswered questions. Many of these questions have been noted in a number of prior literature reviews. There are at least 17 prior literature review articles and 3 books that have reviewed the past decade of literature on stalking (Abrams & Robinson, 1998; Brewster, 2003b; Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Douglas & Dutton, 2001; Emer, 2001; Emerson, Ferris, & Gardner, 1998; Fisher, 2001; Jordan, Quinn, Jordan, & Daileader, 2000; McEwan, Mullen, & Purcell, 2007; McGuire & Wraith, 2000; Melton, 2000; Mullen, Pathe, & Purcell, 2000; Ravensberg & Miller, 2003; Rosenfeld, 2004; Sheridan et al., 2003; Sinwelski & Vinton, 2001; Spitz, 2003; Spitzberg, 2002b; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2003, 2007).

This article differs from the prior literature reviews by focusing on the unique dimensions of partner stalking and by identifying how research on partner stalking has remained largely superficial, which has limited the development of effective legal or other interventions. Miller (2001) speculated that one important difference between stalking crimes and other kind of crimes is the mutual dependence of the justice system and the victim in addressing this crime. Specifically, there are few crimes where the victim's safety is threatened over such a long period of time, and where the criminal justice system must rely on victims for evidence of the crime. Highlighting the intersection of mutual dependence between the victim and the criminal justice system in addressing the stalking, Miller (2001) summarized with the following:

Most commonly, however, the investigator has to rely on victim cooperation in keeping a record of the stalking events to help in building a prosecutable case. At the same time, the victim is experiencing stress and fear as the stalking and the investigation continue. During this interim period, the victim may have to cope with stalking behavior as best she can, often without official support or advice. As a result, many victims develop coping

behaviors that may, on the surface, appear to undercut the seriousness of the threat faced by the victim and her fear of the stalker. (p. 75)

This quote not only highlights the importance of victim responses to partner stalking for law enforcement but also underscores the importance of understanding the psychological consequences of being stalked. Furthermore, given that more women experience stalking, are more afraid when they experience stalking behaviors, and because the largest categories of stalkers are partners, this article will focus on female victims of partner stalking. Specifically, after a brief introduction, this review has two main goals: (a) to examine how partner stalking is distinct from nonpartner forms of stalking and (b) to describe areas of research on partner stalking that need to be systematically addressed to deepen the understanding of partner stalking and to craft more effective mental health and criminal justice responses. The focus of this article is not meant to diminish the importance of research on stalkers, especially violent partners who stalk. However, that aspect of partner stalking is beyond the scope and purpose of this particular article.

WHAT MAKES PARTNER STALKING DIFFERENT?

Definitions of stalking require specific key elements, regardless of the victim–stalker relationship. These key elements typically include the experience of unwanted attention that is repeated and that invokes fear. Furthermore, most stalkers employ common forms of harassment such as surveillance, property destruction, threats, unwanted communications (e.g., text messages, phone messages, e-mails, talking to others, spreading rumors), and actual violence (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004). However, there are at least five main dimensions to partner stalking that make the experience distinct from nonpartner stalking: (a) the relationship history or context, (b) a wider array and more frequent stalking tactics, (c) the increased risk of threats and violence, (d) the timing of the beginning of stalking, and (e) greater psychological distress.

Relationship History or Context

In contrast to most other forms of stalking, partner stalking occurs within the context of the relationship history. The prior relationship between the stalker and the victim was often characterized by psychological abuse and control, physical assault, and sexual assault (Brewster, 1999, 2003a; Coleman, 1997; Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Davis, Ace, & Andra, 2000; Logan, Leukefeld, & Walker, 2000; McFarlane, Campbell, & Watson, 2002; Roberts, 2002; Spitzberg & Rhea, 1999). For example, Tjaden and Thoennes (1998) found that 81% of the women who reported being stalked by a husband or ex-husband also reported physical assault and about one third (31%) reported sexual assault by that partner.

Not all women who experienced partner violence are stalked (Douglas & Dutton, 2001; Harrell, Smith, & Newmark, 1993); however, women stalked by a violent partner or ex-partner typically experience more psychological abuse and controlling behavior, more serious threats, more severe physical assault, and more of them experience injury as well as sexual assault during the relationship (Brewster, 2003b; Coleman, 1997; Cole, Logan, & Shannon, 2005; Logan, Shannon, & Cole, 2007; Mechanic, Weaver, & Resick, 2000; Melton, 2007a).

The relationship history, especially one characterized by physical and sexual violence, injury, and threats of death or harm, plays a unique and critical role in the experience of stalking (Logan, Cole, Shannon, & Walker, 2006). First, the past history of violence provides cues that often only the two individuals with that history can understand. For example, a former partner following his ex-girlfriend around, shaking his fist at her when she happens to look his way may be a strong reminder of physical violence she endured during the relationship; thus, she may interpret the fist shaking as a very real, visceral reminder of the assault. Outsiders who may happen to see a man shaking his fist may consider the behavior odd but may or may not interpret his actions as threatening. Moreover, even if they did perceive it as a threat, an outsider would most likely perceive the threat as less dangerous

than the woman who knows his past. One stalking victim reported that just a certain look from her ex-husband induced fear (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006): "Seeing . . . my ex-husband brings back memories . . . He has a way of looking at me, he knows how to look at me when he sees me to make me just shudder. And I'm afraid" (p. 25).

Second, there may be a dose-response relationship between severity of the history of violence and fear evoked from the stalking behavior. For example, the Logan, Cole, et al. (2006) study found that the severity of abuse during the relationship was associated with greater the level of fear from stalking. Specifically, the more psychological abuse tactics a woman experienced in the relationship, the greater her fear and concern about future harm from the stalker. Likewise, women in more severely physically and sexually abusive relationships also reported more fear and worried more about future harm by their stalkers than women whose partners used fewer physically and/or sexually abusive tactics (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006).

Wider Array and More Frequent Stalking Tactics

Having a prior history of intimacy provides the stalker with a wider array of tactics to employ during the stalking (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006; Mohandie, Meloy, McGowan, & Williams, 2006; Mullen et al., 2000; Sheridan & Davies, 2001). When compared with nonintimate stalkers, intimate stalkers engage in more frequent stalking (Mohandie et al., 2006; Nicasastro, Cousins, & Spitzberg, 2000). One reason is that stalkers may know their partners' greatest weaknesses, concerns, fears, and secrets as well as details about their work, friends, family, customary routines, and hangouts (Emerson et al., 1998; Logan, Cole, et al., 2006). Thus, not only do partner stalkers know more niches of private life to invade, they have more information that can be used to punish, humiliate, and torment women as part of the stalking as noted by one victim below (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006):

He's a terrorist. It's like he knows I don't want him to call my grandmother because she's ill. So

if I [refuse to communicate with him] he starts calling my grandmother. I regret everything I have ever told that man, every personal thing because he's used it as a weapon against me, even the casual stuff. (p. 14)

Stalking tactics may also be increased when stalkers and victims have children in common. Specifically, having children in common with a stalker may increase the likelihood of interaction, the variety of threats (e.g., threatening to obtain custody of children, sending threats through children, actually threatening to harm the children, and kidnapping or threatening to kidnap children), the likelihood of harassment through the court system, and the likelihood of the victim having more regular routines that are difficult to change thus increasing the opportunity for access (Brewster, 2003a; Logan, Cole, et al., 2006; Mullen et al., 2000; Proctor, 2003). Partner stalkers may also take advantage of how protective services may threaten to remove children exposed to partner violence. Logan, Cole, et al. (2006) found that some mothers feared that child custody could be threatened if child protective services or the courts believed the children were at risk in the home or that the mother was "unfit" as this is the message the partner often conveyed. Mothers were also concerned for their children's safety and their level of fear because the stalking tactics sometimes include the children as noted by a stalking victim in the quote below (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006):

[The children are] also afraid of every time they see him. [The children wonder], "Is he gonna see us? You know, is he gonna stop us? Is he gonna run mommy off the road and not know we're in the car like he did before?" (p. 165)

Also, in partner stalking the array of tactics may be expanded by proxy—the involvement of other people in attempting to contact or keep track of victims (Mullen et al., 2000). Several studies have indicated that about half of the women being stalked by a violent partner or ex-partner reported that their partners elicited the help of others in stalking them (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006; Melton, 2007b). Proxy stalking may become easier when stalkers and their victims have had a prior relationship. The

proxies often include friends and relatives, unidentified persons, professionals (e.g., private investigator), and the stalkers' new intimate partner (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006; Melton, 2007b; Mullen et al., 2000). Furthermore, most women believe that these individuals knew they were helping their stalker as noted in the examples below (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006):

He had a friend who would just walk to the house. I could look out my bedroom window and he had a chair and he was sitting outside in a lounge chair. In the parking lot! . . . I would look out my bedroom window and he was staring straight dead at me, I would wave at him and he would wave back. I would raise the window and yell and ask him what he was doing and he said, "You know what I'm doing."

My sister's husband [helped him]. I saw the pictures! I saw him [her brother-in-law] in the pictures because you could see him in the side mirror of the car. He was driving and my ex-husband was taking the pictures of me all around my driveway and everywhere. (p. 35)

Increased Risk of Violence and Threats

A number of studies suggest that stalkers targeting partners, compared to stalkers targeting other victims, are more likely to threaten victims and to actually commit more violence (James & Farnham, 2003; Mohandie et al., 2006; Palarea, Zona, Lane, & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1999; Rosenfeld & Harmon, 2002; Rosenfeld, 2003, 2004; Sheridan & Davies, 2001). Several studies of partner stalking have also found that stalkers who made threats were more likely to carry out violence than those who did not make threats (Brewster, 2000; Roberts, 2005). Furthermore, stalking has been associated with intimate partner homicide and attempted homicide (McFarlane et al., 1999, 2002; Moracco, Runyan, & Butts, 1998). For example, McFarlane et al. (1999) found that 76% of partner-homicide victims and 85% of attempted partner-homicide victims had been stalked in the year prior to the lethal or attempted lethal violence.

Partner stalkers represent a persistent group who are also more likely to use approach tactics than nonpartner stalkers (Mohandie et al., 2006; Palarea et al., 1999). In cases of partner stalking, many boundaries have already been crossed in the relationship, thus making

approach tactics more likely and potentially more threatening (Palarea et al., 1999; Proctor, 2003). Studies examining recidivism after a court intervention underscores the persistence of partner stalkers. More intimate stalkers reoffend than nonintimate stalkers (Mohandie et al., 2006; Rosenfeld, 2003). Mohandie et al. (2006) reviewed over 1,000 criminal justice records for cases of stalking or domestic violence that had been, or were currently, under investigation or threat management, and summarized their findings of the increased risks to targets from partner stalkers compared to nonpartner stalkers with the following:

[Partner stalkers] frequently approach their targets and escalate in frequency and intensity of pursuit. They insult, interfere, threaten, and are violent. Over one-half of these subjects will physically assault their object of pursuit. More than one-third also show evidence of suicidal ideation or behavior. Virtually all of them reoffend, and they do so more quickly than the other groups. Almost one out of three will threaten with or use a weapon. (p. 153)

Further evidence of the risk of violence associated with partner stalking can be found in a recent study that examined protective order violations (Logan & Walker, 2009). This study found that the number of months stalked the year before the protective order was issued predicted protective order violations. In fact, that study also found that, even after controlling for a variety of relevant factors, stalking was a risk factor for every other kind of violence after the protective order was issued.³ Specifically, women who were stalked after the protective order was issued were 1.8 times more likely to experience psychological abuse, 4 times more likely to experience physical abuse, 4.8 times more likely to experience severe physical violence, 9.3 times more likely to experience sexual assault, and 4.7 times more likely to be injured.⁴

Timing of Stalking

One thing that becomes clear from examining the research literature on partner stalking is that it often begins while the relationship is still intact (Mullen et al., 2000). Between 25% and 80% of women indicate the stalking began or

occurred during the relationship with the stalker (Brewster, 2003a; Hackett, 2000; Logan, Cole, et al., 2006; Melton, 2007b; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). For example, Logan, Cole, et al. (2006) found that 79% of the stalking victims had been stalked both during the relationship and during periods of separation. Six percent of the women in the study said they were stalked only during periods of separation, and 11% of women reported they were only stalked during the relationship; however, the majority of those women had never been separated from the stalker. That same study reported that women being stalked by a violent partner thought their partner stalked them during the relationship because of increased control, jealousy (trying to make sure she wasn't cheating), or to ensure that the relationship continued. One victim who said her partner was convinced she was dating someone else said (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006),

It was a control thing. I mean he was looking for the incident report. He was looking for, basically, to see, "Why'd you go there, what'd you do?" . . . or he'd want to know it beforehand so that he could just show up. (p. 49)

Being stalked during an intact relationship can hinder help seeking or attempts to leave the relationship (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006). Even so, the literature on domestic violence clearly indicates that most women in violent relationships do leave (Logan, Walker, Jordan, & Campbell, 2004). In fact, one recent study found that being stalked by a violent partner was negatively related to continuing the relationship after obtaining a protective order; for women who did continue a relationship after the protective order, [ongoing] stalking was associated with separation at the follow-up (Logan, Walker, Shannon, & Cole, 2008). However, being stalked while separated may pose some unique risks for women with violent ex-partners, as literature suggests that separation is associated with ongoing violence and sometimes increased violence (Logan et al., 2004). Furthermore, several studies suggest that being separated from a violent ex-partner may be associated with more severe and frequent stalking (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006; Melton, 2007a).

Greater Psychological Distress

In general, the literature suggests that being the victim of stalking is associated with significant psychological distress (Amar, 2006; Davis et al., 2002; Kuehner, Gass, & Dressing, 2007; Sheridan et al., 2003; Spitzberg, 2002b; Westrup, Fremouw, Thompson, & Lewis, 1999). One study found that 83% of the sample of stalking victims reported anxiety symptoms, and a large number of victims reported distressing recollections, flashbacks, nightmares, appetite changes, and depressed mood (Pathé & Mullen, 1997). Another study of stalking victims, of which 68% were stalked by an ex-partner, concluded that 78% had symptom levels that indicated the presence of at least one psychiatric disorder (Blaauw, Winkel, Arensman, Sheridan, & Freeve, 2002). That same study found that mean scale scores for somatic symptoms, anxiety, social dysfunction, and severe depression were comparable to psychiatric outpatient populations (and both samples had higher mean scale scores than general population or general practitioner patient samples).

When partner stalking occurs within the context of a current or former relationship that was violent, victim distress is significantly increased (Brewster, 2002; Logan et al., 2004; Mechanic, Weaver, et al., 2000). For example, Nicastro et al. (2000) found that partner-stalking victims with histories of partner violence experienced over three times as many anxiety symptoms as stalking victims with no history of partner violence with the stalker. Brewster (2002) reported, from a sample of 187 women stalked by an ex-intimate partner, that women who experienced violence during the relationship had higher distress levels than women who had not experienced violence during the relationship. On the other hand, another study found increased psychological distress among women who experienced more frequent stalking behaviors by their violent ex-partners compared to women who experienced infrequent stalking behaviors by their violent ex-partners (Mechanic, Uhlmansiek, Weaver, & Resick, 2000).

One problem with many studies examining the impact of stalking on psychological distress is that few studies control for key factors that

could also account for increases in psychological distress such as prior history of partner violence from the stalker. More specifically, there is a strong relationship between intimate partner violence and psychological distress, such as anxiety, posttraumatic stress syndrome (PTSD), and depression (Logan, Walker, Jordan, & Leukefeld, 2006). The overlap of partner abuse during the relationship and psychological distress as well as the overlap of partner abuse and stalking make it difficult to differentiate the effects of stalking versus other abuse on psychological distress. However, there is some preliminary evidence that stalking does in fact contribute uniquely to psychological distress (Basile, Arias, Desai, & Thompson, 2004; Logan & Cole, 2007; Logan, Shannon, Cole, & Walker, 2006; Mechanic, Weaver, & Resick, 2008). Specifically, Logan and Cole (2007) found that the duration of stalking victimization was a good predictor of PTSD symptoms at the 12-month follow-up controlling for a number of relevant factors.⁵ That same study found that duration of stalking was associated with higher fear and lower perceptions of protective order effectiveness. One victim, who reported she had never been diagnosed with any mental health problems, described the intense anxiety she had experienced since the stalking began (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006):

I feel like I have a lot of anxiety. I have anxiety attacks sometimes for reasons that I can't even relate back to anything that is happening in my daily life. I have anxiety attacks now and I never [used to]. Not like where my chest tightens up and I feel like I can't breathe and stuff for no reason. (pp. 128-129)

Summary of What Makes Partner Stalking Different

This overview of stalking research suggests there are at least five ways that partner stalking experiences are different from nonpartner-stalking experiences. There is substantial evidence suggesting that stalking is a form or extension of partner violence and that relational history provides a context where cues of implicit or explicit threat are more meaningful to the victim than they would be to someone

without an understanding of the relationship history. The relationship history also gives stalkers a wider array of tactics to potentially use in his arsenal, including intimate knowledge of victims and their life, children, and proxy stalking. Adding to the terror of being stalked by a prior violent partner, there is evidence that intimate partner stalkers are more likely to threaten their victims and to follow through on those threats. Another unique dimension of partner stalking is that it often begins or occurs while the relationship is intact and continues during periods of separation. However, stalking during periods of separation may be especially dangerous. Finally, stalking victimization is associated with psychological distress, and some preliminary evidence suggests that stalking by a violent partner contributes uniquely to psychological distress.

In general, the research on stalking is still in formative stages and this is especially the case with partner stalking. Although there are some general trends that have been confirmed across multiple studies, most of what we know about partner stalking needs to be replicated with larger samples and needs to move beyond descriptive or correlational findings. The next section provides a brief overview of three selected major areas that need closer examination to provide a more in-depth understanding of partner stalking.

IS PARTNER STALKING A UNIQUE FORM OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DOMINANCE OR IS IT "BUSINESS AS USUAL"?

One of the critical unanswered questions about partner stalking is when does partner harassment or ongoing psychological and other abuse become stalking? In other words, what determines ongoing violent and harassing behavior as stalking versus business as usual (or continuation of abuse)? Is there a smooth continuum from harassment to stalking or are these two fundamentally different constructs? This question has been asked regarding courtship stalking by a number of investigators (e.g., Cupach & Spitzberg, 2000, 2004; Sinclair & Frieze, 2000, 2005; Spitzberg, Nicastro, & Cousins, 1998) but has not been adequately

addressed within the partner-stalking context. In other words, when women separate from partners who were violent they are often subjected to a variety of ongoing harassment and abuse tactics and even periodic violence, but they are not all are classified as being stalked (Logan et al., 2004; Logan, Shannon, & Cole, 2007; Logan & Walker, 2009). Thus, the core of the question is to better understand what exactly differentiates continuing abuse and harassment from stalking. Is the distinction related to specific features of stalker behavior or is there other empirical evidence that clearly shows stalking as a distinct phenomenon? At some level, this question goes to the validity of the construct of stalking.

It must be noted here that partner violence, for the purpose of this article, is characterized by coercive control not simply physical assault (Stark, 2007). Thus, within the context of coercive control, classifications of abuse tactics such as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse are tools or tactics designed for the purposes of controlling the victim (Stark, 2007). Stalking is viewed as an extension of coercive control. The question posed here is whether stalking is a unique group of tactics that conceptually differ from the other forms of partner violence namely physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.

The limited documentation of the distinction between stalking and business as usual (or ongoing violence) makes interpreting trends across studies difficult. More critically, the blurred distinction may be part of the problem with the lack of response to partner stalking by the criminal justice system. Research suggests that arrest rates, prosecutions, and convictions for stalking are low when compared with the incidence estimates of stalking (Brewster, 2001; Jordan, Logan, Walker, & Nigoff, 2003; Logan, Nigoff, Jordan, & Walker, 2002; Miller, 2001; National Center for Victims of Crime, 2007; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). The National Violence Against Women Survey found a prosecution rate of 24% ($n = 84$) for partner-stalking cases with female victims who reported stalking to law enforcement ($n = 350$), 53% of those cases were actually convicted ($n = 37$), and 60% of those convicted were incarcerated ($n = 22$), which ultimately means that only 6% of stalking

perpetrators among cases with female victims reported to law enforcement were incarcerated (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Sheridan and Davies (2001) found a conviction rate of 36% from their study of victims who were seeking help for stalking. Interestingly, this study found that although current or ex-intimate partner stalkers were more violent than other stalkers, stranger stalkers were more likely to be convicted of stalking-related offenses (Sheridan & Davies, 2001). In addition to low charges and prosecution rates for stalking, stalking cases brought to the attention of law enforcement are often charged with other, sometimes lower, offenses such as harassment, harassing communications, terroristic threatening, trespassing, criminal threat, and violation of a protective order (Jordan et al., 2003; Spitzberg, 2002a). Charging stalking cases with these other offenses may also be related to the blurred distinction between stalking and business as usual, which implies an incident focus rather than a course of conduct.

There are three main interrelated reasons hypothesized why the line between partner stalking and business as usual (continuing abuse) is blurred. First, the definitions of stalking vary across studies with some not including key elements present in most legal definitions. This variation in definitions makes comparisons of partner stalking prevalence rates, correlations, and other results across studies difficult and makes the interpretation and translation for the criminal justice system complicated at best and irrelevant at worst. Second, the research literature often treats partner stalking in very simplistic terms such as with a dichotomous variable rather than treating it as a course of conduct or a pattern of coercive control. Third, there has been considerable focus on specific stalking tactics in the research literature, but stalking may be better characterized by other factors such as duration, intensity, intrusiveness, timing, and implicit and explicit threats. One problem with focusing on tactics is that they are varied and change over time so the information they provide is limited. Also, the narrow focus on tactics rather than a combination of factors leaves a huge gap in the understanding of what course of

conduct really means and how stalking may impact psychological distress. This simplistic treatment of stalking in the research may influence law enforcement to view stalking as an incident instead of part of a pattern of behavior—and this difference in how stalking is viewed has implications for criminal justice responses.

There are two core elements that are present in most legal definitions of stalking that vary across research studies—the repeated criterion and the fear criterion (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2007).⁶ Some studies use a very restrictive definition of repeated (e.g., must have experienced at least 10 separate acts of unwanted attention lasting at least 4 weeks; Roberts, 2005), whereas others use a much broader definition of stalking that does not assess for repeated activity (e.g., if the behavior occurred even once they are classified as being stalked; Jordan, Wilcox, & Pritchard, 2007). In addition, some studies require that participants report the behavior made them feel *extremely* afraid (e.g., Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998), whereas others use the criteria of *somewhat* afraid (e.g., Davis et al., 2002), while still other studies do not use the fear criterion to classify participants as being stalked at all (e.g., Westrup et al., 1999). These definitional differences across studies naturally mean that estimates vary and also that the results may or may not translate as relevant for law enforcement.

In addition, many studies do not treat stalking as a course of conduct but rather as a dichotomous variable. In other words, many studies simply classify participant experiences as stalked versus not stalked, which presents a simplistic picture of the stalking experience and limits the understanding of what components of stalking may be most distressing. Similarly, many studies focus on tactics rather than on other aspects that could differentiate partner stalking from psychological dominance or abuse from business as usual. For example, some studies suggest increased psychological distress is associated with longer duration of stalking (Blaauw et al., 2002; Kamphuis, Emmelkamp, & Bartak, 2003; Purcell, Pathe, & Mullen, 2004). Specifically, one study found that stalking that persisted beyond 2 weeks

was associated with more negative victim psychosocial functioning (Purcell et al., 2004). Other studies have found that higher intensity stalking (defined by amount of contact or variety of stalking tactics) is associated with greater psychological distress (Blaauw et al., 2002; Kamphuis et al., 2003; Mechanic, Uhlmansiek, et al., 2000).

Intrusion, such as violation of privacy and stalking that incorporates other people in the victim's life, has been associated with more psychological distress (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2000; Emerson et al., 1998; Nicastrò et al., 2000). The intrusion can extend into the few safe spaces women might have such as work or the grocery store (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2000; Emerson et al., 1998; Nicastrò et al., 2000). For example, one study found that although many women with violent partners experienced harassment at work (75%), even more women with violent partners who stalked them experienced harassment at their place of work (95%; Logan, Shannon, Cole, & Swanberg, 2007). More of those who experienced stalking reported problems concentrating at work, job performance problems, more illness that interfered with work, and more frequently reported they were unable to go to work because they were upset. Also, perceived intrusion or lack of reprieve (time in between episodes) may also play a role in psychological distress (Collins & Wilkas, 2001). For example, one victim summarized how her stalker was just "constantly there," which could be interpreted as literally or figuratively in her mind (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006):

He monitors everything that I do. It's like everything I do I have to think, "Is it going to be OK?" and "What [will happen] if I do this?" "If I do this how is he going to react?" It's just he's constantly there. (pp. 184-185)

Another factor that needs more attention is the timing of stalking and the impact of timing on psychological distress. As mentioned earlier, stalking often begins during an intact relationship and continues into periods of separation. There are a few studies that indicate stalking during separation is more distressing and may be more dangerous (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006; Melton, 2007b). However, there has been very

limited attention to understanding the trajectory of stalking within a violent relationship such as when the stalking started, how it progresses in intensity and intrusion over time, and how it escalates or de-escalates in relation to changes in the relationship and/or intervention trajectories. For example, Logan, Cole, et al. (2006) reported that some women reported they were being stalked by their partner before they even began dating, whereas others report the stalking started immediately after they began dating, and still others reported the stalking started when the woman began to gain some independence in her life (such as starting college, work, creating emotional distance as she contemplated leaving), and some women reported the stalking began during periods of separation. Understanding the timing of stalking, the relationship of stalking to other kinds of abuse, the association of timing of stalking and separation patterns, the association of timing of stalking and dangerousness or escalation patterns, and the timing of stalking and psychological distress would provide valuable information about the role of stalking in the context of violent relationships.

For women who have been in violent relationships who are being stalked and who meet the fear criterion, it can be assumed that they perceive an implicit threat from the stalking behavior. However, it is still unclear as to what features of stalking create implicit threats and fear. Requiring women to have proof of explicit threats, as some state laws do, may be difficult—especially given that many violent ex-partners do not need to deliver explicit threats to scare their victims and may deliberately withhold explicit threats to remain under the legal threshold of a criminal offense.

Furthermore, more information is needed to better understand the impact of implicit versus explicit threats on psychological distress. One study of stalking victims (from all types of stalkers) found that explicit threats of violence and death were significantly associated with greater fear compared to stalking victims who did not receive explicit threats (Bjerregarrd, 2000). Another study found that explicit threats and violence, across a variety of victim-stalker relationships, were linked to elevated psychological

distress (Nicastro et al., 2000). Likewise, Brewster (2002) found that explicit threats from violent ex-partners during the course of stalking was significantly associated with higher psychological distress compared to women who experienced only implicit threats, and compared to women who experienced neither implicit or explicit threats during the course of stalking. This study also compared women who experienced violence plus verbal threats during the course of stalking to women who experience violence but no verbal threats during the course of stalking. Results indicated that those who had experienced violence plus verbal threats during the course of stalking had higher anxiety scale scores than those who experienced violence but not verbal threats. Several other studies suggest explicit threats are related to higher psychological distress, regardless of actual violence, among stalking victims (Pathé & Mullen, 1997; Purcell et al., 2004). McEwan et al. (2007) suggested,

Though perhaps counter to expectations, it appears that the sense of looming vulnerability that accompanies threats may be more productive of psychological distress in stalking victims than the reality of actual physical assault, which importantly, may precipitate a more sympathetic response, particularly from law enforcement. (p. 7)

Although some of the evidence suggests that explicit threats are important in evoking fear and psychological distress, even among women being stalked by violent ex-partners, less attention has been paid to examining implicit threats. For example, understanding how implicit threats are conveyed and interpreted as well as the difference among women who experience explicit threats compared to women who experience only implicit threats and women who experience both may be important. Thus, there is some preliminary evidence that type of perceived threat and the interaction of type of threat and violence during the course of stalking may be an important dimension of partner stalking to examine.

Summary

One of the first questions that needs to be addressed to deepen the understanding of

partner violence is whether stalking represents unique form or type of abuse or whether it is simply an extension of ongoing harassment or business as usual. And, if the answer to that first question is that stalking is a unique phenomenon, then the question should focus on what differentiates stalking from business as usual for women being stalked by a violent ex-partner? There are clues in the literature that provide some potential components or elements that may differentiate stalking from business as usual, such as duration, intensity, intrusion level, timing, and implicit and explicit threats.

Furthermore, if research is going to provide a better foundation for crafting more effective societal interventions, more attention needs to be given to definitional differences across studies as well as the divide between research and legal definitions of stalking. It is possible that better characterizing stalking as a "course of conduct" in research could help move the legal system away from a focus on incidents in stalking cases. There is precedence for this in civil law such as prosecuting a major corporation for patterns of deceptive advertising or misrepresentation of stock values. No one incident is sufficient to meet a violation threshold, but taken together, a pattern of corruption can be identified.

Typically, criminal investigations are focused on incidents that have happened in the past, whereas stalking requires not only looking at the past history of the course of conduct but also looking at the persistence of the crime into the future (Miller, 2001; Spitzberg, 2002a). This difference in how law enforcement views stalking may make a huge difference in the response to stalking. Miller (2001) summarized how stalking differs from other kinds of crimes with the following:

Stalking is often an elusive crime. It starts, stops, starts again, and ends, at least temporarily, again. Similarly, the locations where stalking occurs vary, from home, to business, to shopping mall, to simply passing in a car on the street. While in most instances the identity of the stalker may be known, proving identity . . . can be difficult. Stalkers' methods may change constantly, from simple following or telephone calls, to leaving "gifts," to wiretapping telephones, to yet more ominous behaviors. Finally the reactions of the victim may also fluctuate over time, from unawareness to bemusement, to terror,

to surrender, and even to aggression. All of these stalking attributes make it an especially difficult crime for criminal justice agencies. (p. 63)

This statement underscores the importance of the stalking victim's reactions, which is the focus of the next section.

WHAT COMPONENTS CHARACTERIZE STALKING DIFFERENTLY FROM BUSINESS AS USUAL FOR WOMEN?

In addition to examining specific features of stalking behavior that distinguish it from business as usual, women's perceptions of what distinguishes stalking from business as usual must be examined. This question in particular may be the key link between the stalking experience and associated psychological distress. In other words, if partner stalking is found to be a unique form of abuse, then it is important to understand the unique contribution of stalking to psychological distress. But before making that connection, women's perceptions of stalking and harm from stalking must be considered. For one thing, as noted above, not all women from abusive relationships report they had ever experienced stalking by the violent partner. For example, several studies have found that about half of women with protective orders indicated they had ever been stalked by that violent partner (using a definition that included repeated unwanted communication and harassment that frightened them; Logan & Walker, 2008; Logan, Shannon, & Cole, 2007).

Another consideration is that even if women do meet a research or legal definition of stalking they may or may not define it themselves as stalking. One recent study found that only about 40% of women who reported stalking-type victimization actually labeled the experience as *stalking victimization* although the definition of stalking in this study was very broad (Jordan et al., 2007). Analysis of the National Violence Against Women Study found that of those that met the study definition of stalking (defined by repeated behavior that made the victim feel very frightened) a quarter of them (26.2%) did not label the experience as stalking (Tjaden, Thoennes, & Allison, 2002). That study also found five factors that were

associated with victims self-labeling their experience as stalking: being targeted by a current or former partner, being approached by the stalker, explicit threats during the course of stalking, if the stalker violated a protective order, and if the stalker involved a proxy to help them during the course of the stalking. Thus, the interim step between understanding the experience of stalking and its psychological impact is to examine the process by which stalking evokes psychological distress. Research on traumatic stress suggests there are three factors that could be considered in evaluating psychological harm from partner stalking: (a) loss of control and predictability, (b) perceived threat to physical and psychological integrity, and (c) social isolation.

Control (or the perception of control) over decisions, outcomes, and rewards are extremely important for human well-being (Antonovsky, 1987; Lazarus, 1999; McEwen & Lasley, 2002; Mirowsky & Ross, 2003; Sapolsky, 1994; Wegner, 2002). Perceptions of diminished control have been associated with stress (Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000; Sapolsky, 1994). Bandura (2001) emphasized the powerful impact the lack of perceived control can have on life functioning,

Among the mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs in their capability to exercise some control over their own functioning and over environmental events . . . Unless people believe they can produce desired results and forestall detrimental ones by their action, they have little incentive to act or persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever other factors may operate as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce effects by one's actions. (p. 10)

Stalking victims have daily evidence they lack control over their life and are constantly reminded that someone else is in control of their life.

Of course, true control over life circumstances is limited, but within those limitations it is human nature to perceive we have control over choices and directions in life (Wegner, 2002). Moreover, when confronted with a situation that eviscerates our perception of control, the innate human response is to escape or change the situation (Sloman & Gilbert, 2000). What is particularly harmful in loss of control

is the inability to escape the situation (Gilbert, 2000; Kahana, Kahana, Harel, & Rosner, 1988; Sloman, 2000). In other words, being trapped in a situation that usurps control or the ability to change the situation is particularly harmful to well-being and evokes a variety of psychological reactions (Gilbert, 2000):

There is clear evidence that [lack of] control . . . over important social and nonsocial resources significantly contributes to psychopathology . . . In some contexts lack of control over aversive situations can produce behavioral demobilizations in rodents, primates, and humans. (p. 14)

In addition to perceived control being important to well-being, predictability is also important. At first glance, it may seem that control and predictability mean the same thing. However, although they overlap, they are separate constructs (Sapolsky, 1994). When stressors are predictable even if they are not within control, they are less stressful (Antonovsky, 1987; Sapolsky, 1994; Wheaton, 1997). Unpredictability is a stressor because predictive information (even over uncontrollable events) lets us know how long to expect the stressor, how best to cope with it, or at least some relief during periods where we don't expect a threat. However, not having predictive information eliminates any time for rest, or deactivation of the stress response, thus further increasing stress (Sapolsky, 1994). Stalking victims are especially susceptible to the loss of predictability given the very nature of the stalker's behavior and the fact that there is no predictable end to the stalking behavior (even when it seems to have ended). Furthermore, even when a stalking event occurs, there may be no reprieve because victims are anticipating the next intrusion (Collins & Wilkas, 2001). There is substantial evidence that unpredictability and uncontrollability of stressors plays an important role in the development of anxiety and fear and that these two stressors play a role in perceived threats to physical and psychological integrity (Basoglu, Livanou, & Crnobaric, 2007; Baum, Cohen, & Hall, 1993; Ehlers, Maercker, & Boos, 2000).

Stalking behavior clearly includes implicit and explicit threats of physical harm and death.

Direct threats of physical harm have been associated with psychological distress (Green, 1993; Iversen et al., 2008; Keller et al., 2006; McCaslin et al., 2006; Ozer, Best, Lipsey, & Weiss, 2003). Although, as reviewed above, explicit threats to physical integrity have been linked to increased psychological distress in stalking victims, there has been limited research on how stalking poses a threat to psychological integrity. More general research suggests that psychological integrity is threatened when expectations about how things work or should work are violated (Kahana et al., 1988). For example, in the case of being stalked by an ex-partner, expectations of being removed from the partner during separation are violated. Also, expectations about criminal justice responses to stalking are often violated (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006). Psychological integrity is also threatened when one's life and routines are disrupted as in the case with stalking, where routines have to be modified to try and avoid the stalker (Kahana et al., 1988). Unlike many trauma events that intrude abruptly into normal psychological and social functioning, stalking can actually replace normal life with an aberration. Often, even within domestically violent relationships, women can compartmentalize the violence, which typically occurs at home, leaving some areas of life that are separate and normal such as work (Swanberg & Logan, 2005). However, stalking intrudes into much wider areas of the victim's life than what they may have experienced during the violent relationship (or what women in violent relationships that do not include stalking experience). In addition, psychological integrity is threatened when the stressor appears to be meaningless and without rational explanation (Kahana et al., 1988). Victims of stalking often do not understand why their partners continue to stalk them as noted by several victims (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006):

You know, if you [partner] don't like what she's doing, you need to leave her. Why the hell would you stalk her and hit her and threaten her and make her life miserable? Just leave, you know?

It never occurred to me [that he would be capable of stalking]—that obsessive behavior is so out of my realm of . . . I just don't think that way. You know like

if I'm seeing a guy and all of a sudden he doesn't wanna see me—I just accept that and move on, you know. Why would I pursue that if he doesn't want it, you know? I have more self respect than that. (p. 143)

Stalking also creates various forms of social isolation; however, the extent and nature of stalking-related isolation has not been studied in depth. Women experiencing stalking often become disconnected from their social networks for a several reasons (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2004; Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 2001; Logan, Cole, et al., 2006; Logan, Shannon, Cole, & Swanberg, 2007; Pathé & Mullen, 1997; Spitzberg, 2002b). Women may have to relocate, change their employment or school situation, or change other activities to attempt to avoid stalkers. More importantly, stalkers may directly or indirectly sabotage their relationships. Also, friends and family may become concerned for their own safety or annoyed by the stalking situation and thus chose to distance themselves from the stalking situation. A more insidious outcome may occur if friend or family members are upset or blame her for his behavior or because she separated from him and broke up the family. Lastly, women being stalked by violent partners may withdraw from their social networks out of a fear, embarrassment, or concern for the safety of their friends and family. Thus, there is a need to examine the extent of social isolation that results either voluntarily or involuntarily from being subjected to stalking.

Being isolated from social networks or mainstream society excludes individuals from being able to reach valued goals and increases feelings of inferiority, rejection, and condemnation (Gilbert, 2006). Social isolation also impacts feelings of self-worth and meaning, or the opportunity to live a meaningful life (Baumeister, 2005). In general, the lack of social support and validation during and after a traumatic event has been associated with increased psychological distress (Gailliot & Baumeister, 2006; Ozer et al., 2003; Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2003; Williams, 2007). There is some preliminary evidence that stalking is associated with more negative self-worth beliefs, such as feelings of alienation and isolation although limited studies have examined this issue (Kamphuis et al., 2003; Logan, Cole, et al., 2006).

Summary

There are few crimes where there is a tight connection between victim dependence on the criminal justice system for safety and of the criminal justice system on the victim to develop evidence of the crime. This mutual dependence places a great burden on victim perception of the crime of stalking. Victim perception of stalking is also an important component of understanding the impact of stalking on psychological distress. Although research suggests there is a link between being the victim of stalking and psychological distress, the pathways through which stalking leads to increased psychological distress has received limited research attention. More general research on chronic stress suggests there are several factors that are associated with psychological distress including: (a) loss of control and predictability, (b) perceived threat to physical and psychological integrity, and (c) social isolation. Stalking victims are reminded every single day of the loss of control over their lives, and they have no idea what to expect next or when the stalking might end. Being stalked is also interconnected to threat to both physical and psychological integrity in part because of the lack of control and predictability and also because of the intrusiveness into every aspect of the victims lives and the seemingly meaningless nature of the behavior. Stalking is also associated with social isolation for a number of reasons; social isolation is associated with a number of negative outcomes including lowered self-worth and feelings of alienation. It may be that these three factors are some initial pathways that should be the primary link between stalking and psychological distress.

HOW IS PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF PARTNER STALKING BEST CHARACTERIZED?

As mentioned earlier, there is evidence that stalking, in general, is associated with psychological distress (e.g., Davis et al., 2002; Sheridan et al., 2003). Several studies indicate that victims stalked by intimate partners with a history of violence in the relationship have

increased psychological distress compared to stalking victims with no history of relationship violence (Brewster, 2002; Nicastro et al., 2000); a few studies found that stalking uniquely contributes to psychological distress even after controlling for violence history (Basile et al., 2004; Logan & Cole, 2007; Logan, Shannon, et al., 2006; Mechanic et al., 2008). However, fully understanding the impact of stalking on psychological distress among women who have experienced violence during a relationship with the stalker is complicated. It is complicated because research on partner violence in general has strong and robust associations with psychological distress (Logan, Walker, et al., 2006). Moreover, it is clear that partner violence during a relationship is associated with partner stalking (Logan, Cole, et al., 2006). Furthermore, research suggests there is a dose-response relationship between partner violence, sexual assault, and stalking with psychological distress (Dutton, Kaltman, Goodman, Weinfurt, & Vankos, 2005; Logan, Walker, et al., 2006), and that stalking is associated with a more severe history of physical and sexual abuse (Brewster, 2003b; Cole et al., 2005; Coleman, 1997; Logan, Shannon, & Cole, 2007; Mechanic, Uhlmansiek et al., 2000; Melton, 2007a). Understanding the impact of stalking on psychological distress among women who have experienced violence from the stalker in the past is also complicated because stress from stalking evokes normal, adaptive responses that may be viewed too narrowly to capture the true essence of the experience, or they may be characterized as simply pathological (Burstow, 2003; Gilfus, 1999; Horwitz & Wakefield, 2007; Mirowsky & Ross, 2002; Wasco, 2003).

What is needed is a more sophisticated examination of the effects of partner stalking on psychological distress, which will require addressing three main areas. First, more evidence is needed regarding whether and to what extent partner stalking uniquely contributes to psychological distress beyond abuse experienced in the relationship. Second, the research must move beyond using a laundry list of symptoms or diagnoses to describe victims' behavioral or affective responses to partner stalking. Third, examination of interactions

among characteristics of stalking, victim perceptions of stalking, adaptation or coping responses, and a range of psychological responses are needed to more fully understand stalking and resultant psychological distress.

One of the first and most important questions to answer is whether and to what extent partner stalking has a unique impact on psychological distress even after controlling for abuse history. Although there is some preliminary evidence that stalking does in fact contribute uniquely to psychological distress as reviewed above, these findings need to be replicated and studied in more detail. In fact, Logan, Cole, et al. (2006) noted, over the course of in-depth interviews with women stalked by violent partners or ex-partners, that

It is important to acknowledge that the women we spoke to often had trouble separating specific types of abuse into distinct categories even when they were specifically asked questions about stalking. This may be important to further examine in future research on partner stalking as well as in interpreting current research studies on partner stalking. In addition, separating psychological abuse, especially monitoring and controlling aspects of psychological abuse, from stalking has proven to be particularly difficult for women as seen throughout these narratives. (p. 289)

Given much of the research on the effects of partner violence and stalking rely on self-reports, systematic, large-scale studies must be used to clearly delineate these differences.

In addition, even if stalking is found to contribute uniquely to psychological distress, there has been only limited examination of the role of coping in victim responses to stalking. Specifically, the demarcation between coping and defensive behavior is blurred when the options for change are profoundly limited or nonexistent (Kahana et al., 1988). In other words, the orientation to survival must be examined as an important motive within conditions of extreme and constant threat, which means that coping and responses likely fluctuate over time and may not seem like typical "healthy" responses.

Thus, the context of partner stalking may require a different way of viewing or characterizing psychological responses. For example,

although there are a significant number of studies suggesting that pretrauma characteristics are related to trauma responses and outcomes (Ozer et al., 2003), chronic severe stress and the survival instinct may override the importance of individual differences in responses and outcomes (Brewin, Andrews, & Valentine, 2000; Kahana et al., 1988; Ozer et al., 2003). Also, indicators of psychological distress that are normally viewed as pathological may be better viewed as adaptive responses to extremely stressful situations. Specifically, fear, anxiety, and social withdrawal or depressive symptoms all serve critical innate adaptive functions (McGuire & Troisi, 1998). Fear and anxiety increase hypervigilance to safety when people are threatened or when they feel they have lost control and predictability (Sapolsky, 1994). Withdrawing through depressive symptoms signals to an aggressor that there is no need to attack and may reduce threatening cues to the aggressor (McGuire & Troisi, 1998; Sloman & Gilbert, 2000). Moreover, depressive type behavior may help conserve resources for other aspects of survival or when resources may be most needed (Sloman & Gilbert, 2000). Other psychological reactions may be important for coping or adaptation as well like anger, derealization, internalization, and dissassociative responses (Wilson, Harel, & Kahana, 1988). Hence, the boundary between normal adaptations to extremely stressful exposures and psychopathology is difficult to establish.

The literature on stalking not only characterizes coping or adaptation in very simplistic terms (e.g., Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007) but also characterizes psychological distress in very simple terms often by using a laundry list of diagnostic symptoms or diagnosis for a few specific problems (e.g., anxiety, PTSD, and depression). Using a psychiatric diagnostic framework to categorize psychological responses to partner stalking is problematic in at least three ways. First, using diagnostic criteria for specific mental health problems overlooks the fact that there is significant overlap of problems or comorbidity among most individuals who are exposed to chronic stressors or trauma (Rosen & Taylor, 2007; van der Kolk et al., 1996). In other words, there are certain

manifestations of trauma that can be criteria for several different diagnostic categories, although researchers often focus on a single diagnosis rather than the overall array of affects and behaviors. The discovery of these co-occurring disorders is difficult in the context of clinical practice. In research, they may be discovered only if specifically sought after; that is, a research study might include measures of PTSD but not for other disorders and thus miss a potentially important co-occurring condition just because it was not included in the research design. In other words, the clinical uses of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* categories typically derive from an open-ended assessment leading inductively to a diagnosis; research often is a top-down approach that merely seeks confirmation of whether the subject does or does not meet criteria for a selected disorder.

Second, a diagnosis does not incorporate the nature of the experience or the context—A point that has recently been made in the literature (Burstow, 2003; Gilfus, 1999; Herman, 1992; Horwitz & Wakefield, 2007; Wasco, 2003). Specifically, research rarely differentiates whether victim distress is due to the symptoms or to the stalking environment. The proper use of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed., text revision; *DSM-IV-TR*) criteria calls for a finding that “the symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other areas of functioning” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 356). This criterion establishes a threshold for the application of a diagnosis but, in the case of stalking victimization, the criterion would appear to do little to reduce likelihood of false positives in the use of psychiatric diagnoses given the range of impairments directly resulting from stalking victimization (Spitzer & Wakefield, 1999). The impairments specified in the criterion are typical outcomes of stalking with or without a diagnosis; thus, there is a question of whether the diagnostic labeling is a valid characterization of the phenomenon. Also, a simplistic symptom-seeking data collection approach is vulnerable to being overinclusive because using this approach “looks for” diagnosis rather than considering context or even the subjective understanding or

explanation of these symptoms (McHugh & Treisman, 2007). Using diagnostic criteria to describe or characterize potentially normal and adaptive functions may distort the true rates of those with dysfunctional mental health problems (Horwitz & Wakefield, 2007).

Third, a diagnosis pathologizes potentially normal and adaptive responses to extremely stressful conditions (Mirowsky & Ross, 2002). Research studies need to assess what is actually gained by using diagnostic criteria to describe stalking victims. This last point goes back to the issue of the literature needing to move beyond the merely descriptive information and the need to recognize the complexity of psychological reactions to partner-stalking victimization. What perhaps began as a way to ground and validate the seriousness of victim outcome to stalking and other trauma by using diagnostic criteria may have had the unintended effect of both a distorted understanding of victimization response and inflated estimates of prevalence of disorders. The most fundamental question is whether the use of a diagnostic framework clarifies the types of interventions that should be employed. Mirowsky and Ross (2002) suggested that people do not need to be diagnosed or labeled to be helped, and that "using diagnosis to measure mental health presents a reified image of hidden disease knowable and manageable only by trained professionals—beyond the capacity of the suffering individuals to understand and control" (p. 152).

In a similar manner, researchers must also recognize that using diagnostic categories to describe stalking victims can not only be unhelpful but may even be harmful. For example, one recently published study concluded (Kraaij, Arensman, Garnefski, & Kremers, 2007) as follows:

Finally, victims who thought more about what steps to take and how to handle the stalking reported significantly higher symptom levels of depression, anxiety, and PTSD. The findings suggest that these cognitive strategies are not a good way to cope with stalking . . . These findings can possibly contribute to the help provided to stalking victims. (p. 1609)

Some consideration has been given in trauma and victimization studies to using a more

severe form of PTSD that has been called *complex PTSD* or *disorders of extreme stress not otherwise specified* (DESNOS) to provide a diagnostic concept to accommodate sustained, longer term exposure to traumatic events or conditions (e.g., Herman, 1992; Pelcovitz et al., 1997; van der Kolk, Roth, Pelcovitz, Sunday, & Spinazzola, 2005). However, as stated above, it remains unclear how even these more amplified psychiatric and physiological characterizations of victim effects relate directly to partner stalking, or how using this classification to describe psychological distress of stalking victims is informative. In addition, the broader victimization and trauma literatures have identified a wide range of physiological consequences of trauma exposure and these are generally seen as part of the consequences of hyperstimulation of the arousal system. Thus, even this broader view of consequences resulting from chronic stress like stalking often leads to a laundry list of symptoms that is not very informative for victims, health professionals, or law enforcement.

The use of a psychiatric lens for understanding victim responses to stalking may have profound implications for societal responses by suggesting that the needed intervention is mental health treatment rather than legal interventions. Perhaps, a more useful pathway would be to document specific, long-term harms and losses that stalking victims suffer. Describing harms and losses in nonclinical terms may better identify what victims actually need to remedy the effects of stalking and to restore their safety and security. Using nonclinical constructs, and focusing more on specific impacts to an individual's orientation to life, health, significant relationships, finance, employment, recreation, child care, and freedom to have an autonomous existence, might provide a better road map for interventions. This could also be a step forward in documenting the human rights violations that characterize situations of partner stalking. Examining stalking through a human rights lens might pave the way for more assertive safety planning with victims of partner stalking and potentially be a critical step in motivating more definitive law enforcement and the legal responses to stalking.

Summary

One important question to answer when thinking about how to best characterize psychological distress associated with partner stalking is whether or to what extent partner stalking has a unique impact on psychological distress even after controlling for abuse history. If partner stalking is identified as uniquely contributing to psychological distress then the issue of how to best characterize or describe the psychological impact of partner stalking must be addressed. The current literature often provides simplistic descriptions of coping with stalking that does not address the complexity of coping with a severe, ongoing constant threat. This simplistic description of coping also downplays the importance of specific psychological responses that play important innate adaptive and survival role.

The psychological responses to stalking are also often viewed in simplistic and pathological terms that overlook survival dimensions of symptoms. A simplistic way of characterizing psychological responses to stalking does little to inform how best to intervene or help victims. Even when studies examine stalking victims after the stalking has ended, there is little recognition that when an individual has coped with this kind of chronic traumatic stress for a long period of time, the adaptation strategies may or may not continue to perform adaptive functions. What is needed is more research to examine the match or appropriateness of the coping or adaptive response to the tasks the victim is currently confronting (Kahana et al., 1988). Future research should also link specific dimensions of the stalking experience (e.g., intensity, duration, timing, threat), perceptions of the harm caused by stalking (e.g., loss of control and predictability, threat to physical and psychological integrity, and social isolation) with the types and extent of psychological reactions and distress and, more importantly, the degree to which victims experience harms and losses in their daily lives. Documenting the specific losses and harms caused by the stalking may be an important step in safety planning, physical and mental health treatment, and in legal interventions for victims of partner stalking.

CONCLUSION

Research on stalking has made great strides over the past decade and has provided an excellent foundation for future research agendas. Specifically, the research on stalking provides strong evidence that partner stalking can be characterized along several dimensions that differentiate it from acquaintance and stranger stalking. In essence, this review of the literature suggests that partner stalking is different from other forms of stalking, is harmful, and that it has long-term consequences for victims. However, within the context of the stalking research, there are several significant questions that are still left unanswered or left with unsatisfactory answers. For example, the literature has not definitively answered the question as to whether or to what extent partner stalking is a distinct form of psychological dominance or whether it is business as usual—that is, just continued abuse. Furthermore, although there are extensive descriptive data on partner stalking and its effects on victims, there remain serious gaps in understanding the nexus of legal, social, psychological, and interpersonal qualities of the stalking experience.

The key questions identified in this review suggest that the answers may require a new lens through which responses to partner stalking should be viewed. For example, it might require thinking about stalking as a human rights violation. In other words, stalking limits basic personal freedoms in multiple ways with drastic economic, social, legal, and psychological consequences. Documenting the human rights violations of stalking victimization requires a greater examination of the phenomenology of the experience—the actual narrative accounts of stalking and its effects on victims' day-to-day living. A greater emphasis on the narrative of the stalking experience might lend greater weight to the need for cross-system change in how society crafts interventions. This could lead to more attentive justice system responses to the unique patterns of abuse that stalking typifies. It also could sensitize the mental health provider communities to less of a focus on the diagnosis and treatment of disorders to a more supportive appreciation for

the stressful conditions under which stalking victims must lead their lives. This review also questions the overreliance on a psychiatric framework in research to characterize responses to partner stalking, and it poses a challenge as to whether coping and survival artifacts can be seen or treated as the same thing as mental disorder.

If a human rights lens is used to frame stalking research in the future, it would require a more careful examination and documentation of the specific harms and losses that affect victims' day-to-day living. There are several examples of how this might be done. Tangible losses could be documented such as the cost of property damage from the stalker, or how the stalking has cost the victim in safety measures, medical care, time off from work due to stress, court appearances, or dealing with property damage (e.g., Max, Rice, Finkelstein, Bardwell, & Leadbetter, 2004). But more qualitative harms and losses also need to be documented, for example, exploring how women's opportunities for education or employment may have been impacted (e.g., lost potential employment opportunities or promotions) due to the interference of a stalker. Quality time devoted to parenting and to the child-parent bond may be altered by the experience of being stalked. Studies might examine how day-to-day routines are disturbed by the presence of a stalker and how those disturbances affect social life and close relationships. Each of these studies could examine these harms and losses with

comparisons to other abuse cases and to nonabuse cases to better understand the unique effects of stalking on the quality of life. Studies might also try some creative approaches to understanding the impact of stalking on victims like adapting the health utility measure to get a better understanding of how day-to-day interference from the stalking is related to victim's overall quality of life (Horsman, Furlong, Feeny, & Torrance, 2003; van Doorslaer & Jones, 2003). Similarly, Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum have used the concept of capability deprivation to capture the economic, psychological, and social harms that greatly affect women and disenfranchised people and that result in lower life expectancy, greater health problems, and lower quality of life (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 2000). Developing measures from the concept of capability deprivation could yield findings that can be related to multiple cultures and ethnicities, given the international focus of Sen's and Nussbaum's work.

With these changes in the focus of future research, the social policy implications could be very important. If data were obtained showing the actual harms and losses (rather than their clinical proxies) resulting from stalking, it may be possible to rethink societal interventions. Public policy might be encouraged to develop interventions to reduce or stop the stalking rather than trying to ameliorate its effects on victims, which could lead to greater opportunities for victims to enjoy the liberties typically extended to free citizens.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, POLICY, AND RESEARCH

RESEARCH

- Research on stalking has made great strides over the past decade and has provided an excellent foundation for future research agendas.
- Specifically, the research on stalking provides strong evidence that partner stalking can be characterized along several dimensions that differentiate it from acquaintance and stranger stalking. In essence, this review of the literature suggests that partner stalking is different from other forms of stalking, is harmful, and that it has long-term consequences for victims. However, there are many gaps in the literature on partner stalking that still need to be addressed.
- Future research should also link specific dimensions of the stalking experience (e.g., intensity, duration, timing, threat), perceptions of the harm caused by stalking (e.g., loss of control and predictability, threat to

physical and psychological integrity, and social isolation) with the types and extent of psychological reactions and distress and, more importantly, the degree to which victims experience harms and losses in their daily lives.

PRACTICE

- The key questions identified in this review suggest that the answers may require a new lens through which responses to partner stalking should be viewed. For example, it might require thinking about stalking as a human rights violation. In other words, stalking limits basic personal freedoms in multiple ways with drastic economic, social, legal, and psychological consequences.
- If a human rights lens is used to frame stalking research in the future, it would require a more careful

examination and documentation of the specific harms and losses that affect victims' day-to-day living.

POLICY

- With these changes in the focus of future research, the social policy implications could be very important. If data were obtained showing the actual harms

and losses (rather than their clinical proxies) resulting from stalking, it may be possible to rethink societal interventions. Public policy might be encouraged to develop interventions to reduce or stop the stalking rather than trying to ameliorate its effects on victims, which could lead to greater opportunities for victims to enjoy the liberties typically extended to free citizens.

CRITICAL FINDINGS SUMMARY

Research shows that 1 in 12 to 1 in 14 women are stalked while 1 in 45 men are stalked suggesting that more women are stalked than men. Also, more men are stalkers regardless of target gender, more women are afraid from stalking behaviors than men, and 80% of victims know their stalker. In fact, the largest category of stalkers for female victims is partners/ex-partners.

What makes partner stalking different from non-partner stalking?

1. Partner stalking often occurs within a context of a past history of violence and abuse giving the stalking behavior additional and subtle threats and cues.
2. Partner stalkers engage in a wider array and more frequent stalking tactics in part because he knows many details about her and her life, if they have children in common he has an additional tool of manipulation, and partner stalkers may be more able to engage others in the stalking behavior (proxy stalking).
3. Partner stalkers make more threats of violence and are more likely to follow through on those threats than nonpartner stalkers.
4. Partner stalking often starts during the relationship and continues during periods of separation, however, stalking during separation may pose significant risks to victims.
5. There is some preliminary evidence suggesting that women stalked by violent partners/ex-partners experience greater psychological distress than those stalked by nonpartners or by nonviolent ex-partners.

What three questions need to be addressed to begin to fill gaps in the current research on partner stalking?

1. Is partner stalking a unique form of psychological dominance or is it just "business as usual"?
 - The crux of this question is "what differentiates stalking from ongoing abuse and harassment?"
 - The incomplete documentation of this distinction may contribute to the limited response to partner stalking by the criminal justice system.

(continued)

APPENDIX (continued)

- There are at least three potential problems with research on partner stalking that may be associated with the blurred distinction between stalking as a unique form of psychological dominance or business as usual: (a) varying definitions, (b) dichotomous treatment of stalking, and (c) focus on tactics.
2. What components characterize stalking differently from business as usual for women?
 - This question may be especially important for understanding the link between stalking and psychological distress.
 - Women's perceptions of stalking must be considered in part because not all women with violent partners are stalked, and not all women who would meet the legal definition of stalking believe they are being stalked.
 - Three features inherent in the partner-stalking victimization experience that need better examination: (a) loss of control and predictability, (b) threat to physical and psychological integrity, and (c) social isolation.
 3. How is psychological distress within the context of partner stalking best characterized?
 - One of the first and most important questions to answer is whether and to what extent partner stalking has a unique impact on psychological distress even after controlling for abuse history.
 - If stalking is found to contribute uniquely to psychological distress, the next step is to begin to examine the coping and adaptation responses that may serve basic survival needs.
 - The demarcation between coping and defensive behavior is blurred when the options for change are profoundly limited or nonexistent. In other words, the orientation to survival must be examined as an important motive within conditions of extreme and constant threat, which means that coping and responses likely fluctuate over time and may not accord with the typical view of "healthy" responses
 - Using a diagnosis to globally characterize stalking victims may be inappropriate and problematic.
 - A new lens to characterize psychological distress associated with stalking may be needed to develop better interventions and legal responses.

NOTES

1. Quotes from a woman stalked by an ex-boyfriend.
2. The literature often uses the term *victim* and *survivor* interchangeably, with some disciplines favoring one over the other. The use of the term victim in this article is not meant to imply that women who have experienced partner violence and stalking are not survivors. Rather, the use of the word victim was simply chosen to provide a consistent terminology throughout the article and should be thought of as interchangeable with survivor.
3. Control variables included minor children in common and total number of separations, severity of physical and sexual violence between baseline and follow-up, and length of relationship involvement between the baseline and follow-up.
4. Using relative risk ratios.
5. Factors controlled include history of posttraumatic stress syndrome and depression symptoms at baseline, depression and substance use at follow-up, number of months involved with the violent partner between baseline and follow-up, and number of psychological abuse tactics as well as severity of partner violence physical and sexual assault between baseline and follow-up.
6. There are several other aspects of the legal definition of stalking that are not discussed here, including intent and threat level present in many state laws.

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SUGGESTED FUTURE READINGS

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TK Logan, PhD, is currently a professor in the Department of Behavioral Science, College of Medicine. She has spent the past 13 years examining researching issues relevant to violence against women. Currently, she is focusing on several projects including costs and avoided costs to society related to partner violence and protective orders, whether partner stalking is just "business as usual" or a unique form of psychological dominance, how to define sexual assault within the context of a violent relationship, and health disparities of rural women with partner violence experiences. She also

recently completed a study of human trafficking in Kentucky and is working on understanding the dynamics of human trafficking, especially with regard to survival and coping. She is an author on approximately 100 research articles and serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence and Violence and Victims* and is a consulting editor for *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. She serves as a grant reviewer for the National Institute of Drug Abuse, National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, and other special emphasis panels for the National Institute of Health. She also serves on the Domestic Violence Prevention Board, Partner Abuse Committee, Lexington-Fayette Partner Violence Fatality Review, Advisory Board of the Supervised Visitation Center, and works on a grant obtained by the Fayette-Urban County Police Department on addressing enforcement of protective orders and partner stalking. She also works closely with several other state and community agencies to address violence against women. She has coauthored five books including *Women and Victimization: Contributing Factors, Interventions, and Implications* (American Psychological Association Press) and *Partner Stalking: How Women Respond, Cope, and Survive* (Springer Publisher). She is currently working on a book developing a theory to better understand violence against women.

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