Types of Stalkers

*(Taken from the National Center for Victims of Crime, Stalking Resource Center)*

Forensic psychologists, who study criminal behavior, are just beginning to examine the minds and motives of stalkers. These psychologists have identified two broad categories of stalkers and stalking behavior -- "Love Obsession" and "Simple Obsession."

**Love Obsession Stalkers**

This category is characterized by stalkers who develop a love obsession or fixation on another person with whom they have no personal relationship. The target may be only a casual acquaintance or even a complete stranger. This category represents about 20-25 percent (20-25%) of all stalking cases.

Stalkers who stalk celebrities and stars -- such as David Letterman, Jodie Foster, and Madonna -- fall into the category of love obsessionists; however, stalkers in this category also include those who develop fixations on regular, ordinary people -- including co-workers, their aerobics instructor, casual acquaintances or people they pass in the street.

The vast majority of love obsessional stalkers suffer from a mental disorder -- often schizophrenia or paranoia. Regardless of the specific disorder, nearly all display some delusional thought patterns and behaviors. Since most are unable to develop normal personal relationships through more conventional and socially acceptable means, they retreat to a life of fantasy relationships with persons they hardly know, if at all. They invent fictional stories -- complete with what is to them real-life scripts -- which cast their unwilling victims in the lead role as their own love interest. They then attempt to act out their fictional plots in the real world.

The woman who has stalked David Letterman for five years truly believes she is his wife. She has been discovered on Mr. Letterman's property numerous times, has been arrested driving his car and has even appeared at his residence with her own child in tow -- each time insisting that she is David Letterman's wife.

Love obsessional stalkers not only attempt to live out their fantasies, but expect their victims to play their assigned roles as well. They believe they can make the object of their affection love them. They desperately want to establish a positive personal relationship with their victim. When the victim refuses to follow the script or doesn't respond as the stalker hopes, they may attempt to force the victim to comply by use of threats and intimidation.

When threats and intimidation fail, some stalkers turn to violence. Some decide that if they cannot be a positive part of their victim's life, they will be part of their life in a negative way. Some even go so far as to murder their victims in a twisted attempt to romantically link themselves to their victim forever. This was the case with the man who shot and killed Rebecca Schaffer, the young actress and star of the television show My Sister Sam.

**Simple Obsession Stalkers**

This second category represents 70-80 percent (70-80%) of all stalking cases and is distinguished by the fact that some previous personal or romantic relationship existed between the stalker and the victim before the stalking behavior began.
Virtually all domestic violence cases involving stalking fall under this rubric, as do casual dating relationships (commonly referred to as Fatal Attraction cases, named after the popular movie by the same title).

While this kind of stalker may or may not have psychological disorders, all clearly have personality disorders. One forensic psychologist has attempted to identify some of the common personality traits and behavioral characteristics among this category of stalkers. Stalkers in this class are characterized as individuals who are:

- Socially maladjusted and inept;
- Emotionally immature;
- Often subject to feelings of powerlessness;
- Unable to succeed in relationships by socially-acceptable means;
- Jealous, bordering on paranoid; and
- Extremely insecure about themselves and suffering from low self-esteem.

The self-esteem of simple obsession stalkers is often closely tied to their relationship with their partner. In many cases, such stalkers bolster their own self-esteem by dominating and intimidating their mates. Exercising power over another gives them some sense of power in a world where they otherwise feel powerless. In extreme cases, such personalities attempt to control every aspect of their partner's life. This behavior pattern was vividly depicted in the major motion picture entitled Sleeping with the Enemy, where the antagonist turns to intimidation and violence as the means to control every aspect of his victim/wife's life.

Since the victim literally becomes the stalker's primary source of self-esteem, their greatest fear becomes the loss of this person. Their own self-worth is so closely tied to the victim that when they are deprived of that person, they may feel that their own life is without worth.

It is exactly this dynamic that makes simple obsession stalkers so dangerous. In the most acute cases, such stalkers will literally stop at nothing to regain their "lost possession" -- their partner -- and in so doing, regain their lost self-esteem.

Just as with most domestic violence cases, stalkers are the most dangerous when they are first deprived of their source of power and self-esteem; in other words, the time when their victims determine to physically remove themselves from the offender's presence on a permanent basis by leaving the relationship.

Indeed, stalking cases which emerge from domestic violence situations constitute the most common and potentially lethal class of stalking cases. Domestic violence victims who leave an abusive relationship run a 75 percent (75%) higher risk of being murdered by their partners.

Stalking behavior is as diverse as the stalkers themselves. Yet behavioral experts are beginning to identify patterns in the cycle of violence displayed by simple obsession stalkers.