

# Stalking in the Context of Intimate Partner Abuse

## In the Victims' Words

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This article explores stalking in the context of intimate partner abuse (IPA) using qualitative data. In-depth interviews were conducted with 21 women who experienced stalking and violence from male partners. Findings include an exploration of the relationships between the motivations for stalking, the behaviors utilized, and the impacts of the behaviors for the victims.

**Keywords:** *domestic violence; intimate partner abuse; relationship violence; stalking*

**S**talking is a relatively new concept. For example, the term *stalking* was first coined in 1989 (Coleman, 1997). In general, *stalking* refers to the willful, repeated, and malicious following, harassing, or threatening of another person (Coleman, 1997; Meloy, 1996; Meloy & Gothard, 1995; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998); however, legal definitions differ from state to state, as do the estimates of stalking incidents. Conservative estimates suggest about 200,000 annual incidents occur nationally in the United States (Roberts & Dziegielewski, 1996; Wright et al., 1996). Other studies suggest that stalking may affect about 1.4 million victims annually in the United States: 1 million women and 400,000 men (Tjaden, 1997; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; U.S. Department of Justice, Violence Against Women Grants Office, 1998).

The relationships between stalkers and their victims may be characterized in one of three ways: intimates or former intimates, acquaintances, or strangers (National Institute of Justice [NIJ], 1996). Generally speaking, most research suggests that victims are most often the current or former spouses or intimate partners of their stalkers (Burgess et al., 1997; Coleman, 1997; Guy, 1993; NIJ, 1996; Roberts & Dziegielewski, 1996; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998; U.S. Department of Justice, Violence Against Women Grants Office, 1998). Some researchers estimate that as many as 80% of all stalking cases involve a prior or current intimate relationship (Coleman, 1997; Roberts & Dziegielewski, 1996). Moreover, studies show a high

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correlation between stalking, verbal, and physical abuse in intimate relationships (Coleman, 1997; Davis, Ace, & Andra, 2000; Logan, Leukefeld, & Walker, 2000; McFarlane et al., 1999; Mechanic, Uhlmansiek, Weaver, & Resick, 2000; Mechanic, Weaver, & Resick, 2000; Tjaden, 1997; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; White, Kowalski, Lyndon, & Valentine, 2000). One study found that 80% of the victims of stalking reported having been physically assaulted and 31% sexually assaulted by a partner who later stalked them (Tjaden, 1997; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). In addition, it is estimated that between 29% and 54% of all female murder victims are battered women, and it is believed that stalking preceded the murder in 90% of these cases (Guy, 1993; U.S. Department of Justice, Violence Against Women Grants Office, 1998). Thus, the developing research in the field suggests a strong association between stalking and intimate partner abuse (IPA) (Coleman, 1997; Davis et al., 2000; Logan et al., 2000; McFarlane et al., 1999; Mechanic, Uhlmansiek, et al., 2000; Mechanic, Weaver, et al., 2000; Tjaden, 1997; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; White et al., 2000). Less, however, is known about the context of stalking. In other words, there is much to be learned about why and how stalkers engage in this behavior and what affect it has on their victims.

### **Motivations for Stalking**

Prior research has identified the various motivations for stalking. One study cited control, obsession, jealousy, revenge, and anger as possible motives for stalking (NIJ, 1996). Studies that have focused on stalking in the context of IPA have found that the need to control the victim or the desire to reestablish a relationship may motivate these stalkers (Roberts & Dziegielewski, 1996). Meloy and Gothard (1995) found that domestic partner stalkers are motivated by “abandonment rage arising out of a narcissistic sensitivity which appears to defend against the grief of object loss, which then drives the pursuit” (p. 262). Using data that specifically asked stalking victims their perceptions of their stalkers’ motivations, the U.S. Department of Justice (1998) reported that 21% of victims said that their stalkers wanted to control them, 20% said that the stalker wanted to keep them in the relationship, 16% said that the stalker wanted to scare them, 12% were not sure, 7% said that the stalker was mentally ill or abusing drugs/alcohol, 5% said that the stalker liked or wanted attention, and 1% said that the stalker wanted to catch the victims doing something. Stalkers, then, appear to have many different reasons for engaging in stalking.

### **Stalking Behaviors**

Stalking includes numerous different behaviors and has been defined in various ways. Using factor analysis, Coleman (1997) identified two categories of stalkers based on their types of stalking behaviors. Violent behavior stalkers are those stalkers who break or attempt to break into the victim’s home or car, violate restraining

orders, threaten or attempt to physically harm the victim, physically harm or threatened to harm themselves, steal/read mail, and damage property of the victim's new partner. Harassing behavior stalkers were typified by behaviors such as calling the victim at home, work, or school; following or watching the victim; making hang-up calls; arriving unwanted to the home, work, or school of the victim; sending unwanted gifts, letters, or photos; leaving unwanted messages on the answering machine; or making threats against or harming the victim's new partner (Coleman, 1997). Meloy (1996) identified the following stalking behaviors in his review of existing studies: the sending of aggressive letters, unwanted following, property damage, annoying phone calls, assaults, and unwanted gift giving. Finally, Burgess and her colleagues (1997) identified the following forms of stalking behavior: written and verbal communications; unsolicited and unrecognized claims of romantic involvement on the part of the victims; surveillance, harassment; loitering; and following that produces intense fear and psychological distress to the victim. Thus, researchers have identified a variety of behaviors that constitute stalking.

### **Stalking in the Context of IPA**

Clearly, the majority of stalking occurs in an IPA context (Coleman, 1997; Davis et al., 2000; Logan et al., 2000; McFarlane et al., 1999; Mechanic, Uhlmansiek, et al., 2000; Mechanic, Weaver, et al., 2000; Tjaden, 1997; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; White et al., 2000). Research examining the link between IPA and stalking has found that stalking is highly correlated with psychological and physical abuse (Davis et al., 2000; Mechanic, Weaver, et al., 2000). The few studies that have examined this link focused on the relationship between abuse and stalking, when stalking begins in an IPA relationship, and the effects and consequences of stalking on the victim. In a study examining IPA victims' experiences with stalking, Mechanic, Weaver, et al. (2000) found that stalking appears to be more strongly correlated with psychological abuse than physical abuse; the emotional abuse variables in the study better predicted stalking than did the physical abuse variables. In contrast, in another study examining IPA victims' experiences with stalking, Mechanic, Uhlmansiek, and colleagues (2000) found that severe stalking was highly correlated with severe physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. The researchers (Mechanic, Weaver, et al., 2000) also found that the stalking in the relationship escalated among women who left their partners. In another study examining stalking victimization among a population of men and women who experienced IPA, Logan and colleagues (2000) concluded that stalking is a continuation of intimate partner violence (IPV) that occurs after the relationship has ended. Finally, regarding the effects of stalking, Mechanic, Uhlmansiek, and colleagues (2000) found that women who are severely stalked compared to infrequently stalked women are more likely to suffer from depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Similarly, Davis and his colleagues (2000) found that experiences with stalking in the context of IPA were related to increased

levels of fear, anger, and distress. Therefore, the context of stalking is not entirely clear, and there are contradictory findings about the nature of the phenomenon.

The current study builds on this body of research and examines stalking through victims' experiences. To fully understand stalking and to be able to develop better stalking prevention and treatment, we must have an understanding of the problem from the victims' point of view. The effects of stalking are clearly linked to the motivations and tactics of stalkers, and additional information may provide important clues about how to address stalking more effectively. As such, the current study employed qualitative methodology to provide information about the context of stalking to help identify areas for future research that might be used to devise broader and more effective assistance for victims.

## Method

The data for the current study were collected as part of a larger study on IPV and the criminal justice system response. The current study uses a subsample of 21 respondents.

### Sample

The original sample consisted of female victims of IPA whose cases had entered the criminal justice system (i.e., the abuser was arrested) in one of three jurisdictions in the United States: a medium-sized Midwestern city, a large Western metropolitan area, and a Western, rural, college county. The respondents were recruited from the district attorney's offices in these three jurisdictions.<sup>1</sup> Of the 178 women in the larger study, 21 women in two of the jurisdictions (the metropolitan area and the rural/college county) were randomly selected to participate in the current study and completed an in-depth interview pertaining to their experiences with stalking.<sup>2</sup> All of the interviews were conducted immediately after the final interview for the larger study.<sup>3</sup>

Of the 21 women, nine were White, seven were Latina, four were African American, and one identified as Middle Eastern. The average age was 36 years, with a range of 19 to 56 years. The majority of them (more than 75%) had a high school degree, and their income levels ranged from US\$500 a month to \$6800, with a mean of just under \$2000 a month. Of the 21 women in the current sample, only one respondent was still with her abuser/stalker. Ten respondents (47.6%) experienced stalking over the two time periods, nine (42.8%) experienced stalking only in the first time period (prior to criminal justice intervention), and two respondents (9.5%) only experienced stalking during the second time period.

## Interview Protocol

Given the exploratory nature of the study, the interview format was open ended. The average time of the interviews was 28 min, with a range from 10 to 60 min. The majority of the interviews ( $n = 17$ ) were taped and then transcribed.<sup>4</sup>

The main research foci were identifying the victims' perceptions and reports about (a) the perpetrators' motivation for stalking, (b) the perpetrators' stalking behaviors/methods, and (c) the effect stalking had on the victims. The interview began with a general query about victims and their history and experiences with stalking. Respondents were asked when it began, how it started, and what their relationship was with the perpetrator when the stalking began. They also were asked about how stalking had affected their lives, including their sense of well-being and safety, their employment situation, and their relationships with other people. In addition, when applicable, they were asked how stalking varied based on whether or not the participant was intimately involved with the stalker/abuser at the time. Thus, the current study collected data regarding whether stalking begins or increases in severity when victims and offenders have "broken up" or are in the process of breaking up.

## Findings

### Motivations for Stalking in the Context of IPA

Women cited a variety of issues when asked about the motivations of their partner or ex-partners' stalking behaviors. These explanations included control, anger, and jealousy. Some women also stated their partners abused them in an effort to win them back, to scare them, and because their perpetrators were sick (mentally or physically). It is interesting to note that some women mentioned more positive reasons behind the stalking, namely that the stalking took place out of love or concern. These themes are illustrated below in the women's own words.

Six women (28.6%) cited control issues as motivating their partner or ex-partners' stalking behaviors. Jane, a 50-year-old White woman from the college/rural town, is an example of a woman who reported being controlled. She experienced stalking consistently before and after criminal justice intervention in her domestic violence case (i.e., Time 1 and Time 2) by her ex-partner. She said: "He's a controller. And that's a pattern. I read six books on domestic violence and that's the pattern. And I have heard that he could do this, have somebody else do this to me the rest of my life." Samantha, a 36-year-old White woman from the large metropolitan area, who experienced much violence and consistent stalking from her ex-husband, said,

Because he still has not completely let go of the control. He has, he's such a controlling person you know, I mean . . . But it's just, it's all control. All has to do with control. He has to know what I'm doing all the time. Why I don't know. To have, to be in control.

Kristen, a 49-year-old White woman also from the college/rural town, who experienced stalking only before criminal justice intervention (only Time 1), identified the motivation of her stalker as using fear to control her. She stated,

You know, even though we separated and were going to get a divorce, it was still, he could never work it out in his head about a control issue. You can't control other people. And so this is their way of controlling you. By making you afraid. It's the only control they have over you.

Five respondents (23.8%), including some of the same women who cited control as a motivating factor, mentioned that their stalkers stalked them because they were angry. For example, Kristen also stated,

It was just, I mean he's just a type of person, abusers are like this too. I mean they have a lot of anger in them that doesn't go away. I don't know, sometimes it stems from childhood, who knows where it all comes from but it's just something they don't get rid of.

It is interesting to note that Tina, a 41-year-old Latina woman from the large metropolitan area, who was consistently stalked and threatened by her ex-partner, cited her attempts to seek help from others for her abuse as the impetus for her partner's stalking:

He's mad at me because I call the police on him. I wasn't even going to report it, but my friends talked me into it. I don't want him to come after me. So I says, if I don't report it, he'll continue on.

Some respondents ( $n = 3$ , 14.3%) mentioned jealousy as the primary motivation behind the stalking they experienced. For example, in terms of why he was stalking her, Joan, a 49-year-old White woman from the metropolitan area, whose ex-partner stopped stalking her after criminal justice intervention, mentioned that her partner stalked her to find out if she was with someone new: "Cause he would just ask me, 'Do you have somebody else or something.' He'd want to know if I was with anybody, if I had another man in the apartment of something."

Several respondents ( $n = 3$ , 14.3%) mentioned the stalker was trying to win her back by stalking. Crystal, a 34-year-old African American woman from the large metropolitan area, whose experience with stalking and violence from her ex-partner stopped after the criminal justice intervention, summarized this:

You know that's what I used to tell him. You know I thought, if you wanted to prove to me, I was thinking that it was because he wanted to prove to me, to become a part of my life again. And I don't know why he thought that intimidation and scare tactics will make me change my mind. You know I thought, bring me flowers, bring me candy. Do something that is going to make me think that you're a nice guy, but I truly think that maybe he thought that I, I don't know, maybe it was his last resort. He went from one thing of, you know, begging, and it wasn't going to work and then I thought, he went to, "you are going to go back to me." Which is crazy. What is he going to try to do? Is he going to try to force me? That's not going to work. If anything, it pushed me further from him. But in his mind he thought, "I'm going to force her to do this." And he's crazy. It wasn't going to happen.

Several respondents ( $n = 3$ , 14.3%) also reported that their stalkers were engaging in stalking behaviors to scare them. When asked why the stalker was doing the stalking, each of these three respondents responded with, "To scare me."

Two respondents (9.5%) mentioned that their stalkers' motivation was, in part, due to either mental or physical illness. For example, Shari, a 52-year-old Latina woman from the metropolitan area, whose ex-partner was consistently stalking her and extremely violent (including almost daily threats to kill her), reported: "Well, he had a head injury. He was in an automobile accident. . . . He was violent anyway and I think it just added (to it)."

Last, several respondents ( $n = 3$ , 14.3%) mentioned that their stalkers were doing it for more positive reasons—out of love or concern. For example, when asked why her abuser stalked, Alice, an African American woman in her forties from the metropolitan city, who was stalked and abused consistently throughout both time periods, said: "You know, 'cause he loves me."

Clearly, victims perceived a variety of motivations for stalking. Although some of these motivations are consistent with prior research, the current study unearthed greater variety of motivations that have critical implications.

## How Stalking Is Conducted

Several patterns emerged regarding the process of stalking. These patterns revolved around the stalking behaviors, the respondent's relationship with the abuser when the stalking started, how the stalking changed as the relationship changed, and whether the stalker had other "proxy stalkers" assisting him in the stalking process.

Respondents reported being stalked in several different ways and places. They were physically watched or followed in their homes, at their jobs, or in other public places. Respondents also reported receiving unwanted calls or messages or being sent unwanted letters by the stalker. All together, 16 of the 21 women interviewed (76.2%) reported being watched or followed in or en route to their homes, 10 (47.6%) reported being watched or followed at their jobs, and 9 (42.9%) reported being watched or followed in other places. Thus, stalking was conducted in a

variety of spaces that illustrates that stalking is a method abusers use to assert themselves into their victims lives, beyond the confines of their homes.

The following are examples of respondents' experiences with being followed or watched in or from their homes. Shelia, a 34-year-old African American from the metropolitan area, who experienced consistent stalking, said not only does her ex-partner come by the outside of her building but he also came into her building: "He comes around to check if the light is on in the bedroom at night. He comes in the building and listens at the door to see who is in there." Mary, a 43-year-old African American woman from the metropolitan city, who was the only respondent in the current sample of 21 who was still dating the person who was stalking her (not living together), said, "He seems to watch me. He knows everything. I didn't go to work. I was sick and he called later and says 'I saw your car there [her home].'" Shari, whose ex-partner had a head injury, said,

He parked a mobile home two blocks from my house and watched me with binoculars. He stalked the neighborhood at 1:30 in the morning. And a neighbor of mine goes to work at 1:30 at the airport, so that's how I knew that. He would be directly across the street, sitting up in a tree, watching my house.

In addition to stalking at their homes, many women mentioned that they were also stalked where they worked. Lily, a 24-year-old Latina woman who, like many others, was stalked consistently before and after criminal justice intervention, said, "I work in day care and he would park out there and wait for me to get off my break." Crystal was also stalked at her place of work and said, "That was when he showed up at my job. And they'd say 'Some man's out there looking for you.' And I'd be like, 'Oh gosh.' So he would do that. Then he started breaking my car windows at work." Some women discussed being followed or watched in other places. These places included grocery stores, bars, bus stops, or just as they walked or drove around town. For example, Alice mentioned running into her stalker in the grocery store: "I went into the store, never knew he was there, and he came around the corner."

Another tactic used by men who stalked was to make unwanted calls or leave unwanted messages at the victim's home or work. Nine women (42.9%) reported experiencing this behavior. Denise, a 25-year-old Latina from the metropolitan area, who was stalked by her ex-partner over both time periods, said,

Oh it was crazy. I mean in one instance he called me like thirteen times in a row, I remember. And finally I saw it there on my caller ID and I picked up the phone and said, "What!" You know and he was mad at me because I wasn't calling him. So it was all the time.

Samantha, who mentioned that her ex-husband stalked because of control, illustrated this by the behaviors he exhibits. About phone calls, she said,



But, I am not giving him this house number; I am not putting in another line. I have done it before where I have a separate phone number and answering machine from the other line in the house, so that he can call and get a hold of [her daughter] and [her son] can get a hold of me and he abuses it. Totally abuses it. We would come home and the answering machine would be full of messages from him—"Where are you at? what are you doing? why can't you do this? you're never home."

It is important to examine when the stalking behaviors started during the course of the relationship to more fully understand the process of stalking. It is often assumed that stalking is a behavior that occurs primarily after an intimate couple has broken up (Logan et al., 2000; Mechanic, Uhlmansiek, et al., 2000). In particular, many researchers argued that stalking may be a continuation of domestic violence after the abuser no longer has physical access, and thus control, over their victim (Logan et al., 2000; Mechanic, Uhlmansiek, et al., 2000). It is surprising to note that a majority of the women ( $n = 17$ , 80.9%) stated that the stalking started in some form while they were still in a relationship. Ann said, "I think it [when the stalking started] was probably three months into [the relationship]." Kristen also mentioned that the stalking occurred while they were still involved: "No, he had done that before. . . . He's a very controlling person and so yeah it had been going on for several years actually. We were married for six years and I would say a good four of those years." Finally, Nicky, a 28-year-old Latina from the larger metropolitan area, who was stalked consistently, mentioned that the stalking began very early in her relationship: "It started when in the relationship, within the first 3 months he started stalking me—always calling, wanting to be around."

Notably, 3 of the 17 women (17.6%) who stated that the stalking was occurring throughout the relationship mentioned that at the time they did not see it as stalking behavior. Ann continued,

In the beginning, I think I sort of misread it as, "Oh that's really sweet that he's coming to visit me so much." But looking back now, I'm realizing that he had a job that he was afforded the luxury of never really needing to be in the office, so I was kind of thinking it was him coming to say hi. But I think it was more like him coming to check up on me, because it was never announced. I would never invite him. He just showed up.

Beth, a 21-year-old White woman from the metropolitan location, said,

I never considered it that [stalking] when we were together, but I think it was constant. I just didn't see it as that at the time. When we were together, I thought it was cute that he wanted to know what I was up to. I blew it off. It was continuous though.

Barbara, a 56-year-old White woman from the metropolitan area, also said,

[at the time did you see it as stalking]. No, not right away. Because a couple of times it was really, really cold and he'd bring me some extra gloves or an umbrella. He was

pretending like he was protecting me [the abuser was showing up, following her after she got out of computer classes].

Although most of the women indicated stalking started while the relationship was intact, 10 (47.6%) of the respondents discussed that as they broke up with the defendant, the stalking actually got more intense or increased. Samantha said,

I think it actually did get worse when we separated . . . he would follow me and it was worse then because I would go with other men. And he, all he would do when I went back, was use this against me. So it did get worse and then after I finally did leave him, we were divorced, but I still lived with him. He divorced me and he wouldn't let me leave. And for the first year it was really bad with the following and watching me. I mean he would call and tell me exactly what I had done all day long. Whether I was at home or that I had left. I mean it was awful. I felt like I couldn't do anything. So then it was like, if I stay at home he's watching me and I mean I wasn't sleeping good or anything like that. It was bad for awhile.

And Lily, who was stalked consistently as previously stated, said,

I would say in a way it got worse because it was to the point to where he was watching me from across the street. I work in day care and he would park out there and wait for me to get off from my break. And when I was at home he would sit out in the parking lot or on the street. Or he was having his friends come by. Or he would call and leave songs on my pager all the time. So, that kind of stuff. So in a way it did get worse. And then at one time, I had thought of going back to him just because the kids were always asking about their dad so much and he told me that he was going to change and do all this. I didn't and that triggered it again. So it just got worse. And one day, he slit my mom's tires.

Thus, abusers may resort to more abusive tactics when the relationship ends.

Another interesting pattern that emerged was the notion of "proxy stalking." More than one half of the interviewed women ( $n = 11$ , 52.4%) mentioned that not only had their current or former intimate partners stalked them but also that the stalker had others stalk them as well. Respondents most often mentioned friends and family members as the "proxy stalkers." Some examples of this follow. Ann said, "It's not just him [who stalks me], it's sort of his circle of friends. I don't want to run into them anywhere. Like I see them in the parking garage and stuff."

Lily stated,

As far as following me, he used to have a couple of friends follow me. Like when I'd be out, over at my grandma's he'd tell me, "Yeah so and so told me they saw you at the Bingo." I was sometimes here and I could hear them go through the parking lot for an hour or something stupid. He would do it and he'd have a friend do it or with him.

Once again, Denise, who was stalked over both time periods by her ex-partner, said, "He'd have members of his family call for me. He had his brothers' cars, so they were helping him. I would see that as helping. And they had called for me before." Joan also mentioned, "He did tell me that he had people watching me and stuff. But who they was, I have no idea. I really don't know who they was." Finally, Shari, describing how her ex-partner used other people when he was incarcerated, said,

He had a nephew. When he went to jail on this probation one, I was working at a new job. I thought I was safe. So then his nephew calls me . . . and told me, "My uncle told me to tell you that you can rest in peace now, 'cause he's going to jail for a while." I said, "Who is this?" He says, "[his nephew's name], his nephew." I says, "How in the heck did you get my phone number?" "Oh, my uncle know where you're at. He's been watching you."

If the stalker himself is incapacitated or under court order and cannot stalk, he may resolve this "setback" and continue harassing his victim by stalking her through other people or "proxy stalkers."

## Effects of Stalking

The effect stalking has on victims has important implications. To help the victims, it is important to know how stalking affects them. The women in the current sample were seriously affected by the stalking in many negative ways that can be categorized into tangible effects and emotional or mental health effects.

In terms of tangible effects, two women (9.5%) lost their jobs because of the stalking. Eight women (38.0%) were forced to move, in attempts to avoid the stalking, and an additional three women (14.3%) seriously considered moving because of the stalking. Three women (14.3%) discussed the expensive nature of the ordeal. For example, they felt compelled to get caller ID and change their phone numbers because of the threat and nuisance of the stalking, and incurred other costs from the damage the stalkers caused, such as the price to fix broken windows and cars.

The most common reported negative effect of stalking was related to the mental and emotional impact. Respondents reported feeling scared, depressed, humiliated, embarrassed, distrustful of others, and angry or hateful. Fifteen women (71.4%) reported that the stalking scared them. The following quotes illustrate just how scary this behavior was for victims. Sarah, a 49-year-old White woman who was continually threatened by her ex-partner, said,

Scared to death. Because he doesn't give up. I mean my experience with him is with these other people it would be years, years that he would hold grudges. Um, and try to find out where they moved or he just doesn't let things go. So yeah, I'm scared. It's been a year, a year and a half almost and um that's nothing for him.

Lily stated,

[And had you been scared when you were together?] Oh yeah. 'Cause he had threatened me, said that if I left him he would do something to my mom or my grandma, he'd do something so that I'd regret leaving him. So I didn't do anything and I didn't tell anybody nothing until after. And then as my relationship went on with him, like my cousin saw him pull my hat one time. My mom saw him pull me in the car. People started seeing things. So I just started saying stuff because my friend was telling me, "Well, what if he does something to you?" I didn't think the relationship was like that. So I told my mom everything that happened. My girlfriends, I started telling them. The only time I would talk to them was if I would like sneak and call from my mom's or something. But still I wasn't, I couldn't talk about it.

Kristen specifically mentioned that she is afraid of her stalker finding out that she has moved on in her life. She stated,

Oh yeah, and I still am [afraid of him]. I'm afraid of what's going to happen when he finds out I've met someone else. That's what I'm afraid of. I'm worried about that. I don't know what to do. I'm thinking about moving for awhile. But that scares me.

Joan and Crystal discussed how their fear has affected their behavior and thoughts when outside. Joan stated, "It felt like when I was walking outside, I always had to be looking over my shoulder to make sure he wasn't behind me, or lurking behind a tree or something." Crystal reported,

Sometimes I would be afraid to go outside of work. Especially with the change of season and 4:30, 5:00 and it is starting to get dark and the parking lot situation. You know, before I went to court and had the restraining order and everything I was always thinking, "Is he out there?"

Seven women (33.3%) reported their stalking led to distrust of others. Most women mentioned how difficult it is to contemplate getting involved with another person after the experience of stalking. Ann stated,

Yeah, I'm extremely weary of getting involved with anyone. Probably since the initial separation. There's been two people who I've seen very casually and that was like for a two-week period tops. I think I'm just, I don't know, I think that having a child the dynamic is different. I don't want to put my child in a bad situation. And I think it's unfortunate that a lot of women would put themselves back in it again, except that they have a child so then they wouldn't. I think, women, I know it's hard because I've done it. It would be nice if we did it for our own well-being not just because we have a child.

Joan also mentioned how her experiences with stalking have affected her relationships with potential partners:

I'm less trusting and I have a real hard time now trying to get into a relationship. There's times when I want to be in a relationship and then when I get involved with this person, I don't want to be around him. And the guy is completely different than [the abuser]. I don't know. I guess I'm real defensive. You know. It's hard to describe, how I feel. It's like I want a relationship, yet I don't want a relationship. I'm scared to commit.

Others talked about feeling humiliated ( $n = 5, 23.8\%$ ), depressed ( $n = 2, 9.5\%$ ), and angry or hateful ( $n = 2, 9.5\%$ ). For example, Crystal mentioned how it made her feel at her place of work. She stated,

But it was embarrassing. You know, I was embarrassed because I had just started that job. To have this person come over that I didn't want a life with anymore. To be showing up, loaded. I mean I was just like, "Oh, god!" You know, and I was afraid that it was going to affect my job.

Mary, who is still with her abuser/stalker, is illustrative of how stalking can affect one's self-esteem. The stalking and the violence that she experienced put her in a deep depression. She had this to say:

I'm awful. It's made me feel bad, real bad. I mean I uh, he makes me feel so horrible and makes me feel like I have to put up with him because I'm such an awful person that I don't have no business looking outside the house. And stuff like that you know.

Mary's body language was interesting as well. She was unable to look the interviewer in the eyes. Moreover, after talking about the above, she went on to say that she can barely leave her house now because she has a really hard time talking to anyone—from children on the street to cashiers at the grocery store.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The current study examined victims' perceived motivations for perpetrators who stalked in the context of IPA. It asked victims about their experiences with the process and the effects of stalking. The current study found that control and anger were often perceived motivations for stalking. Victims also commonly felt that stalking was used to scare them and/or get them to reestablish the relationship. These findings are consistent with prior research. (NIJ, 1996; Roberts & Dziegielewski, 1996; U.S. Department of Justice, 1998). It is important to note that like much of the research on IPA and, in particular the feminist research on IPA, control was the number-one cited motivation for the stalking (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh, & Lewis, 2000). It is important to note, however, that several respondents viewed the stalking as a result of more positive motivations (i.e., stalkers were doing it out of love or concern for the victim). This is in direct contrast with

most of the research on stalking and needs to be explored in detail in future research. Although these victims clearly experienced stalking (i.e., they fit the criteria to be part of the current study) and acknowledged that the behavior was unwanted, they still tended to give perpetrators “the benefit of the doubt” in terms of motivations. This is consistent with research that discusses ways in which women who experience IPA tend to minimize their abuse (Smith, 1994). It also illustrates the problems that result when the social construction of love in a culture includes possessiveness and jealousy. As the women noted, many of them reported that they felt early stalking behaviors indicated that their partner was being considerate or expressing his love through “excessive” attention. This finding illustrates the need for more education and public awareness to heighten awareness and change the conceptualization of love so that jealousy and possessiveness are viewed as early warning signs of an abusive relationship.

Previous research identified how stalking affects women in IPA situations (Davis et al., 2000; Mechanic, Uhlmansiek, et al., 2000; White et al., 2000). The current study supports these findings. Stalking had a serious negative affect on women’s lives. Women reported increases in levels of depression, fear, and anger. Women talked about having to change their lives, moving in an attempt to thwart the stalking. Women also discussed leaving jobs or having problems maintaining employment because of the stalking. The current study, however, highlighted ways that stalking affected other relationships in their lives. Some women discussed how stalking interfered with maintaining relationships with children, other family members, and friends. Respondents also discussed the ways stalking hampered their ability to trust other people, in general, and potential partners, in particular. Future research should examine this effect in more detail, especially because a failure to maintain other supportive relationships may enhance the effectiveness of the stalking. For example, women without support systems may be more apt to return to batterers who stalk them out of fear or because they simply lack the emotional resources to deal with the stalking any longer.

Previous literature also has identified behaviors used in the stalking process (Coleman, 1997; Mechanic, Uhlmansiek, et al., 2000; Mechanic, Weaver, et al., 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). The current study confirmed these findings indicating that stalkers target victims at home and in public, and that women are often threatened with bodily harm. Victims also suffer unwanted phone calls and other types of persistent behaviors. The current study, however, identified the existence of “proxy stalkers.” Although other studies (Mullen, Pathe, & Purcell, 2000; Sheridan & Davies, 2001) have reported this phenomenon, they have limited the discussion of proxy stalkers to relationships involving strangers.

Respondents in the current study discussed ways that other people “helped” the stalker by either standing in for the stalker (acting in place of him) or by supplementing the stalker’s actions (by working with him to magnify the stalking experience). The use of proxy stalkers gives the stalker greater control over the victim than exists through his stalking alone. In many ways, this experience may be even more

terrifying for victims as numerous people may be engaged in following them, watching them, and harassing them. They may feel even less safe than a victim who is stalked "only" by her abuser. Victims also may be in more danger when additional stalkers are added to the equation; perhaps the potential for violence and/or harm increases by the introduction of these "helpers." In addition, the proxy stalker may be engaging in stalking behavior when the primary stalker is unable to stalk (i.e., when the primary stalker is incarcerated or under a court order to stay away). For example, using proxy stalkers is a creative way to subvert the intention of protective orders, and many states may lack appropriate legislation to deal with proxy stalkers effectively. It is important that these proxy stalkers are held accountable by the criminal justice system if protective orders and stalking statutes are to be enforced with any efficacy. This issue needs additional research.

Another important finding from the current study relates to the function of stalking. The current study supports previous research that concludes that stalking behavior may intensify after the relationship is terminated (Logan et al., 2000; Mechanic, Weaver, et al., 2000). The current study, however, also found that the overwhelming proportion of victims reported experiencing stalking prior to the break-up period. This finding contradicts research that classifies stalking primarily as part of a continuation of IPA occurring after the relationship ends (see Logan et al., 2000; Mechanic, Weaver, et al., 2000). The current study indicates that stalking should also be seen as a variant of IPA during the relationship. Stalking may give the abuser greater control over his victim during the relationship and may be one of the many tactics batterers use to ensure that women stay in abusive relationships. Clearly much research indicates that batterers use a wide variety of tactics to control women in abusive relationships (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Dobash et al., 2000; Tong, 1984); however, stalking is not usually discussed as one of these tactics. It more often is viewed as a way that abusers ensure that women return if they try to leave. Moreover, it was discovered that some women experienced stalking during the relationship without defining it as such. In fact, as previously noted, they defined the behavior as positive in the beginning (i.e., he is doing this because he loves me). Additional research is needed to better explore the ways that abusers may use stalking throughout the course of the relationship. Perhaps abusers who stalk during the relationship are more apt to stalk when the relationship has ended. Similarly, it is possible that abusers who employ stalking during a relationship are more dangerous stalkers when the relationship ends. These types of stalkers also may be more apt to use creative stalking techniques, such as employing proxy stalkers. These issues are important avenues for future research.

Because of the limitations in the current study (i.e., sample size of 21), it is unclear whether these findings may represent broader trends. Stalking, as a legal concept, is a relatively new phenomenon. There is a need to continue to explore the link between the motivations to stalk, the behaviors used to stalk, and the impact stalking has on victims. Qualitative research, such as the current study, can help identify new and important areas of research that require additional examination.

## Notes

1. After their case closed, victims were mailed a flyer briefly describing the research and providing contact information. Only women who contacted the project were included in the initial study. Because personnel from the district attorney's and prosecutor's offices controlled the mailing of the flyers, the overall response rate for the original study is unknown (i.e., they did not keep track of how many flyers they handed or sent out). Women were interviewed immediately after their case closed, 6 months later, and 1 year later. They were paid US\$40 for the first interview and \$50 for each of the two subsequent interviews. This sample included 178 women at Time 1 (of which more than 92% experienced stalking), 160 women at Time 2 (of which more than 56% experienced stalking), and 148 women at Time 3 (of which more than 58% experienced stalking).

2. Only respondents who experienced stalking at either or both Time 1 (the first interview from the larger study) or Time 2 (the 6-month interview) were randomly selected. Only the first two time periods were included because this in-depth stalking interview took place at the same time as the third interview for the larger study because of time constraints for the researcher. The two jurisdictions were selected because the researcher had the ability to interview respondents face-to-face at these locations.

3. All interviews were conducted at a time and place that was convenient and safe for the respondent and the interviewer. The respondents were paid \$25 for participating in these interviews.

4. In one of the interviews, recording was halted at the respondent's request because she felt uncomfortable speaking while being recorded. The remaining five interviews were not taped because of tape recorder malfunction or the inability to tape because of the setting of the interview.

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