

The Dangerous Nature of Intimate Relationship Stalking: Threats, Violence, and Associated Risk Factors

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Although previous studies of forensic and law enforcement stalking populations (Harmon, Rosner, & Owens, 1995; Meloy & Gothard, 1995; Zona, Sharma, & Lane, 1993) agree that the degree of intimacy of the victim–suspect relationship is an important factor in stalking cases, they have not conducted in-depth analyses of this variable. This study compared 223 intimate ($n = 135$) and non-intimate ($n = 88$) stalking cases managed by the Los Angeles Police Department's Threat Management Unit. A path analysis revealed a significant relationship between the stalkers' intimate versus non-intimate status and violence committed toward persons and property. This relationship was positively influenced by the suspect's level of proximity to the victim and threats toward the victim and property, but not influenced by suspect's criminal, psychiatric, and domestic violence histories. Overall, intimate relationship stalkers used more dangerous stalking behaviors than non-intimate relationship stalkers. Risk factors for assessing dangerousness of stalkers are discussed. Copyright © 1999 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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Stalking has only recently been introduced into criminal law. However, stalking behaviors have existed in our society for quite some time (Schaum & Parrish, 1995). The movement to create stalking laws was instigated by the 1989 murder of actress Rebecca Schaeffer (Zona, Palarea, & Lane, 1998). The effects of Ms. Schaeffer's stalking and murder on society were both positive and negative: while this case increased the attention given to stalking crimes, it also supported society's incorrect belief that the crime of stalking only afflicts celebrities.

Since Ms. Schaeffer's death, stalking laws have been adopted by all 50 states and the Model Penal Code (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1996). Additionally, the Los Angeles Police Department established the Threat Management Unit (LAPD—TMU), which exclusively handles cases that concern stalking and other threat-related crimes (Lane, 1992; Zona *et al.*, 1998). The purpose of the LAPD—TMU is to identify and manage stalking cases, and to provide the appropriate intervention to curb the suspect's behavior. As of 1996, the LAPD—TMU has investigated and managed 341 stalking cases (Zona *et al.*, 1998). The LAPD—TMU has also created a stalker typology system, allowing for better assessment of the suspect's level of dangerousness (Zona *et al.*, 1998; Zona, Sharma, & Lane, 1993).

The first legal definition of the crime of stalking was proposed by the California legislature in 1990 (Zona *et al.*, 1998). Section 646.9 of the California Penal Code defines stalking as the wilful, malicious, and repeated following or harassing of another person, which includes a credible threat with the intent to place that person in reasonable fear for his or her safety or the safety of his or her immediate family. The elements of the California stalking law have provided the foundation for stalking legislation in many other states and were the foundation for the federal Model Penal Code (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1996).

Since stalking has only recently been identified as a crime, empirical research on stalkers and their victims is relatively limited. Many of the articles published have described case studies of stalking behaviors (Dziegielewski & Roberts, 1995; Kurt, 1995; Meloy, 1992; Mullen and Pathé, 1994a, 1994b). Only a few empirical studies on stalking in forensic and law enforcement populations have been published. In the first study of this kind, Zona *et al.* (1993) analyzed the police records of 74 stalking cases referred to the Los Angeles Police Department's Threat Management Unit. Subsequent to Zona *et al.* (1993), Meloy and Gothard (1995) analyzed the psychiatric and legal records of 20 obsessional followers and compared them to 30 randomly selected mentally disordered offenders from the San Diego County Superior Court's Forensic Evaluation Unit. The third major study on this type of stalking sample (Harmon *et al.*, 1995) analyzed the records of 48 individuals charged with Harassment, Aggravated Harassment, and/or Menacing who were referred to the Forensic Psychiatric Clinic of the Criminal and Supreme Courts of New York. These three studies were similar in their descriptions and methods. In addition, they found similar results concerning demographic variables, methods of contacting the victim, and threats and violence to people and property. Specifically, these studies agreed that the prior victim-suspect relationship is an important variable to account for in stalking cases.

While these studies identified the prior victim-suspect relationship as a salient factor in the analysis of stalking cases, empirical work differentiating intimate from non-intimate stalkers has been lacking. For example, although Zona *et al.* (1993) identified 47% of their 74 cases as Simple Obsessional (i.e., cases in which a prior

victim–suspect relationship existed), and found that this group committed more violence toward persons and property than their other stalker categories, they did not statistically analyze the level of victim–suspect intimacy in relation to these violent behaviors. Meloy and Gothard (1995) found that 55% of their sample had prior relationships: 15% of their sample stalked former spouses, while 40% stalked sexual intimates. However, they also did not statistically compare and contrast these two intimate relationship groups with their stranger group. Furthermore, although Meloy and Gothard (1995) found that 25% of their sample physically assaulted their victims, they did not analyze this variable by the victim–suspect relationship. In the Harmon *et al.* (1995) study, 71% of their cases consisted of prior relationships: 13% had personal or romantic relationships, 25% had professional relationships, 25% had employment relationships, and 8% were acquaintances. Despite these authors identifying the presence of prior relationships in their cases, the majority of their statistical analyses compared their Affectionate/Amarous and Persecutory/Angry subgroups. Analyses from this study revealed that the Affectionate/Amarous group assaulted victims more often than the Persecutory/Angry group. However, since the Affectionate/Amarous category contained a heterogeneous grouping of victim–offender relationships (e.g., prior marriages, prior dating relationships, and strangers and acquaintances who were pursuing intimate relationships with their victims), it is unclear whether the violence was related to the presence of a prior intimate relationship or the desire to establish an intimate relationship.

In addition to these shortcomings in the existing stalking research, Meloy (1996) noted that as a result of law enforcement's selection bias toward arresting and prosecuting more "high profile" or "stranger" stalkers, there exists an underrepresentation of spouse or ex-spouse stalkers in studies of forensic and law enforcement stalking samples. Accounting for these problems in the existing research may have significant implications on the assessment of dangerousness of stalkers.

The void in the existing literature regarding intimate relationship stalking may be filled through research on marital and dating violence. Marital and dating violence literature suggests that one of the most dangerous times in an abusive intimate relationship is when the relationship is terminated (Walker & Meloy, 1998). In a review of 215,273 homicides from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Report, Kellerman and Mercy (1992) found that of the 16,552 murders of intimate partners and spouses committed by men, the most common motive for the murder was as a response to a woman leaving an abusive relationship. Cordes (1993) cited a 1991 Federal Bureau of Investigation study that reported that 90% of women who were killed by their husbands were stalked prior to their murders. Schaum & Parrish (1995) cited a study by Victim Protective Services, who proposed that 83% of stalking offenses were committed by spouses, ex-spouses, or former significant others. Victim Protective Services proposed a domestic violence model of stalking, such that victims who leave abusive relationships have a 75% higher chance of being killed by their partners than in non-abusive relationships, with stalking behaviors preceding the murder (Schaum & Parrish, 1995). This literature illustrates the importance of accounting for the presence of an intimate relationship when assessing the dangerousness level of stalking perpetrators.

In addition to the prior victim–suspect relationship, several other risk factors have been identified in the previous stalking studies: level of contact proximity, use of threats, and the suspect’s criminal and psychiatric histories. The suspect’s level of proximity used in contacting the victim has been found to be an important factor in assessing the suspect’s dangerousness. Zona *et al.* (1993) found that Simple Obsessional stalkers used more face-to-face contact than Love Obsessional or Erotomantic stalkers. Similarly, Harmon *et al.* (1995) found that Affectionate/Amorous stalkers made more face-to-face contacts than Persecutory/Angry stalkers. In relating these findings to the suspect’s dangerousness level, Zona and Palarea (1997) found that 77% of suspects that committed violence toward persons or property used physical approach as a regular means of contacting their victims.

The use of threats has also been related to the suspect’s dangerousness level. Zona *et al.* (1993) found that Simple Obsessional stalkers made more threats overall than Love Obsessional and Erotomantic stalkers. Furthermore, 30% of these Simple Obsessional stalkers followed their threats with harm to persons or property. In the most recent LAPD-TMU sample, Zona and Palarea (1997) found that of the 111 cases where violence was committed toward persons or property, threats were made in 84% of the cases. Meloy and Gothard (1995) found that 55% of their sample threatened persons and 25% threatened property, with the suspect being more likely to threaten a prior spouse or intimate than a stranger. Harmon *et al.* (1995) found that of the 12 Affectionate/Amorous stalkers who made threats, five assaulted the victim.

The prior stalking research has also discussed the suspect’s criminal history. Meloy and Gothard (1995) found that the majority of their sample had a prior criminal history, while 46% of the Harman *et al.* (1995) sample had a history of offenses that were similar to the subject’s current charge (Meloy, 1996). Zona and Palarea (1997) found that of the 67 suspects who committed violence toward persons or property during their stalking campaign, 46% had a prior violent crime conviction.

A final risk factor identified in the stalking literature is the suspect’s psychiatric history. Zona *et al.* (1993) found that 40% of Simple Obsessionals had either a specific mention or clear evidence of a mental illness, particularly personality disorders. Meloy and Gothard (1995) found that 85% of their sample met criteria for both axis I and II disorders, with the majority of axis II disorders involving a personality disorder other than antisocial personality disorder. Harmon *et al.* (1995) found that the majority of their Affectionate/Amorous group contained primary diagnoses of delusional disorders (including erotomania), personality disorders, or schizophrenia.

Overall, previous research has demonstrated that the nature of the prior victim–suspect relationship is a critical variable in assessing the suspect’s level of dangerousness. In addition, several other risk factors have been demonstrated to influence the suspect’s dangerousness level. As an extension of previous work, this study hypothesized that suspects who are stalking victims with whom they had a prior intimate relationship would (1) use higher levels of proximity in contacting their victim, (2) make more victim, third party, and property threats, and (3) commit more violent acts towards persons and property than suspects who had non-intimate relationships with their victims. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that stalkers who have known psychiatric, criminal, general violence, and domestic

violence histories would also be more likely to commit violence toward persons and property. Two path analysis models were hypothesized to demonstrate the association between type of victim–suspect relationship and damage toward persons and property: the first model contained stalking contact behavior variables (i.e., level of proximity used in contacting the victim; threats toward the victim, third parties, and property), while the second contained the suspect’s historical variables (i.e., psychiatric, criminal, general violence, and domestic violence histories).

METHOD

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 223 victim and suspect pairs who had an established relationship prior to the stalking campaign. All cases were managed by the Los Angeles Police Department’s Threat Management Unit (LAPD—TMU) from 1990 to 1996. Intimate relationship cases ($n = 135$) were defined as cases in which the victim and suspect were married, engaged, cohabiting, dating, or had a casual sexual relationship. Non-intimate cases ($n = 88$) were defined as cases in which the victim and suspect did not have an intimate relationship. This category contained a variety of types of victim–suspect relationship, including co-workers, schoolmates, roommates, neighbors, and professional business relationships (e.g., physician–patient, therapist–client, and teacher–student).

Materials

The data were collected through the Revised Zona Profile—Threat Management Research Questionnaire 5.0 (Zona *et al.*, 1993; Zona & Palarea, 1997). This research tool was created by these authors for the exclusive use of the Los Angeles Police Department—Threat Management Unit in assisting its detectives with their investigations. The Zona Profile is a 13 page document that assesses for a variety of variables, including demographic information on the victim and suspect (e.g., gender, age, and education level), victim–suspect relationship, contact behaviors, threat and damage behaviors, information gathering on the victim, law enforcement interventions, and suspect mental health, criminal, and violence histories.

The suspect’s historical variables consisted of composites of individual variables screened for in the Zona Profile. Specifically, the psychiatric history variable consisted of the suspect’s known history of psychiatric hospitalization, use of psychotherapy, and/or use of psychotropic medication. Additional variables in this category included a known history of neurological damage, a history of or current presence of alcohol or drug abuse, presence of delusional thoughts, and a known history or current presence of suicidal ideation/plans/attempts. The criminal history variable consisted of any known police reports, arrests, or convictions relating to the suspect. The general violence variable included any known history of violent criminal acts and violent acts that did not come to the attention of law enforcement officials, including domestic violence. Domestic violence history was

then separated from the general violence variable and identified as its own variable. Although a thorough screening of the case files was conducted to identify the presence or absence of these variables, some of the police investigations did not contain information on their presence or absence, particularly the domestic violence variable. Thus, some of the historical variable categories included missing data.

The level of proximity used in contacting the victim was measured on a five point scale: 1 = distant unidirectional (e.g., phone message), 2 = distant dyadic (e.g., phone conversation), 3 = physical following/stalking, 4 = attempted face-to-face contact, and 5 = actual face-to-face contact. Level of education was also rated on a five point scale: 1 = some high school, 2 = high school degree, 3 = some college, 4 = college degree, and 5 = graduate/professional degree.

Procedure

The data for this study were contained within a pre-existing database that is maintained by the LAPD—TMU. The data consisted of information that was collected through regular investigation procedures. Sources of information included interviews with the victims, suspects, and other individuals (e.g., family, friends, co-workers, and business professionals) conducted by the investigating TMU detective, prior police reports, arrest records, criminal history records, court documents, probation reports, medical records, and evidence provided by the victim.

Only cases that were officially opened for investigation were included in this study. In order to open an investigation, the case was first screened by the officer-in-charge, and if the pattern of harassment was determined to be obsessional in nature, a follow-up interview was conducted with the victim. If the case met investigative criteria for stalking, it was formally opened as a TMU case.

The Zona Profile was first completed by the investigating detective upon closing an investigation. It was then reviewed, along with the rest of the case file, by the researchers. To gather complete data, any additional information gleaned from the case file, interviews with the investigating detective, or law enforcement and court databases was added to the reviewed profile.

RESULTS

Intimate and Non-intimate stalking cases were compared with regard to victim and suspect demographic information, suspect historical variables, and suspect stalking contact behaviors. The demographic variables analyzed included gender, age, and education levels of the suspects and victims. The suspect historical variables included psychiatric, criminal, general violence, and domestic violence histories. The suspect stalking contact behaviors were analyzed by threats against the victim, violence committed against persons and property, the relationship between overall threats and overall violence, the relationship between threats and violence against the victim, and the level of proximity used in contacting the victim. Path analyses were then used to determine the relationships between the type of victim–suspect

Table 1. Victim age, education level, and gender demographics as compared by relationship type

Victim demographics	Victim-suspect relationship			F/χ^2
	Intimate	Non-intimate	n	
Age	32.3	37.9	206	13.12**
Educational Level	3.0	3.8	165	19.10**
Gender				
Male	53.2	46.8	47	1.35
Female	62.5	37.5	176	

Note. The gender values represent percentages.
** $p < .01$.

Table 2. Suspect, age, education level, and gender demographics as compared by relationship type

Suspect demographics	Victim-suspect relationship			F/χ^2
	Intimate	Non-intimate	n	
Age	34.0	36.5	217	3.55*
Educational level	2.7	2.9	146	.96
Gender				
Male	65.5	34.5	174	8.22**
Female	42.9	57.1	49	

Note. The gender values represent percentages.
* $p = .06$, ** $p < .01$.

relationship, the suspect's historical variables, the suspect's contact behaviors, and violence committed against persons and property.

Table 1 provides a comparison of victim characteristics between Intimate and Non-intimate cases. Statistical analyses revealed no difference between the likelihood of men or women being the victim of an Intimate or Non-intimate stalker, $\chi^2(1) = 1.35, p > .10$. The victims' ages were significantly different between the two groups, with Intimate stalking victims being younger ($M = 32.3$ years) than Non-Intimate stalking victims ($M = 37.9$ years), $F(1, 205) = 13.12, p < .01$. A significant difference existed between the victim's levels of education, with Non-intimate victims having higher levels of education ($M = 3.8$) than Intimate victims ($M = 3.0$), $F(1, 164) = 19.10, p < .01$; Non-intimate victims averaged in the "college degree" range, while Intimate victims averaged in the "some college" range.

Table 2 provides a comparison of suspect characteristics between Intimate and Non-intimate cases. Men were more likely (65.5% versus 34.5%, $n = 174$) to be the suspects in Intimate than Non-intimate cases, whereas women were more likely (57.1% versus 42.9%, $n = 49$) to be the suspects in Non-intimate than Intimate cases, $\chi^2(1) = 8.22, p < .001$. Although there was no significant difference between suspects' ages, there was a trend demonstrating that Intimate stalking suspects were slightly younger ($M = 34.0$ years) than Non-intimate stalking suspects ($M = 36.5$ years), $F(1, 216) = 3.55, p = .06$. A significant difference did not exist between Intimate ($M = 2.7$) and Non-intimate ($M = 2.9$) suspects' levels of education, $F(1, 145) = .96, p > .05$, with both averaging in the "some college" range.

Table 3. Level of contact proximity, threat, and damage behaviors as compared by relationship type

Dangerousness factors	Victim–suspect relationship			<i>F</i> / χ^2
	Intimate	Non-intimate	<i>n</i>	
Victim threats				
Present	66.7	33.3	144	6.39*
Absent	49.4	50.6	79	
Violence against person				
Present	76.2	23.8	42	5.31*
Absent	56.9	43.1	181	
Violence against property				
Present	75.7	24.3	74	10.62**
Absent	53.0	47.0	149	
Overall threats followed by violence against persons or property				
Present	73.8	26.3	80	5.53*
Absent	55.8	44.2	77	
Victim threat followed by violence against the victim				
Present	80.6	19.4	36	4.17*
Absent	62.0	38.0	75	
Level of contact proximity	4.37	3.42	217	25.74**

Note. The threat and violence factors values represent percentages.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

With regard to variables that assessed for levels of dangerousness, Intimate stalkers were more likely to exhibit higher levels of these factors than Non-intimate stalkers (see Table 3). For those cases in which threats were made toward the victim ($n = 144$), Intimate stalkers were twice as likely to threaten (66.7%) as Non-intimate stalkers (33.3%), $\chi^2(1) = 6.39$, $p < .05$. Of the 42 cases in which the victim or a third person was harmed (e.g., simple assault, sexual assault, assault with a deadly weapon), Intimate stalkers were significantly more likely to commit violence against persons (76.2%) than Non-intimate stalkers (23.8%), $\chi^2(1) = 5.30$, $p < .05$. Likewise, of the 74 cases in which property was damaged, Intimate stalkers were significantly more likely to commit violence against property (75.7%) than Non-intimate stalkers (24.3%), $\chi^2(1) = 10.62$, $p < .01$. Cases in which a threat was made toward a person or property and followed by violence toward persons or property ($n = 80$) were three times as likely to occur in Intimate (73.8%) than Non-intimate (26.3%) cases, $\chi^2(1) = 5.53$, $p < .05$. Furthermore, those cases in which the victim was threatened and then physically harmed ($n = 36$) occurred four times more often in Intimate cases (80.6%) than in Non-intimate cases (19.4%), $\chi^2(1) = 4.17$, $p < .05$. Finally, Intimate stalkers used significantly more physical approach behaviors in contacting their victims ($M = 4.37$) than Non-intimate stalkers ($M = 3.42$), $F(1, 216) = 25.74$, $p < .01$.

Two path analysis models were developed to identify relationships between relationship type and violence committed against persons or property, one based on suspect historical variables, and the other based on contact behaviors used in the stalking campaign. Table 4 provides a summary of the correlations between all path analysis variables. Overall, significant relationships were found between

Table 4. A summary of correlations between the path analysis variables

Suspect variables	Relationship type	Person damage	Property damage
Known suspect historical variables			
Psychiatric history	.02	.11	-.01
General violence history	.10	.43**	-.12
Criminal history	.12	-.09	.11
Domestic violence history	.24**	-.08	.16
Suspect stalking contact behaviors			
Victim threats	.19**	.15*	.05
Third party threats	.04	-.02	.13*
Property threats	.18**	.05	.35**
Level of contact proximity to victim	-.33**	-.30**	-.19**
Overall variables			
Relationship type	—	.15*	.22**
Person damage	—	—	.15*

Note. The values represent beta weights. Positive correlations indicate an intimate victim–suspect relationship, except in the level of contact proximity to victim variable, in which a negative correlation indicates an intimate victim–suspect relationship.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Relationship Type and damage towards the victim or a third party ($r = .12$, $p < .05$) and Relationship Type and Property Damage ($r = .22$, $p < .01$), with Intimate stalkers committing both forms of violence more often than Non-intimate stalkers. The first model demonstrated that the suspect's known historical variables (i.e., known psychiatric, criminal, general violence, and domestic violence histories) did not further explain the relationship between type of stalker and damage behaviors (see Figure 1). However, a significant correlation existed between the presence of an intimate victim–suspect relationship and the suspect's history of domestic violence ($r = .24$, $p < .01$). Additionally, a significant relationship was found between suspects in intimate relationships who displayed a history of general violence and committed violence toward persons during their stalking campaign ($r = .43$, $p < .01$).

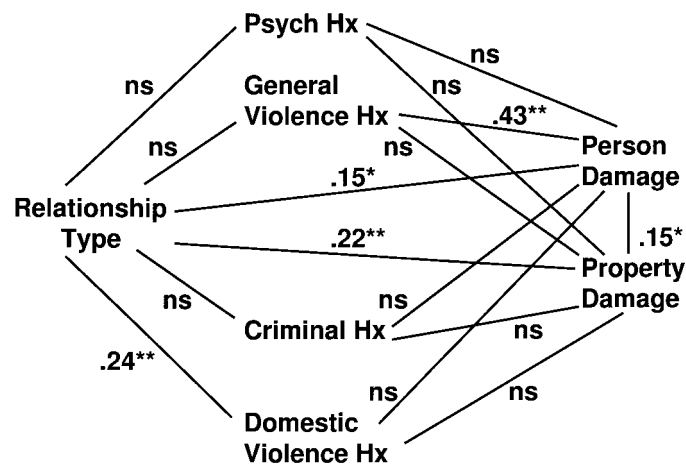


Figure 1. A path analysis demonstrating the relationship between victim–suspect relationship type and damage to persons and property as related to the suspect's known psychiatric, criminal, violence, and domestic violence histories

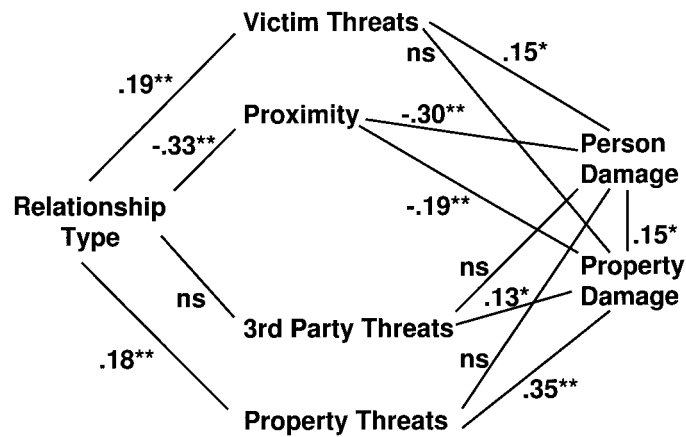


Figure 2. A path analysis demonstrating the relationship between victim–suspect relationship type and damage to persons and property as related to the level of proximity used in contacting the victim and threats toward the victim, third parties, and property

The second model tested the correlations between the victim–suspect relationship type and violence against persons and property as they relate to proximity and threats used in contacting the victim (see Figure 2). A significant path was found between Relationship Type and Proximity ($r = -.33$, $p < .01$), with Intimate stalkers using higher levels of proximity in contacting their victims and subsequently committing some form of violence against persons or property. In addition, a significant path was found between Relationship Type and Victim Threats ($r = .19$, $p < .01$), and Victim Threats and Person Damage ($r = .15$, $p < .05$), with Intimate stalkers making more threats toward their victims and committing more violence toward their victims or third parties. Similarly, a significant path was found between Relationship Type and Property Threats ($r = .18$, $p < .01$), and Property Threats and Property Damage ($r = .35$, $p < .01$), with Intimate stalkers making more threats and committing more violence toward property. Although Third Party Threats did significantly correlate with Property Damage ($r = .13$, $p < .05$), with Intimate stalkers conducting this behavior more than Non-intimate stalkers, the presence of Third Party Threats was not correlated with the Relationship Type variable.

DISCUSSION

Taken as a whole, these results demonstrate that intimate relationship stalkers are more dangerous than non-intimate relationship stalkers. Specifically, intimate stalkers threatened persons and property more often, committed more violence against persons and property (including physical violence toward the victim), were more likely to “make good” on their threats by following them with some form of violent behavior, and used more physical approach behaviors in contacting their victims than non-intimate stalkers. These results illustrate the importance of accounting for the presence of an intimate relationship when assessing for violence risk in stalking cases.

The current findings are consistent with past research on intimate relationship stalking cases. Meloy and Gothard (1995) found a significant relationship between threats and intimacy, while Harmon *et al.* (1995) found a significant relationship between threats and assaults in their Affectionate/Amorous subgroup. This finding may be explained through intimacy levels in interpersonal relationships: suspects who had higher levels of intimacy with their victims may use more physical approach behaviors with their victims due to their comfort level in interacting with their victims, as well as their knowledge of the victims' lifestyles and whereabouts. Additionally, intimate stalkers' behaviors may be fueled by affective responses to the dissolution of their relationship, such as anger, jealousy, and rejection, which may occur at more intense levels than in non-intimate cases (Meloy, 1996). This sentiment was echoed by Zona *et al.* (1993), who suggested that their Simple Obsessional group's behavior could be best described as "a sustainable rage in response to a perceived narcissistic injury."

The current study's findings serve notice to society's misperception of the crime of stalking. In a colloquial sense, the term "stalking" evokes images in the public's mind of Madonna, David Letterman, and Steven Spielberg—celebrities who have had highly publicized stalking cases. Conversely, this study reinforces the finding of Zona *et al.* (1993) that stalking is not only a crime for celebrities. While the media's attention on high-profile cases continues to portray the image that stalking is a celebrity crime, it occurs more often between non-public figures who had some form of established relationship than between celebrities and their obsessed fans (Harmon *et al.*, 1995; Zona *et al.*, 1993). For example, Meloy (1996) noted the selection bias in the current forensic stalking literature due to law enforcement's focus on "high profile" cases. Given this bias, one would expect that since the Los Angeles Police Department's Threat Management Unit is the main law enforcement agency responsible for investigating celebrity stalking cases (since the majority of the entertainment industry exists within the LAPD's jurisdiction), their database would contain an over-representation of these types of case. Even accounting for this over-representation, cases in which a prior relationship existed between the victim and suspect outnumbered celebrity cases: of the 341 cases in the current LAPD—TMU database, only 66 involved celebrity—stranger stalking cases, as compared with the 135 Intimate and 88 Non-intimate cases analyzed in this study (Zona *et al.*, 1998). Thus, stalking is not merely a crime exclusive to celebrities and their obsessed fans; it is more likely to be experienced by ordinary citizens for a myriad of motives (e.g., individuals who are pursuing or terminating intimate relationships, employees who believe that they were unjustly fired).

The strongest correlation in this study was the relationship between the suspect's general violence history and violence committed against persons during the stalking campaign. This finding supports the colloquial notion that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior. Due to the diverse population embodied in this study's sample, these suspects may not have necessarily been "caught" by the police for past violent behavior, but have exhibited violence toward the victim or other persons. This finding further supports the hypothesis that victims of domestic violence may be more at risk for violence during a stalking campaign, as their relationship has been marked by past violence. However, it also emphasizes the notion that victims of domestic violence are not the only individuals at risk. The lack of a significant correlation between Relationship

Type and Violence History indicates that regardless of the type of victim–suspect relationship, suspects who are violent in the past are more likely to be violent in the future.

The lack of correlation between Domestic Violence History and Person or Property Damage conflicts with past research, which has suggested a relationship between stalking and domestic violence (Cordes, 1993; Kellerman & Mercy, 1992; Schaum & Parrish, 1995; Walker & Meloy, 1998). Several factors may account for this discrepancy. For example, due to the nature of their investigative procedures, the LAPD—TMU detectives may not have thoroughly assessed for the suspects' history of domestic violence in their intimate cases and may not have assessed for it at all in their non-intimate cases. Indeed, many of the affirmative suspect domestic violence histories were obtained through legal records or statements offered by the victims during the investigations. Typically, knowledge of a suspect's domestic violence history was not the result of a response to a standard screening question used by the investigators. Similarly, the presence of the correlation between Relationship Type and Domestic Violence History may be attributed to this information arising more often in intimate than non-intimate investigations. Thus, the lack of relationship between domestic violence history and suspect damage behaviors may be confounded by limitations during the investigative and subsequent data collection procedures.

Although this study did not find a relationship between stalking and domestic violence, we recommend that domestic violence history should continue to be considered an important risk factor in assessing the stalker's level of dangerousness. This is not only warranted by the findings of previous research, but also by findings in this study. Specifically, the finding that the suspect's history of general violence (including domestic violence) is related to his or her commission of violence against the victim during the stalking campaign demonstrates the need for assessing all types of past violence committed by the suspect. It may be the case, for example, that a non-intimate suspect who has a history of assaulting his wife may be more likely to assault the former employer that he is currently stalking. Future research would benefit from a more systematic screening for domestic violence.

As with the domestic violence history confounds, the lack of significant findings between the Criminal History and Person or Property Damage variables may be attributable to several possible factors. One factor may be the limitations of the data collection procedure, as thorough criminal histories were not available for all suspects. Another possible explanation may be that the majority of suspects in this study may not have had prior interaction with the criminal justice system. Zona *et al.* (1993) found that many of their Simple Obsessional suspects consisted of "first time" stalking offenders; that is, these subjects had not had prior contact with the police regarding their stalking campaigns. This finding may generalize to an overall absence of criminal behavior. Similarly, while previous research has found prior criminal history to be an important risk factor in stalking cases (Harmon *et al.*, 1995; Meloy, 1996; Meloy & Gothard, 1995), these studies were conducted on individuals who were referred to forensic psychiatric clinics and private practices. The sample used in this study is more diverse. Consequently, it may not involve as many individuals who have prior criminal histories in comparison to the forensic psychiatric samples.

Although a past history of criminal behavior was not demonstrated to be a risk factor for person and property damage, we believe that it should continue to be accounted for in assessing a stalker's dangerousness. Since stalking laws were enacted only recently, the police or the victims may have failed to recognize that the suspects' campaign of harassment constitutes illegal stalking; suspects may have had contact with the police, but the victims may not have filed formal reports or pressed charges. With the continued education of the general public, victims may more easily identify that they are experiencing illegal stalking behaviors and may be more willing to seek law enforcement intervention; this will increase police contact with the suspects. Furthermore, continued stalking behavior, despite law enforcement and judicial intervention, demonstrates a disregard for being held legally accountable for one's actions. This may place the victim or third parties at an increased risk for physical violence or property damage.

The results of this study are also in conflict with prior studies in regard to the suspect's psychiatric history. Although Meloy and Gothard (1995) and Harmon *et al.* (1995) found significant psychiatric histories within their samples, their studies involved individuals referred for psychiatric evaluations, and thus presented an increased likelihood of psychopathology. Zona *et al.* (1993) did find a significant psychiatric history across their three typologies, with thought disorders occurring more often in the Love Obsessional and Erotomantic groups and personality disorders occurring more often in the Simple Obsessional group. Thus, by limiting this study's sample to the Simple Obsessional and Erotomantic groups where a prior victim-suspect relationship existed, the majority of the suspects with major mental disorders (i.e., the Love Obsessional group) may have been eliminated from this study. In support of this notion, Zona and Palarea (1997) noted an absence of delusional thoughts within the LAPD—TMU's intimate relationship cases.

Although the suspect's psychiatric history did not correlate with violence against persons or property in this study, this may be due to the conglomeration of multiple variables into one category. Prior research has suggested that several risk factors included in this category should be accounted for on a case-by-case basis: suspect's substance abuse, level of suicidality, delusional disorder-jealous type, and personality disorders as they relate to violent behavior. The presence of substance abuse serves as a risk factor due to its ability to impair impulse control, lead to paranoid or other delusional thoughts, or heighten emotionality, all of which may lead to aggressive behavior (Zona *et al.*, 1998). Suicidality of the suspect has been shown to be a risk factor for attackers and near-lethal approachers who have stalked public figures (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998), as well as for domestic violence situations in which the batterer kills himself and his partner in response to her attempt to leave the relationship (Walker & Meloy, 1998). The delusional disorder-jealous type also surfaces in domestic violence scenarios; it is marked by the delusional belief that one's intimate partner is being unfaithful to one in the absence of any supporting evidence. In fact, the *DSM-IV* (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) alludes to the use of stalking behaviors and the potential for violence in the diagnostic criteria for this disorder: "e.g., restricting the spouse's autonomy, secretly following the spouse, investigating the imagined lover, attacking the spouse" (Zona *et al.*, 1998). The presence of a personality disorder within the suspect may also put the victim at a greater risk for violence. Zona *et al.*

(1998) discussed the potential for violence for suspects diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder, while Meloy (1996) identified violence as a response due to pathological narcissism. Although these psychiatric risk factors may not be present in all stalking cases, they should be accounted for in assessing a suspect's level of risk, especially in cases where the victim and suspect had an intimate relationship.

This study provides a more accurate sample of stalking in the general public. Since the LAPD—TMU was created in response to the murder of a celebrity, their initial database was over-represented with celebrity and other public-figure cases. Consequently, the study by Zona *et al.* (1993) contained an over-representation of Love Obsessional and Erotomania cases, and an under-representation of Simple Obsessional cases. Over the past several years, there has been an increase in the LAPD—TMU's experience with screening and investigating these cases, an increase in media publicity involving the LAPD—TMU, and an increase in law enforcement and general public education regarding stalking behavior. This has resulted in an increase in Simple Obsessional cases referred to and investigated by the LAPD—TMU. Future research will likely continue to demonstrate this trend, thus correcting for the under-representation of intimate relationship cases found in previous stalking studies (Meloy, 1996).

In conclusion, although the crime of stalking has come to the public's attention through the media's exposure of celebrity stalking cases, this behavior is more prevalent between people who have had some form of prior relationship. Furthermore, while suspects in both of the prior relationship groups exhibited dangerous behavior toward their victims, the intimate relationship stalkers did this more often. This study demonstrated that stalking suspects who had a prior intimate relationship with their victims are more at risk for committing physical violence towards persons or property. Additionally, intimate relationship stalkers use more threats toward persons and property, as well as more physical approach behaviors in contacting their victims, which puts the victims at an increased risk for violence. While this study was conducted with a population of law enforcement stalking suspects, it provided a different view of stalking than previous research with forensic psychiatric populations; suspects in this study did not present the prior criminal and psychiatric histories exhibited by the samples of Meloy and Gothard (1995) and Harmon *et al.* (1995). These results demonstrated that stalking is not a crime only committed by individuals with criminal or psychiatric histories. Future research would benefit from analyzing a broader sample of stalking cases, both through law enforcement and psychiatric samples, as well as with non-criminal and non-clinical populations.

Furthermore, future research on stalking would benefit from thorough analyses of suspects' historical risk factors that may be associated with stalking. When conducting risk assessments of stalking cases, law enforcement officials and other professionals should conduct an extensive assessment of the victim-offender relationship, the suspect's past history of general and domestic violence, the suspect's psychiatric and criminal histories, the suspect's use of threats and propensity to follow these threats with violence, and the level of physical approach used in contacting the victim. This will allow for a better assessment of the suspect's level of dangerousness in stalking cases.

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