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Parental Bonding and Adult Attachment Styles in Different Types of Stalker*

ABSTRACT: Attachment theory is one of the earliest and most vigorously promoted explanations of the psychological processes that underlie stalking behavior. Insecure attachment has been proposed as impairing the management of relationships, thus increasing the propensity to stalk. The current study explored the parental bonding and adult attachment styles of 122 stalkers referred to a specialist forensic clinic. Stalkers were grouped according to two common classification methods: relationship and motivation. Compared to general community samples, stalkers were more likely to remember their parents as emotionally neglectful and have insecure adult attachment styles, with the degree of divergence varying according to stalker type and mode of classification. In offering support for the theoretical proposition that stalking evolves from pathological attachment, these findings highlight the need to consider attachment in the assessment and management of stalkers. Also emphasized is the importance of taking classification methods into account when interpreting and evaluating stalking research.

KEYWORDS: forensic science, stalking, harassment, attachment, typologies, parental bonding

Stalking is now widely recognized as a significant social problem. Large community studies have resulted in estimates of lifetime prevalence rates falling between 12% and 32% for women and 4% and 13% for men depending to some extent on the definitions employed (1–6). While the growing body of literature has increased our knowledge regarding victims and perpetrator violence, what remains unclear is why some people not only resort to this behavior, but frequently persist despite the distress they cause to others and the problems they bring upon themselves. A variety of theories have been advanced which attempt to explain the psychological processes that underlie stalking behavior (7–10). Whilst large community studies (1,4) suggest that ex-intimate harassment encompasses less than half of stalking cases, to date this type of stalking has been the predominant focus of theoretical deliberation (7,10–12).

Spitzberg and Cupach (10) propose that ex-intimate stalking involves a “process of goal linking, rumination, emotional flooding, and rationalization [which] conspire to transform normal relationship development and or maintenance into obsessive and persistent pursuit in the face of clear rejection” (p. 367). The relationship takes on paramount importance as it is inextricably linked to higher order goals such as self-worth or life happiness, with continued rejection either ignored or positively reframed. In rationalizing their failure to achieve these goals the stalker engages in the behavior in an attempt to restore self-worth. For other researchers, ex-intimate stalking is primarily viewed as an extension, or variant, of domestic

violence (12). The domestic violence theories include the proposition that perpetrators engage in stalking as a means to “regain power and control lost following the termination of the relationship” (7, p. 209). Underlying this construction is a feminist perspective that stalking is a manifestation of a patriarchal social structure reinforced by traditional gender roles in which men are the initiators of relationships, actively pursuing the mate they have selected, and women are the subservient recipients (13).

One of the earliest, and most vigorously promoted, theories of stalking to have evolved from the domestic abuse perspective is that of attachment (14–19). The theory of attachment is based on the premise that humans have an innate predisposition to bond to a primary caregiver to facilitate survival and that the nature of this initial relationship results in the development of an attachment style that persists (20–23). This theory has been developed in the hands of psychodynamically inclined theorists into an explanation of a wide range of human behavior (21,22).

Attachment theory has generated a number of contrasting if not contradictory explanations of stalking. It is proposed that the development of an insecure attachment style impairs the individual’s ability to appropriately manage relationships in adulthood with a consequential propensity to stalk (16,18,24–26). It has been suggested that stalking would be associated with a range of pathological attachment styles (16). Bartholomew and Horowitz (27) propose that the negative view of self and others, as reflected in the fearful style of attachment, can lead to a dependency on others to maintain positive self-regard whilst fearing anticipated rejection. With such a dependency, the notion of rejection becomes intolerable, and the repeated rejection or a failure to obtain “justice” may lead the individual to manifest extremes of anger.

Research has provided some support for the theory that stalking evolves from a pathology of attachment. Studies that have found stalkers frequently report parental abuse, separation, and change or loss of the primary caregiver have been interpreted as evidence of disruptions to stalker’s childhood attachment (17,28). High levels of insecure attachment style have also been reported among samples of self-reported stalkers from student populations (11,28–30). In

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*Dr. MacKenzie’s involvement in this research was partially funded by an Australian Commonwealth Government scholarship in the form of an Australian Postgraduate Award.

Received 9 Sept. 2007; and in revised form 29 Mar. 2008; accepted 29 Mar. 2008.

Tonin's (19) study investigating childhood and adult attachment style in stalkers, it was found that the stalkers were significantly more likely to report overprotective fathers and insecure adult attachment styles than comparison groups comprising nonstalking "mental detainees" and community controls. Kamphuis, Emmelkamp, and De Vries (31) found that stalking victims reported their harasser's attachment style as secure in 14% of cases, fearful in 31%, preoccupied in 32%, and dismissive in 23%.

Despite these findings, the problem with most studies to date is that stalkers have been taken as a single homogeneous group. In reality, stalking is a complex phenomenon that can emerge, and be maintained, by a range of motives. There is no reason to assume that stalkers with different motivations share the same characteristics. A number of classifications have been proposed that separate the heterogeneous group into more distinct stalker categories (32–38). Two frequently used methods of classifying stalkers are the stalker-victim relationship and the stalker's motivation (36,37,39–41). When employing relationship classifications, stalkers are usually separated into ex-intimates, acquaintances, and strangers. In contrast, the typology developed by Mullen and his colleagues (41) divides stalkers on the basis of the predominant motives which initiate and maintain the behavior. From their research and clinical experience, Mullen et al. have identified five categories of stalkers: the Rejected, the Intimacy Seeker, the Incompetent, the Resentful, and the Predatory.

The Rejected stalker commences stalking after the breakdown of an important relationship that was usually, but not exclusively, sexually intimate in nature. The stalking reflects a desire for either reconciliation or revenge for rejection or a fluctuating mixture of both. The Intimacy Seeker desires a relationship with someone who has engaged his or her affection and who he or she is convinced already does, or will, reciprocate that love despite obvious evidence to the contrary. This group is prominent among celebrity stalkers. The Incompetent Suitor also engages in stalking to establish a relationship; however, unlike the Intimacy Seeker, he or she is simply seeking a date or a sexual encounter. The Resentful stalker sets out to frighten and intimidate the victim to exact revenge for an actual or supposed injury. The Predatory stalker engages in pursuit behavior in order to obtain sexual gratification. When the pursuit is preparatory to an assault, usually sexual, the activity involves information gathering, rehearsal and/or fantasizing about the attack, and voyeuristic gratification. The stalking is covert so as not to alert the victim to the impending attack, but some Predatory stalkers derive pleasure from making the victim aware of being watched without revealing his or her own (the stalker's) identity (42; for a detailed description of each category, see 43).

The current study aimed to extend the research on the attachment of stalkers by exploring the childhood and adult attachment styles of various stalker subtypes, using both relationship and motivational classifications.

Method

Subjects

One hundred and twenty-two participants were recruited from those referred to a specialist forensic clinic in a Problem Behaviors Program in Melbourne, Australia. Of those approached (126 cases), two were excluded because they failed to complete the psychometric instruments in a satisfactory manner, two refused to participate, and one was excluded from the motivational analyses as she met the criteria for more than one stalker classification. Each stalker was classified in two different ways: by Mullen and colleagues'

motivational typology (41,43) and by their relationship to the victim (Strangers, Ex-intimates, or Acquaintance). Allocation to one of the five motivational types was made by the assessing clinicians who had been educated in the application of the typology and was determined on the basis of information obtained during clinical interview and information provided by the referral source (e.g., witness statements, summary of charges, and prior assessment reports). Inter-rater consensus was 92%. Ambiguous cases were discussed within the clinic team and the majority decision accepted.

Participants completed the attachment measures as part of a larger psychometric battery used in their assessment.

Operationalized Definition of Stalking

Stalking was operationalized as unwanted intrusive behavior on more than one occasion or a protracted single episode that was either conducted with malicious intent or caused the victim fear or apprehension. Stalking-related behaviors within the context of an ongoing intimate relationship were excluded.

Instrumentation

Adult Attachment Style—A commonly used conceptualization of adult attachment is the two-dimensional, four-category model proposed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (27). By combining the positive/negative dichotomization of the individual's image of both self and others, four prototypical attachment patterns arise: secure and three insecure styles comprising preoccupied, fearful, and dismissive types. The securely attached individuals, who see themselves and others positively, are comfortable with intimacy and autonomy. The dismissive group, who view themselves positively and others negatively, maintain a sense of invulnerability by avoiding being disappointed by others. Those with a preoccupied attachment style view themselves negatively and strive for the acceptance of valued others who they regard positively. The fearful attachment style describes individuals who, in seeing both themselves and others negatively, experience conflict between their desire for intimacy and their fear of rejection.

In this study, adult attachment style was determined using a forced-choice version of the measure developed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (27). In addition to looking at the four categories of adult attachment, the two-dimensional intrapersonal and interpersonal perspective was also examined by combining each attachment style on the basis of the underlying impressions of both self and others. The resulting classifications comprised: positive self (Secure and Dismissing), negative self (Preoccupied and Fearful), positive other (Secure and Preoccupied), and negative other (Fearful and Dismissing).

Parental Bonding Instrument—The parental bonding instrument (PBI) is a 25-item retrospective self-report questionnaire designed to measure parental characteristics that influence child-parent bonding (44). The questionnaire, which is administered separately for each parent, requires the participant to provide answers on the basis of how they remember the attitude and behavior of their mother/father towards them until they were aged 16 years. The PBI produces scores for two parental dimensions: Care (the participant's perception of the warmth and empathy versus emotional rejection and neglect shown by the parent), and Overprotection (OP: reflects the parent's level of intrusiveness and control versus their fostering of autonomy). High Care and low Overprotection scores reflect a secure attachment style, whilst the other three configurations reflect varying levels of insecure attachment.

A review of studies assessing the psychometric properties of the PBI suggests the instrument has satisfactory reliability and validity (44–46), and further factor analyses have confirmed the care and protection dimensions of parenting in clinical and nonclinical Australian samples (47). Mackinnon et al. (45) found Australian general population norms comparable to those obtained by Parker et al. (44).

Data Analysis

Analyses were conducted using spss, version 12 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). To compare stalking types within each classification method, chi-square analyses were used for discrete variables and analysis of variance for continuous variables. When the required statistical assumptions were not met, Fisher’s exact and Mann–Whitney *U*-tests were used. To compare stalkers’ attachment styles to the general public, odds ratios were conducted on the adult measure and Cohen’s *d* on the mean scores of the PBI. The size of the effect was set according to Cohen’s guidelines for evaluation: small = 0.2, medium = 0.5, and large = 0.8 (48).

Results

Males predominated (93%) among the stalkers and females (69%) among their victims. As shown in Table 1, analyses of the Motivational typology (41) showed that the Intimacy Seekers and the Rejected stalkers were more likely to target a single victim ($\chi^2 [1, n = 121] = 8.37, p = 0.004, \phi = 0.263$ and $\chi^2 [1, n = 121] = 6.62, p = 0.010, \phi = 0.234$), whereas the Resentful and the Predatory stalkers were more likely to target multiple victims ($\chi^2 [1, n = 121] = 4.52, p = 0.033, \phi = 0.193$ and $\chi^2 [1, n = 121] = 14.28, p < 0.001, \phi = 0.343$, respectively). Using the Relationship typology, Strangers were found to be more likely to target multiple victims ($\chi^2 [1, n = 76] = 9.56, p = 0.002, \phi = 0.360$ and $\chi^2 [1, n = 90] = 6.60, p = 0.010, \phi = 0.271$, Ex-intimates and Acquaintances, respectively). The duration of stalking ranged from 1 day to 16 years and varied greatly both between and within the groups. With respect to the Motivational typology, Intimacy Seekers were the most likely to persist for long periods ($U = 309.0, p < 0.001$) whereas the Incompetent Suitors and Predatory stalkers engaged in their pursuit of the victim for the briefest time ($U = 534.0, p < 0.001, U = 284.0, p = 0.004$, respectively). In the Relationship classification, Strangers stalked their victims for shorter periods than either the Ex-intimates or the Acquaintance groups ($U = 334.5, p < 0.001, U = 447.5, p < 0.001$, respectively).

Parental Bonding Instrument

Compared to members of the general public, stalkers remembered their parents as significantly less caring (see Table 2). With the exception of the Intimacy Seekers on the Maternal Care scale and the Incompetent Suitors on the Paternal Care scale, all of the Motivational and Relationship types produced lower mean scores on the PBI than the community sample. The effect sizes produced on the care scales suggest that the Rejected (maternal $d = -0.45$, paternal $d = -0.54$), Ex-intimate (maternal $d = -0.47$, paternal $d = -0.54$) and Predatory (maternal $d = -1.07$, paternal $d = -1.34$) stalkers were the ones who recalled their parents as being the most emotionally neglectful. Motivational groups diverged on the Paternal Overprotection scale, with the Resentful and the Intimacy Seekers remembering their fathers as more overprotective than the general population, whereas the other groups remembered their father as less intrusive and controlling than was the general population’s recollection.

Adult Attachment Style

Stalkers, except the Intimacy Seekers, were more likely to identify themselves as having an insecure attachment style, particularly the Fearful style of attachment, than the community group (see Table 3). This applied to both Relationship and Motivational classifications. Apart from the Predatory group, stalkers were also more likely to select the Preoccupied style of attachment than the community sample. No significant differences were found with respect to the Dismissing style of attachment.

Comparisons between the Motivational groups revealed that the Intimacy Seekers were significantly more likely than other groups to regard the Secure attachment style as applicable to them compared to the Rejected ($\chi^2 [1, n = 52] = 5.99, p = 0.014, \phi = 0.339$), the Incompetent Suitors ($\chi^2 [1, n = 52] = 4.55, p = 0.033, \phi = 0.296$), or the Resentful ($\chi^2 [1, n = 48] = 4.70, p = 0.030, \phi = 0.313$). Intimacy Seekers were also less likely to select the Fearful description than the Incompetent Suitors or Predatory stalkers ($\chi^2 [1, n = 52] = 4.49, p = 0.034, \phi = -0.294$ and Fisher’s exact $p = 0.035, \phi = -0.425$, respectively). There were no significant differences found between the Relationship groups on any of the attachment styles.

All stalking groups were significantly more likely than the community samples to have a negative self-view, apart from the Intimacy Seekers. The Intimacy Seekers were also the only Motivational group who did not differ significantly from the

TABLE 1—Demographics of stalker types and total sample.

Stalker Type (<i>n</i>)	Age (SD)	Male (%)	One Victim (%)	Male Victim Only (%)	Duration in Weeks	
					M (SD)	Median
Motivational type						
Rejected (31)	35.8 (10.3)	96.8	87.1	3.2	42.9 (44.8)	26
Resentful (27)	37.6 (10.4)	85.2	51.9	37	77.7 (136.6)	27
Intimacy (21)	39.3 (11.6)	90.5	95.2	9.5	178.8 (185.8)	79
Incompetent (31)	35.7 (10.8)	100	64.5	0	11.5 (20.8)	5
Predatory (11)	29.9 (9.1)	100	18.2	0	16.6 (37.9)	4
Relationship type						
Ex-intimate (32)	35.8 (10.1)	96.9	84.4	3.1	42.0 (44.4)	25.5
Acquaintance (46)	36.9 (10.4)	89.1	76.1	21.7	119.9 (171.1)	58
Stranger (44)	36.6 (11.6)	95.5	50	4.4	20.3 (33.9)	7
Total sample (122)	36.3 (10.7)	93.4	68.9	18.9	63.5 (117)	20

TABLE 2—Parental bonding instrument subscale mean scores of stalker subtypes and general population norms.

Stalker Type (n)	Maternal Care Mean (SD)	Maternal OP Mean (SD)	Paternal Care Mean (SD)	Paternal OP Mean (SD)
Motivational type				
Rejected (25)	23.67 (9.0) [†]	13.85 (7.0)	17.44 (11.0) [‡]	10.52 (8.1)*
Resentful (22)	23.63 (11.5) [†]	14.77 (10.6)	18.23 (12.9) [†]	13.82 (8.6)*
Intimacy (19)	25.79 (9.7)	13.94 (8.2)	19.42 (9.2) [†]	12.95 (6.2)
Incompetent (29)	24.10 (10.0) [†]	12.83 (8.0)	21.97 (10.4)	9.62 (6.6) [†]
Predatory (9)	19.56 (7.5) [§]	13.00 (10.2)	11.11 (8.9) [§]	9.89 (8.2)*
Relationship type				
Ex-intimate (26)	23.42 (9.2) [†]	14.26 (7.4)	17.43 (10.8) [‡]	11.00 (8.4)
Acquaintance (43)	23.82 (11.0) [†]	13.69 (9.6)	18.28 (11.2) [†]	11.81 (7.9)
Stranger (36)	24.26 (9.1) [†]	13.22 (8.2)	19.97 (11.7)*	10.83 (7.4)
Total sample	23.87 (9.9) [†]	13.66 (8.7)	19.28 (10.9)*	11.64 (7.8)
General population [¶] (155)	27.3 (7.0)	13.5 (7.5)	22.7 (8.4)	12.1 (6.4)

Note. Care score—range 0–36, Overprotection range 0–39.

*Cohen's d 0.2–0.35, [†]Cohen's d 0.36–0.5, [‡]Cohen's d 0.51–0.8, [§]Cohen's d >0.8.

[¶]General population male norms (45).

community group with respect to holding negative views of others, while in the Relationship classification only the Stranger group was more likely to hold negative impressions of others (see Table 4). Comparisons among the Motivational groups revealed that the Intimacy Seekers were less likely than the other stalking types to view someone else negatively ($\chi^2 [1, n = 121] = 7.22, p = 0.007, \phi = -0.244$). None of the Relationship types differed significantly in terms of negative impressions of others.

Discussion

Among many of the theories advanced to explain stalking, the concept of attachment emerges as a common theme. The basic tenet of these theories is that stalking evolves from a pathological adult attachment style that develops as a consequence of disruptions to the formation of secure attachments in childhood (11,17,28). The current study explored how various types of stalker differ from each other and the general community on measures of childhood

and adult attachment. Overall, stalkers were found to be more likely to have insecure attachment styles than members of the general community on both the childhood and adult measures. It was also found that the degree of divergence varied according to stalker type and mode of classification.

With respect to childhood attachment, the strongest finding was that the stalkers generally recalled both parents as being less caring and more emotionally neglectful than the general community. This was particularly marked for the Rejected/Ex-intimates and the Predatory stalkers. How this impacts on relationships in adulthood is difficult to interpret in light of the very different motives driving these stalkers' behavior. Whilst those who had a previous relationship with the victim usually commence the stalking behavior in an attempt to reconcile with a partner they are unwilling to lose, the Predatory stalker has no desire to have a relationship with the victim (9). Given that Mullen and his colleagues (9) depict the Predatory stalkers' pursuit as frequently preceding a sexual assault, it is interesting to note that Smallbone and Dadds (49) found that the

TABLE 3—Percentage of stalker's selecting each attachment style and odds ratios in comparison to community norms.

	Insecure OR (CI)	Dismissing OR (CI)	Preoccupied OR (CI)	Fearful OR (CI)
Community [†] (205)	49.3%	25.3%	8.2%	15.8%
Motivational type				
Rejected (31)	87.1%	29.0%	25.8%	32.3%
	6.9 (2.4–20.4)**	1.2 (.53–2.7)	4.0 (1.6–10.0)**	2.5 (1.1–5.7)**
Resentful (27)	85.2%	25.9%	22.2%	37.0%
	5.9 (2.0–17.6)**	1.0 (.42–2.5)	3.3 (1.2–9.0)*	3.1 (1.3–7.2)**
Intimacy (21)	57.1%	19.0%	23.8%	14.3%
	1.4 (0.56–3.4)	0.69 (0.25–2.1)	3.6 (1.2–10.8)*	0.89 (0.25–3.1)
Incompetent (31)	83.9%	22.6%	19.4%	41.9%
	5.4 (2.0–14.4)**	0.86 (0.35–2.1)	2.7 (1.0–7.5)*	3.8 (1.7–8.3)**
Predatory (11)	90.9%	27.3%	9.1%	54.5%
	10.3 (1.3–81.7)**	1.1 (0.28–4.3)	1.2 (0.14–9.5)	6.4 (1.9–21.7)*
Relationship type				
Ex-Intimate (32)	84.4%	28.1%	25.0%	31.3%
	5.6 (2.1–14.8)**	1.1 (0.51–2.6)	3.9 (1.5–9.6)**	2.4 (1.1–5.4)**
Acquaintance (46)	78.3%	23.9%	21.7%	32.6%
	3.7 (1.8–7.8)**	0.92 (0.45–1.9)	3.2 (1.4–7.3)*	2.5 (1.3–5.1)*
Stranger (44)	81.8%	22.7%	18.2%	40.9%
	4.7 (2.1–10.3)**	0.86 (0.41–1.8)	2.6 (1.1–6.2)*	3.7 (1.9–7.2)**
Total stalker sample (122)	81.1%	24.6%	21.3%	35.2%
	4.5 (2.7–7.8)**	0.95 (0.58–1.6)	3.1 (1.7–5.7)**	2.9 (1.8–4.7)**

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.005$.

[†]Community sample (57).

TABLE 4— *The community's and stalkers' impressions of self and others based on attachment style selection.*

Sample Type (n)	Negative Self OR (CI)	Negative Other OR (CI)
Community (205)	24%	41.4%
Motivational type		
Rejected (31)	58.1%	61.3%
	4.4 (2.1–9.5)**	2.3 (1.1–4.8)*
Resentful (27)	59.3%	63.0%
	4.7 (2.1–10.5)**	2.4 (1.1–5.5)*
Intimacy seekers (21)	38.1%	33.3%
	1.9 (0.79–4.9)	0.71 (0.28–1.8)
Incompetent (31)	61.3%	64.5%
	5.1 (2.4–10.9)**	2.6 (1.2–5.6)*
Predatory (11)	63.6%	81.8%
	5.6 (1.6–19.7)*	6.4 (1.4–30.2)*
Relationship type		
Ex-intimate (32)	56.3%	59.4%
	4.1 (1.9–8.7)**	2.1 (0.99–4.4)
Acquaintance (46)	54.3%	56.5%
	3.8 (2.0–7.2)**	1.9 (0.99–3.5)
Stranger (44)	59.1%	63.6%
	4.6 (2.4–8.9)**	2.5 (1.3–4.8)**
Total stalker sample (122)	56.6%	59.8%
	4.1 (2.6–6.4)**	2.1 (1.4–3.2)**

* $p < 0.05$.** $p < 0.005$.

stranger rapists in their sample also reported unsympathetic and uncaring fathers. It might be that these disparate types of stalkers have responded to the perceived lack of care differently, one group clinging to the relationship out of a fear of abandonment and the other protecting themselves against rejection by avoiding emotional connections.

Turning to the Overprotection scales, none of the stalking groups' recollections of their mothers differed greatly from those reported by the community. In terms of paternal over-protection, the majority of the Motivational types recalled their fathers as less controlling than did the general population. In contrast, the Resentful group, whose stalking behavior emerges in response to a perceived injustice rather than relationship seeking, regarded their fathers as being more controlling. Such a finding raises the possibility that the Resentful's dogged pursuit of justice or retribution is simply a replication of modeled behavior. Alternatively, the perception of a dominant father may have manifested in feelings of impotence and the stalking becomes a means to prove to themselves and/or others that they are not powerless. Whilst the Resentful's result supports Tonin's (19) finding of stalkers reporting overprotective fathers, the effect was only small and did not reflect how the majority of stalkers in this sample remembered their fathers. With respect to the Relationship classifications, no differences were found between the stalker types or the stalkers and the community. Overall, the results on childhood attachment indicate that the primary parental deficit most likely to influence the development of an insecure attachment style in stalkers involves emotional rejection and neglect, particularly with respect to their fathers.

The finding of predominantly insecure attachments amongst stalkers as a whole is consistent with the findings from previous research (19,50,51). The variety of insecure attachments selected also supports Kienlen's (16) claim that stalking arises from a range of pathological attachment styles. In this sample, the Fearful style of attachment was the single most popular style chosen by each of the stalking groups apart from the Intimacy Seekers. Stalkers were twice as likely to select the option indicative of their being fearful of intimacy due to a negative sense of self and an expectation of

rejection from untrustworthy others. This bent towards negative thinking was also demonstrated by close to 60% of each stalking group describing themselves and/or others negatively. In light of the forensic nature of this sample, it cannot be discounted that, for some stalkers, this negativity is likely to be a response to feelings of rejection and/or humiliation and anger over their current circumstances. However, for others it is likely to reflect more enduring and pervasive character traits. The rates of negative self-impression produced across the stalking types also offers support for Spitzberg and Cupach's (10) theory of goal linking. The notion that stalking evolves out of a dysfunctional attempt to restore self-worth is certainly plausible given the percentage of stalkers in this sample who see themselves in a negative light.

The Preoccupied style of attachment also made a major contribution to differentiating stalkers from the general community. Whilst this attachment style tended to be the least popular of the insecure selections made by most stalker types, the proportion of each group to choose this option was significantly higher than a community sample. Kamphuis et al. (31) proposed that preoccupied attachment would be the style most applicable to those who stalk a victim for many years. Likewise, when Tonin (19) compared fixated stalkers (those who pursued one person over a number of years) to serial stalkers targeting multiple victims, she found that serial stalkers were less preoccupied than the fixated. The lower odds produced in this study by the stalking groups that engaged in briefer episodes of harassment would also appear to support this proposal. However, those found most likely to be preoccupied were not necessarily the group who engaged in the behavior for the longest duration, but those who had previously had a relationship with the victim: the Rejected and the Ex-intimates. That the preoccupied rejected stalker becomes enmeshed in a cycle of obsessional thoughts, negative affect and cognitive rationalization and distortion may offer an explanation for why this type of stalker has frequently been shown to be the most likely to be violent (52–57).

Intimacy Seekers were closer to the general population than other stalker groups on every attachment measure except the Preoccupied style. Notably, the Intimacy Seekers were the only ones who were no more likely than the community group to exhibit an insecure attachment style. Intimacy Seekers were also the only Motivational group not to exhibit more negative views of self and others than the community sample. That Intimacy Seekers would have such a positive outlook and feel relatively secure in their attachments may be explained by their belief that they have a loving relationship with their victims, despite all evidence to the contrary. Indeed, for many of this group the belief that their love is or will be reciprocated by the victim is of a delusional intensity (43). This confidence in the eventuality of the desired relationship may also explain why this group persist in their pursuit for many months or even years. At first blush, it would appear from these results that those who stalk their victim for the most protracted periods are the most securely attached. However, as both of the instruments used in this study rely on self-report, we must consider that the optimism and attachment security felt by the majority of Intimacy Seekers is actually a manifestation of their delusional beliefs and thus more reflective of their mental state than a true representation of their attachment style or sense of self-worth. Whether symptomatic of mental illness or not, indications are that the presence of incongruent self-assurance does increase the likelihood of the stalker persisting in their harassment and should therefore be one of the factors considered in all risk assessments.

This study also examined the utility of the Motivational and Relationship classification methods to differentiate between stalker types. Both modes of classification were shown to have

discriminative ability on the demographic characteristics and the attachment measures used. However, greater separation was obtained both between groups and between stalkers and the community when the Motivational typology was used. The overall reduction in effect sizes and odds ratios found when using the Relationship groups suggests an attenuation of distinctive characteristics. Presumably, the loss of discriminatory strength arises as a consequence of the amalgamation of differently motivated stalkers that occurs when combining the stalkers into the more simplistic relationship classifications. For example, the Acquaintance group in this sample included a resentful worker sending threatening messages and dead birds to a colleague who was blamed for a failed promotion and an Intimacy Seeker who kept sending gifts, love poems, and money to a fellow parishioner who was the subject of his erotomatic delusions. Beyond an acquaintanceship with their victim, these two stalkers had virtually nothing in common. Undoubtedly, the Relationship classification has the advantage of parsimony and an ease of application. However, the loss of sensitivity that results from amalgamating the differently motivated stalkers suggests value in maintaining the heterogeneity of the Motivational groups when calling on research to inform the assessment and treatment of stalkers.

Conclusion

The findings of the current study offer some support for the proposition that insecure adult attachment increases an individual's propensity to stalk. It appears that stalkers frequently fail to form secure parental attachments as children, perceiving their parents, particularly their fathers, as neglectful in terms of the care and emotional sustenance provided. There is also evidence that when insecure attachments are developed when young they persist into adulthood and have a detrimental impact on the impressions that evolve about self and others. In turn, this impacts on the stalker's ability to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships. For some stalkers, this may result in their clinging to relationships out of fear of abandonment, whereas others engage in harassing behavior as a means of restoring self-esteem.

This study illustrates the differences between types of stalkers, not only in their style of attachment but also in the degree to which they diverge from the general community. In addition to highlighting the need to take classification methods into account when interpreting and evaluating stalking research, the study also indicates that caution is required before drawing on, in clinical practice, research based on reductionist approaches to stalker categorization. Although more simplistic classification methods such as using the relationship to the victim are appealing, the potential loss of information is definitely a factor that warrants serious consideration. This has important ramifications, not only when assessing the various domains of risk in the stalking situation, but also for the identification of treatment targets in stalkers.

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