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The RECON Typology of Stalking: Reliability and Validity Based Upon a Large Sample of North American Stalkers

ABSTRACT: A new typology of stalking, RECON (relationship and context-based), is proposed, based upon the prior relationship between the pursuer and the victim, and the context in which the stalking occurs. The static typology yields four groups: Intimate, Acquaintance, Public Figure, and Private Stranger. The typology was tested on a large ($N = 1005$) nonrandom sample of North American stalkers gathered from prosecutorial agencies, a large police department, an entertainment corporation security department, and the authors' files. Interrater reliability for group assignment was 0.95 (ICC). Discriminant validity ($p < 0.01$) was demonstrated on a variety of demographic, clinical, pursuit, threat, and violence characteristics among and between groups. Findings confirm and extend the work of other researchers, most notably the very high risk of threats and violence among prior sexually intimate stalkers, the very low risk of threats and violence among public figure (celebrity) stalkers, and the negative relationship between stalking violence and psychosis.

KEYWORDS: forensic science, stalking, violence, threats, psychosis, typology

Since the criminalization of stalking in California in 1990, there have been no fewer than 12 published efforts to categorize the different patterns of stalking behavior (1–12). The more commonly cited typologies use mental health labels and infer motivations based upon psychiatric diagnoses (1,4–7); directly rely upon the inferred or discerned motives of the subject (2,9,10); highlight the degree of previous intimate relationship (3,8); attempt to categorize by level of risk (12); or underscore the extent to which the pursued victim is a private or public figure (11).

Some of these typologies overlap and combine dimensions, such as Boon and Sheridan's (10) emphasis upon both motivation and past relationship; Mullen et al.'s (9) approach, which underscores the stalking context, motivation, stalker–victim relationship, and stalker's mental health status; and Zona et al.'s (5) approach, perhaps the best known and most referenced, which is based upon mental health–related labels, motivation, and stalker–victim relationship. Wright et al.'s (6) typology is also mixed, based on the nature of the relationship (domestic vs nondomestic), content of communication (delusional vs nondelusional), level of victim risk (noncontact or physical contact), and outcome (court, psychiatric, not reported, suicide).

Several positive and negative observations are apparent from reviewing the existing typologies. It is clear from research on obsessional following that there is a difference between those who stalk public and private figures (11,13), and that the degree of prior relationship intimacy is an important variable, especially as it relates to risk for violence (8). It is less clear what relationship mental health diagnoses and motivation have to this phenomenon. The mixing of mental health labels and typological categories seems to complicate research into the relationship between stalking behavior and mental disorders, as well as to introduce the weakness of redundancy (e.g., erotomania is both a mental disorder and a stalking category in the Zona et al. (5) typology). Motivation, in the authors' case experience, is often multidetermined and dynamic. Since it is mutable, using it as a basis for categorization likely diminishes the reliability of attempts to categorize the behavioral patterns of stalkers. We have also observed that some stalkers transition between categories, for example, the *love obsessional* category of the Zona et al. (5) typology to the *erotomanic* category, or the *incompetent* category of the Mullen et al. (9) typology to the *rejected* category. Some of the typologies also unnecessarily complicate the categorization of stalking types by assigning clinical labels. This may also influence perceptions of criminal responsibility in a criminal justice context through the use of mental health diagnoses. Finally, most of the typologies were developed based upon relatively small clinical or forensic samples, limiting their generalizability to other samples in other geographical areas.

A typology should be parsimonious, stable (interrater and temporal reliability), behaviorally based, and useful (concurrent and predictive validity) for a variety of applied settings and professionals, including law enforcement, prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, juries, forensic mental health experts, and victims' rights activists. It should also be helpful to researchers investigating the phenomenon so that it can meaningfully contribute to the understanding, research, and management of individuals committing these behaviors. Based upon these concerns and criteria, Mohandie (14) initially proposed a typology defined by the perpetrator's *relationship*—or the lack thereof—with the victim(s) and the private vs public figure *context* of pursuit (11). The acronym for our typology is RECON (relationship and context-based).

The RECON typology divides the pursuit patterns of stalking into two broad categories: Type I, where the subject has had a

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I. Previous relationship- private figure context

    A. Intimate marriage, cohabiting, dating/sexual (Intimate)

    B. Nonintimate employment-related, affiliative/friendship, customer/client
       (Acquaintance)

II. No prior relationship or limited/incidental contact

    A. Public figure context- pursuit of a public figure victim (Public Figure)

    B. Private figure context- pursuit of a private figure victim (Private Stranger)

FIG. 1—*Relationship and context-based stalking typology (RECON).*

previous relationship with the victim; and Type II, where the subject has had no contact, or a very limited contact with the victim. Type I is further subdivided into those whose prior relationship has been intimate, such as a married, cohabiting, or dating/sexual partner, and those who have had more of an acquaintance, coworker, or friendship relationship. Type II is further subdivided into those who are pursuing a victim identified from a public figure context, and those who are pursuing a victim identified from a private figure context. These four categories are labeled *Intimate*, *Acquaintance*, *Public Figure*, and *Private Stranger*, respectively (see Fig. 1).

This static typology makes it easy to categorize cases, has some theoretical consistency with other models, provides a unifying platform to organize previous data and research from other typologies, and builds upon their empirical strengths. The typology avoids unnecessary inferences, conceptual confusion, assumptions of particular mental disorders, redundancy, and most importantly, dynamic factors that may change during the course of the stalking. The model is consistent with the observation that stalking takes place within the context of a relationship based upon either real or fantasized object relations, and in a private or public figure context.

The authors conducted this study to test the interrater reliability and discriminant validity of RECON. The null hypotheses were that assignment of cases could not be done reliably, and there would be no discriminant validity among the types. If the null hypotheses were disproved, such initial work could pave the way for the establishment of temporal reliability and other forms of validity, such as concurrent, predictive, and construct validity. We also sought to replicate prior work by examining the demographics and quantitative and qualitative aspects of pursuit patterns with a large sample of stalkers, explore new areas of concern such as the stalker's suicidality and recidivism, and assess other points of interest that have not been addressed in previous stalking research.

Method

Over a 17-month period between March 2003 and June 2004, two trained researchers (authors MGM and JW) reviewed over 2300 files dealing with instances of stalking, criminal harassment, menacing, terrorist threats, or domestic violence behaviors. The cases were amassed from six invited nonrandom samples of convenience across North America, including three prosecutorial agencies in California, one police agency in Canada, a corporate security department for a large entertainment firm in Los Angeles, and the authors' files. All data were archival, and therefore subject permission for inclusion in the study was not required. From this pool, 1005 cases were placed in the study sample. Each file represented a stalking or domestic violence case that had been, or currently was being managed for threat assessment purposes, investigated by law enforcement personnel, and/or prosecuted.

Some cases had been reopened due to additional harassment behavior while others were closed due to behavior cessation.

Stalking behavior for the cases included had to meet the operational definition of two or more unwanted contacts by a subject towards a target that created a reasonable fear in that target. The rejected cases did not meet this definition. Of the 1005 cases included, approximately one-third were from prosecutorial agencies, another one-third were from law enforcement, and the final one-third were from the entertainment corporation security department. The three prosecutorial sources yielded the most cases for inclusion, with acceptance rates of 82%, 96%, and 100%, while 56% of the law enforcement cases and 23% of the corporate security cases were accepted. The rejected cases typically involved only one unwanted contact, acts of domestic violence without stalking, or had no identifiable target or subject.

Relevant data for the cases included were recorded on a six-page, 50-variable coding sheet developed by the authors, which covered the following general areas: subject and target demographics; general and specific descriptors of the stalking behavior, including quantity and quality of the pursuit; target, security, law enforcement and/or court responses to the behavior; and instances of stalking recidivism. A variable was coded as "unknown" if the data for the particular case variable were unavailable. Each case of stalking or domestic violence was categorized into one of the four RECON types (Intimate, Acquaintance, Public Figure, and Private Stranger) and one of Zona et al.'s (5) three stalking types (Simple Obsessional, Love Obsessional, and Erotomanic).

Specific data were gathered regarding the subject's criminal history, past arrests for other obsessional harassment behavior, additional targets the subject may have harassed (either previous to or concurrently with the immediate offense), and the subject's legal status when the harassment began. Although unavailable in about 24% of the 1005 cases, information was also coded regarding the mental health status of subjects, including the presence of key DSM-IV-TR (15) Axis I or II diagnoses categorized as thought, mood, substance abuse, personality, or other disorders; or suspected diagnoses as evidenced in the case file documentation, the presence of psychosis and/or substance use during harassment, a history of psychotropic medication use, and/or suicidality.

Data collection included recording the exact relationship between subject and target (with 12 possible categories), as well as the context in which the relationship or behavior took place (i.e., public vs private), domestic violence history between the two parties, and instances of the target's prior stalking experiences. Researchers noted the duration, forms of pursuit (telephone calls, letters, surveillance, burglary, etc.), most frequent pattern of contact, and type of contact including indirect (writing), direct (telephone calls), or proximity-based (in-person approaches). Researchers coded any escalation in frequency and/or type of contact, as well as the presence of any known precipitating event. The quality of the communications (such as loving, help-seeking, demeaning) and any interference in the target's life were noted. Data were collected regarding the presence of threats and violence, how often, how severe, in what form (indirect, implied, conditional, or direct), whether weapons were used, and who was targeted (victim or third party). Violence—defined as acts of intentional physical aggression towards a person or object—was coded as either affective or predatory (16–19) and included incidents of stealing, property damage, and assault, abduction, sexual assault, and murder. Case outcome information was recorded, including whether the subject was charged, offense type, and resultant criminal sanctions. Recidivism information was only coded in instances where

a subject recontacted the target subsequent to legal intervention. The code sheet is available from the senior author (KM).

Because two researchers were employed to collect the data, an interrater (α) coefficient was assessed and calculated on a representative 10% of the overall sample ($n = 101$); and an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was calculated on two key variables: assignment to the specific RECON type and whether or not the subject was mentally ill. In each of the typology comparisons below, a chi-square, independent t-test, or one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical technique was employed. Only results considered statistically significant at $p \leq 0.01$ are reported.

Results

Reliability

Coefficient α for interrater reliability on all variables was 0.92. The ICC for assignment to the RECON typology was 0.95 and assignment of subject mental illness, meaning to one of the five primary DSM diagnostic categories, to the "suspected diagnosis" category, or to the "no mental health issues apparent" category, was 0.85.

Demographics

The average subject age was 36.5 years, with a range of 12–81 years (SD = 10.8). Eighty-six percent were male and 14% were female. The sample was 54% Caucasian, 10% Hispanic, 12% African American, 2% Asian, 2% Native American, and 2% Other (primarily Middle Eastern). Forty-eight percent of the subjects were single, 15% were separated or divorced, 11% were married, and 3% were cohabiting or widowed. Eighty-three percent were heterosexual, 3% were homosexual, and less than 1% could be categorized as bisexual. Twenty-two percent were fully employed, 29% were underemployed or unemployed, 12% were part-time/contract/self-employed, and 6% were categorized as other (retired/student) (see Table 1).

Thirty-three percent had a prior adult violent criminal history, 27% had no prior record, and 19% had a prior adult nonviolent criminal record. Fifteen percent had prior arrests for stalking or similar offenses, and 31% were known to have pursued other targets in the past. Forty-five percent had no known legal status at the time their pursuit behavior began, but 15% were on probation or parole, 14% were subject to a restraining order, 3% were in custody (prison or jail), and 1% were in a psychiatric hospital setting.

In 76% of the cases, sufficient data were available to make some determination as to mental health issues. Forty-six percent of all the subjects in the sample had a clear or probable DSM-IV-TR diagnosis at the time of the stalking, while no disorder was apparent from the available data for 30% of the subjects. Psychotic symptoms were present at the time of the offense for 14% of the subjects, but were not present for 64%. Suicidal ideation or gestures were present in 25% of all the subjects but were not apparent in 7%. Substance abuse was present in 32% of the subjects (primarily methamphetamines and secondarily alcohol).

Targets were primarily female (81%) and reflected a very similar ethnic composition to the subjects. Seventy-three percent of the targets were private context (ex-girlfriend, acquaintance, etc.), and 27% were public figure context (celebrity). In 32% of the cases, there was a history of domestic violence between the subject and target before the stalking behaviors began. Seventeen percent of the targets had been previously stalked by others (see Table 2).

TABLE 1—*Subject demographics (N = 1005).*

Variable	% of Total Sample	N
Race		
Caucasian	54	547
Hispanic	10	95
African American	12	121
Asian	2	22
Native American/Canadian	2	18
Other	2	15
Unknown	18	187
Employment status		
Fully employed	22	222
Un/underemployed	29	285
Part-time/contract work/self-employed	12	116
Other (retired/student)	6	55
Unknown	31	327
Marital history		
Single	48	479
Married	11	114
Separated/divorced	15	154
Cohabiting/widowed	3	35
Unknown	23	223
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	83	834
Homosexual	3	30
Bisexual	<1	5
Unknown	13	136
Prior criminal history		
At least one adult violent crime	33	336
Nonviolent adult crime(s)	19	188
Juvenile record only	<1	8
No criminal history	27	271
Unknown	20	202
Arrested previously for obsessional harassment behaviors	15	153
No previous similar arrests	65	655
Unknown	20	197
Subject has harassed others	31	302
Subject has not harassed others	50	499
Unknown	19	204
Legal status		
In custody	3	26
Hospitalized	1	12
On probation or parole	15	153
Subject to a restraining order	14	141
None	45	457
Other	<1	7
Unknown	21	209
Mental health status		
Clear or probable diagnosis	46	465
No diagnosis	30	298
Unknown	24	242
Psychosis present	14	144
No psychosis present	64	645
Unknown	22	216
Suicidality present	25	252
No suicidality present	7	70
Unknown	68	683
Substance abuse	32	324
No substance abuse	19	188
Unknown	49	493

General Pursuit Characteristics

The average stalking episode lasted 16 months, with a range of 1 day to 26 years and a modal duration of 1 month. Seventy-one percent ($n = 714$) engaged in behavior that put them in physical proximity to the target (in person, burglary, or surveillance), 25% ($n = 251$) used indirect means to contact the target (letter, package, cyberspace), and 4% ($n = 40$) used direct nonproximity-

TABLE 2—*Target demographics (N = 1005).*

	% of Total Sample	N
Gender		
Female	81	815
Male	16	164
Multiple targets	3	26
Context		
Public	27	271
Private	73	734
History of domestic violence (DV) with subject	32	323
No DV history with subject	64	647
Unknown	4	35
History of being stalked by someone else	17	169
No previous stalking	68	682
Unknown	15	154

based methods (telephone). In descending order, the most frequent forms of contact were as follows: 63% ($n = 633$) approached the target in person, 52% ($n = 523$) telephoned, 51% ($n = 513$) surveilled, 30% ($n = 302$) sent letters/cards/fax, 15% ($n = 151$) burglarized, 12% ($n = 121$) sent packages or gifts, 4% ($n = 40$) used a third party to contact, and 5% ($n = 50$) utilized cyberspace. Overall, 78% of subjects ($n = 783$) used more than one approach.

Twenty-eight percent ($n = 281$) of the targets were contacted daily to every 2–3 days, 36% ($n = 362$) weekly, 21% ($n = 211$) monthly, and 8% ($n = 80$) every 2–3 months. Two percent ($n = 20$) of the targets were contacted twice a year, 1% annually or less, and 2% ($n = 20$) had no discernable pattern. Thirty-seven percent ($n = 370$) evidenced escalation of the behavior over time either in frequency or in intensity of pursuit. Fifty-eight percent ($n = 582$) of the subjects had a known precipitating event preceding their stalking behavior, most often the breakup of a relationship or rejection. In the Type I cases where such information was discernable ($n = 456$), and not including the 54 subjects who began harassing targets during their relationship, the mean time elapsed between the relationship ending and harassment beginning was 4.5 months. The time lag between these two events ranged from immediately after the relationship ended (i.e., the next day) to 17 years later. The modal pattern, observed in 20% of these cases, was that harassment began immediately following the end of the relationship.

Qualitative Aspects of the Pursuit

The predominant communication content was expressing love or a relationship desire (40%, $n = 404$), and secondarily verbal insult (37%, $n = 375$). Ten percent ($n = 104$) of subjects sought help from their targets, 8% ($n = 79$) sought communication only, and 2% ($n = 23$) offered help. Fifty-nine percent ($n = 595$) did not interfere with the target's life, that is, targets did not report that the harassment *seriously* impeded their vocational or interpersonal pursuits. However, 17% ($n = 168$) interfered with target's trade or vocation, 9% ($n = 94$) intruded on the target's private interpersonal interactions, 7% ($n = 70$) obtained private information about the target, 5% ($n = 52$) sought to discredit their target publicly, and 1% ($n = 12$) engaged in some other form of life disruption.

Sixty percent ($n = 598$) of the subjects articulated a clear threat, most often (94%) conveyed to the target. The average number of threats per case was five, but ranged from one to 100. Twenty-two percent of the threatening subjects ($n = 223$) targeted the family or friends of the victim, another 8% ($n = 79$) threatened suicide, while 5% ($n = 51$) threatened others (i.e., school/police/business). Most of these threats were direct (73%), rather than indirect, implied, or conditional.

Violence occurred in 46% of the cases ($n = 467$). Thirty percent of subjects directed their aggression towards their object of pursuit ($n = 297$), 26% ($n = 257$) damaged or stole property, 7% ($n = 67$) directed their aggression towards a third party, and 2% ($n = 18$) killed or injured a pet. Physical assault was the most common serious violent act (28%, $n = 282$) followed by vandalism (26%, $n = 260$), sexual assault (5%, $n = 51$), abduction/attempted abduction (3%, $n = 32$), and homicide or mass murder (0.50%, $n = 5$). Subjects used a weapon to threaten and/or harm others or objects in 19% of the cases ($n = 192$). In the cases involving weapons, the most frequently used weapons were knives (43%, $n = 83$), followed by other objects (30%, $n = 57$), firearms (18%, $n = 35$), and cars (9%, $n = 17$).

Outcomes

In 73% of the cases criminal justice involvement greater than a police report occurred ($n = 732$). Sixty-five percent ($n = 650$) of the subjects were charged or convicted of an offense. Of those charged, 45% ($n = 292$) were charged with stalking, 27% ($n = 178$) with criminal or aggravated harassment, 15% ($n = 100$) with other charges (robbery, assault, domestic violence, protection order violation), 10% with criminal threats ($n = 66$), and 2% ($n = 12$) with annoying phone calls. Incarceration was the outcome in 29% of the prosecuted cases ($n = 188$), probation in 21% ($n = 135$), case dismissal in 10% ($n = 63$), criminal restraining order in 6% ($n = 39$), hospitalization in 3% ($n = 19$), and outpatient treatment in 1% ($n = 8$).

Recidivism, defined as target contact after intervention, occurred in 60% of the applicable cases (that is, 434 cases out of 730). The time frame between intervention and recidivism averaged 2 months, with a range of 1 day to 6 years. However, the modal lag time was 1 day.

RECON and Zona Typologies

Fifty percent of the cases were Intimate (IA), 13% were Acquaintance (IB), 27% were Public Figure (IIA), and 10% were Private Stranger (IIB). Sixty-two percent were Simple Obsessional, 35% were Love Obsessional, and 3% were Erotomanic.

Discriminant Validity

Comparison of Type I (Prior Relationship) With Type II (No Prior Relationship)—Type I subjects were more likely to be male, $x^2 = 37.504$, $p < 0.001$ (91–77%), and the targets females, $x^2 = 61.772$, $p < 0.001$ (90–71%). They were more likely to have had a history of prior intimate relationships with others, $F = 6.478$, $p = 0.01$ (36–21%) and violent offenses, $F = 58.522$, $p < 0.001$ (46–13%). Type II subjects were more likely to be psychotic, $x^2 = 22.158$, $p < 0.001$ (26–13%), and the targets males, $x^2 = 61.772$, $p < 0.001$ (29–10%).

Type I subjects engaged in more frequent, $F = 50.357$, $p < 0.001$ (69–55% daily to weekly contact), and proximity-based contact, $F = 474.728$, $p < 0.001$ (90–38%), evidenced more escalation, $x^2 = 12.809$, $p < 0.001$ (42–30%), interfered more in the target's life, $F = 113.247$, $p < 0.001$ (55–17%), communicated more verbal insults, $F = 137.17$, $p < 0.001$ (52–13%), and pursued their victim in response to a precipitating event, $x^2 = 332.78$, $p < 0.001$ (81–22%). Type II subjects used more indirect means to communicate with the target, $F = 474.728$, $p < 0.001$ (56–6%), and the content of their communication was more often an expression of love, $F = 137.17$, $p < 0.001$ (49–35%). Type I subjects were more likely to threaten, $F = 378.766$, $p < 0.001$ (79–26%), and communicated more threats on average when they did threaten, $t = 2.836$, $p < 0.01$ (mean: 7.5 threats to 1.3). They

were more likely to be violent towards their target, $F = 357.205$, $p < 0.001$ (69–10%), and to use a weapon, $x^2 = 75.807$, $p < 0.001$ (27–5%). Type I subjects were more likely to experience criminal justice system involvement, $x^2 = 388.831$, $p < 0.001$ (94–37%), and also more likely to reoffend, $x^2 = 104.207$, $p < 0.001$ (90–46%). When they reoffended, they did so more quickly than Type II subjects, $t = -4.331$, $p < 0.001$ (mean: 1.7 months to 6.5).

Comparison of the Intimate Stalker Group With All Other Groups Combined—The Intimate stalker group was more likely to be male, $x^2 = 55.405$, $p < 0.001$ (94–77%), and have violent criminal records, $F = 57.341$, $p < 0.001$ (50–17%), but less likely to be psychotic at the time of the offense, $x^2 = 27.459$, $p < 0.001$ (11–25%). The subjects contacted their targets more frequently, $F = 56.569$, $p < 0.001$ (68–58% daily to weekly contact) and used more proximity-based approaches, $F = 361.403$, $p < 0.001$ (94–48%). They were more insulting, $F = 123.514$, $p < 0.001$ (55–19%), interfering, $F = 83.308$, $p < 0.001$ (57–24%), threatening, $F = 291.441$, $p < 0.001$ (83–46%), and violent, $F = 360.287$, $p < 0.001$ (74–19%), including the use of weapons, $x^2 = 54.616$, $p < 0.001$ (28–10%). They were more likely to get in trouble with the law, $x^2 = 304.262$, $p < 0.001$ (97–48%), and be incarcerated, $F = 275.745$, $p < 0.001$ (30–8%). They were also more likely to reoffend, $x^2 = 92.476$, $p < 0.001$ (92–56%), and to do so more quickly, $t = -3.895$, $p < 0.001$ (mean: 1.6–4.9 months).

Comparison of Intimate Stalkers with Acquaintance Stalkers—There were proportionately more female stalkers in the Acquaintance stalker group, $x^2 = 25.063$, $p < 0.001$ (20–6%). The Acquaintance stalkers were more likely to be psychotic at the time of the offense, $x^2 = 8.529$, $p < 0.01$ (21–10%). Intimate stalkers were more likely to evidence drug use, $x^2 = 6.864$, $p < 0.01$ (67–50%), and more likely to be subject to a restraining order, probation, or parole at the time of their offense, $F = 16.516$, $p < 0.001$ (46–22%).

Acquaintance stalking cases were more likely to have a sporadic pattern of contact, $F = 11.636$, $p < 0.001$. Acquaintance stalkers were also more likely to employ indirect or direct types of contact, $F = 38.511$, $p < 0.001$ (24–6%). There were more threats overall in the Intimate cases, $F = 13.485$, $p < 0.001$ (83–66%). There was less violence in the Acquaintance cases, $F = 40.355$, $p < 0.001$ (48–74%). Intimate cases were more likely to be prosecuted, $F = 16.521$, $p < 0.001$ (94–77%), and more likely to be incarcerated, $F = 9.008$, $p < 0.001$ (30–16%). Acquaintance stalkers were less likely to reoffend, $x^2 = 11.813$, $p = 0.001$ (77–92%).

Comparison of Public Figure Stalkers With All Other Groups Combined—Public Figure stalkers were more likely to be older, $t = 3.405$, $p = 0.001$ (mean: 39 years to 36), have proportionately more female subjects, $x^2 = 43.566$, $p < 0.001$ (26–10%), less violent criminal records, $F = 55.645$, $p < 0.001$ (8–43%), and more psychosis, $x^2 = 19.951$, $p < 0.001$ (27–14%). They were proportionately more likely to target men, $F = 28.409$, $p < 0.001$ (30–11%), and the targets were more likely to have had a prior stalking victimization, $x^2 = 578.1$, $p < 0.001$ (82–2%).

The stalking behavior was more likely to involve indirect and direct types of contact, $F = 841.116$, $p < 0.001$ (76–10%), less likely to escalate, $x^2 = 11.773$, $p = 0.001$ (29–41%), and to involve more expressions of love and help seeking, $F = 95.232$, $p < 0.001$ (72–43%). There were fewer threats among Public Figure stalkers, $t = 2.715$, $p < 0.01$ (mean: 0.6–7), and they showed the least violence, $F = 276.12$, $p < 0.001$ (2–63%), including weapon use, $x^2 = 65.535$, $p < 0.001$ (3–25%). Among the five Public Figure stalkers who exhibited any violence, four had prior threats, and one possessed a weapon—a knife. Public Figure stalkers were also less likely to experience criminal justice system involvement, $x^2 = 496.126$, $p < 0.001$ (21–92%), less likely to reoffend, $x^2 = 41.812$, $p < 0.001$ (50–85%), and when they did reoffend, they took longer to do so, $t = 4.444$, $p < 0.001$ (mean: 7.9 months to 1.8).

Comparison of Private Stranger Stalkers With Public Figure Stalker—While men were still more likely to be offenders, there were proportionately more female subjects in the Public Figure group, $x^2 = 5.707$, $p = 0.01$ (26–15%). Additional analysis revealed the Public Figure stalkers evidenced more drug use, $x^2 = 14.655$, $p < 0.001$ (77–38%) and more documented mental health diagnoses of any type, including psychoses and Axis I disorders ($F = 6.148$, $p = 0.01$, 52–38%). Targets of Public Figure stalkers were more likely to have been stalked before by another offender, $x^2 = 142.39$, $p < 0.001$ (82–5%).

Contact was more frequent in the Private Stranger cases ($F = 31.326$, $p < 0.001$, 44–15% daily contact) and it was more likely to be proximity based ($F = 147.778$, $p < 0.001$, 80–23%), in contrast to the indirect methods noted among the Public Figure group (71–15%). More documented precipitating events, $x^2 = 33.356$, $p < 0.001$ (43–14%), interference, $F = 46.406$, $p < 0.001$ (30–10%), threats, $F = 44.22$, $p < 0.001$ (53–18%), violence, $F = 45.844$, $p < 0.001$ (38–2%), and weapons use, $x^2 = 12.725$, $p < 0.001$ (12–3%) were observed among the Private Stranger group. Private Stranger stalkers were more likely to experience criminal justice system involvement, $x^2 = 101.238$, $p < 0.001$ (78–22%) including criminal charges ($F = 43.574$, $p < 0.001$, 71–10%), and they were more likely to receive probation, $F = 124.283$, $p < 0.001$, while Public Figure stalkers were more likely to be hospitalized.

Comparison of Private Stranger Stalkers With Intimate Stalkers—More drug use ($x^2 = 14.543$, $p < 0.001$; 67–37%) and violent criminal histories ($F = 12.009$, $p = 0.001$; 50–26%) were observed in the Intimate stalkers than in the Private Stranger group. There were proportionately more female targets in the Intimate stalker group, $F = 92.144$, $p < 0.001$ (95–67%). Intimate stalkers were more proximity based in their stalking, $F = 23.508$, $p < 0.001$ (94–80%) and more likely to insult, $F = 44.044$, $p < 0.001$ (55–22%), threaten, $F = 59.239$, $p < 0.001$ (83–50%) and use weapons, $x^2 = 12.712$, $p < 0.001$ (28–12%). Further, Intimate stalkers were also more likely to assault their victims, $F = 75.746$, $p < 0.001$ (49–12%). When the Intimate stalkers threatened, they were more likely to do so in a direct way (64–30%).

There was more likely to be a precipitating event in the Intimate stalker cases, $x^2 = 107.023$, $p < 0.001$ (87–43%), and Intimate stalkers were more likely to have charges filed, $F = 68.71$, $p < 0.001$ (94–71%), and receive incarceration, $F = 25.193$, $p < 0.001$ (30–18%). Private Strangers were more likely to receive probation as their final outcome. Recidivism was higher in the Intimate stalker group, $x^2 = 87.442$, $p < 0.001$ (92–41%).

Comparison of the Private Stranger Group With All Other Groups Combined—Private Stranger stalkers had less drug use than the other groups, $x^2 = 13.648$, $p < 0.001$ (38–66%). While women were still the predominant target, there were proportionately fewer women targeted by Private Stranger stalkers than all the other groups combined ($F = 26.265$, $p < 0.001$; 67–82%). Insults were more likely in the combined group, $F = 14.159$, $p < 0.001$ (39–24%), while Private Strangers tended to engage in more communication just for the sake of communicating (14–7%).

Private Stranger stalkers were less likely to become violent, $F = 17.904$, $p < 0.001$ (29–48%); however, when they were violent, they were equally violent towards person and property, while the combined group exhibited their violence more towards the target (30–16%). Private Stranger stalkers were more likely to have charges filed against them, $F = 14.832$, $p < 0.001$ (71–65%), but less likely to engage in recidivism than the combined group, $x^2 = 52.835$, $p < 0.001$ (41–85%).

Other Comparisons

In the total sample, subjects with a psychotic disorder were less violent than those who had no diagnosable disorder and those who

TABLE 3—*The presence of threats and violence among RECON typologies.*

	Intimate (%)	Acquaintance (%)	Public Figure (%)	Private Stranger (%)
*Presence of threats**	83	66	18	50
Indirect threats	3	4	4	3
Implied threats	15	10	4	16
Conditional threats	1	0	1	2
Direct threats	64	52	9	29
Presence of violence[†]	74	50	2	36
Property violence	18	23	0.7	17
Personal violence	34	16	1	16
Personal and property violence	22	11	0.3	3

[*]$F = 163.612$, $p < 0.001$.
[†]$F = 210.098$, $p < 0.001$.
RECON, relationship and context-based.

had a nonpsychotic disorder, $F = 10.033$, $p < 0.001$ (32–53% and 49%, respectively). Additional analysis revealed significantly more threats and violence in Type IA (Intimate) than in the other three RECON typologies (see Table 3).

Discussion

The RECON typology appears to have excellent interrater reliability. Temporal reliability theoretically approaches 1.0 as a result of the static nature of the classification system; the relationship of the stalker to his victim at the onset of stalking and the social context of the stalking (public vs private) will rarely change. For example, in one case (JRM files) not included in this study, a celebrity female (public figure) had a brief affair with her wardrobe designer, who then stalked her after she rejected him (intimate). In such situations, we would suggest coding the case as an Intimate stalking case since the rejection postintimacy is the genesis of the stalking episode.

The discriminant validity of the typology is strongly suggested through the multiple comparisons of variables among groups, which yielded statistically significant differences. The RECON typology also demonstrated ecological validity by classifying all of the subjects.

To our knowledge, this is the largest nonrandom sample of stalkers ever studied, and the general findings confirm previous efforts by others. Most stalkers are males in their fourth decade of life, and in North America are ethnically representative of the population as a whole—although we would have expected a slightly larger proportion of Hispanics and Asians since most of the cases originated in California.

Individuals who stalk bring to the table a host of life problems and failures. They are typically without a current sexual pair bond and evidence much higher frequencies of unemployment or underemployment than the general population. Their ability to love and work is grossly compromised, and likely contributes to their predisposition to pursue those who reject them.

These failures are compounded—or perhaps caused—by histories of violent and nonviolent criminality and serious mental disorder for half the subjects. The fact that our sample was not derived from clinical or forensic treatment settings, yet still manifests a high degree of mental illness, should put to rest the social psychological assertions that stalking is just an aberrant form of communication (20). One out of seven subjects was psychotic at the time of the offense, and suicidality and substance abuse are strongly

suggested in at least one-fourth of the sample. Most intriguing is our finding that almost one-third had stalked before, a figure consistent with the serial-stalking data of Lloyd-Goldstein (21).

Stalking is largely a crime against women perpetrated by men. Although female stalkers only represent about 15% of stalking cases (22,23), a finding confirmed by this study, they do pose a serious risk of violence. The gender disparity in stalking cases parallels other violent and nonviolent crime. The specific crime of domestic violence pre-existed the stalking behavior in one-third of our cases—a pattern first noted by others (24,25)—which accentuates the further need for combined domestic violence and stalking research and risk management.

The duration of pursuit averaged 1.3 years in our study, similar to other research averages (26). This figure, however, is misleading because of its range. A more precise and compelling finding is that the modal duration was 1 month. Stalkers also use multiple means of approach (27), most frequently at home, school, and work, and two-thirds pursue victims at least once a week, if not daily. In the majority of cases, there is a precipitating event, usually a perceived rejection (such rejection could, of course, exist solely in the mind of the stalker, and assume delusional proportions in some cases). Such data suggest that the most frequently encountered stalking incidents will be short-lived, frequent, rejection-based, and involve close physical proximity to the target.

Many stalkers pursue their victims because they both yearn for affection and are very angry. Some express only a desire for a relationship, while others disparage and devalue their object. Such feelings may also oscillate in the same individual, especially if his love is unrequited (28). Each rejection may humiliate him and intensify his anger. Our findings underscore the importance of recognizing the dynamic nature of thoughts and emotions in any one stalking case, the danger of attempting to create a static typology based upon changeable internal states (2,3,9,10), and the wisdom of recognizing the mutability of emotion and perception in a stalker over the course of his stalking crime.

Although directly communicated threats are present in the majority of private stalking cases, our study further confirms that directly communicated threats are unusual in Public Figure stalking cases, and are not very helpful for violence risk predictions (11,13,29,30). The more salient risk assessment question is whether or not the subject behaviorally *poses* a threat to the public figure (31).

Violence is ubiquitous in stalking cases. Nearly a third of our large sample assaulted the victim, while only 3% assaulted a third party. Overall, nearly half (46%) of the sample exhibited some form of violence to persons or property. The frequency of violence in our total sample is very close to original estimates (32) and a recent meta-analysis (26). The good news is that homicide is very rare (0.5%), although at least 50 times the homicide risk in the U.S. population at large (<0.01%). Weapons are used to either threaten or harm persons or property in one out of five cases of stalking.

The majority of our subjects were either charged with or convicted of an offense: an anomalous finding due to our subject selection, since most stalking victims do not contact the police (24). However, intervention did not deter in the majority of cases; and the most frequent behavioral pattern was to recontact the target within 1 day of any intervention. Stalkers tend to recidivate half the time (33), a further measure of their tenacity and the stability of their attachment pathology (34).

The RECON typology classified all cases, of which 50% were in the Intimate category. This finding is almost identical to Spitzberg's (26) meta-analytic finding that 49% of stalking cases

TABLE 4—*RECON (relationship and context-based) and Zona typology assignment.*

	% of Total Sample	N
RECON		
Intimate	50	502
Acquaintance	13	129
Public Figure	27	271
Private Stranger	10	103
Zona		
Simple Obsessional	62	620
Love Obsessional	35	357
Erotomanic	3	28

involve prior sexual intimates, even though our large sample was neither random nor epidemiological. We also assigned cases to the Zona et al. (5) typology, and predictably found that the majority of cases were Simple Obsessionals (see Table 4). Even though the diagnosis of Erotomania received most of the earliest attention in the stalking research (28,35), it is an uncommon diagnosis among stalkers, and was found in only 3% of our subjects who had a known psychiatric history.

The operational usefulness of the RECON typology appears to be found in the striking distinctions it identifies among the four groups. The discriminating variables, in turn, suggest certain risk management strategies to law enforcement, criminal justice, and mental health professionals.

The Intimate Stalkers

This group is by far the most malignant. They have violent criminal records, abuse stimulants and/or alcohol, but are rarely psychotic. They frequently approach their targets and escalate in frequency and intensity of pursuit. They insult, interfere, threaten, and are violent. Over one-half of these subjects will physically assault their object of pursuit. More than one-third also show evidence of suicidal ideation or behavior. Virtually all of them reoffend, and they do so more quickly than the other groups. Almost one out of three will threaten with or use a weapon. What is most disconcerting is that our large sample of Intimate stalkers (*n* = 502) confirm the findings of other researchers that prior sexual intimacy substantially increases the risk of personal violence to >50% (3,8–10,36,37). Their dangerous aggression is not a product of a major mental illness, with the possible exception of clinical depression. Although not directly measured, our behavioral data support the clinical hypothesis that these men likely manifest an insecure attachment and a diagnosable personality disorder (32,38). Risk management should emphasize the use of intensive probation or parole supervision; heightened danger in the days and weeks immediately following separation from the intimate; the likelihood of domestic violence and emotional domination before separation (25,39); and the minimal effectiveness of psychotherapy or pharmacotherapy.

The Acquaintance Stalkers

Twenty-one percent of this group (*n* = 129) are women who appear similar to the subjects in Meloy and Boyd's (22) and Purcell et al.'s (23) studies of female stalkers. Although half as frequently violent as the Intimate stalkers, approximately one out of three will assault their object of pursuit or damage property. If they threaten, they do so repeatedly, and their pursuit patterns are likely to be indirect, sporadic, but relentless, enduring on average

for almost 2 years. A less intense bond with the victim may mitigate violence risk in this group, but their desire to initiate a relationship, rather than just react to rejection, is ravenous. Risk management of this group should combine both law enforcement interdiction and mental health treatment, with careful psychiatric diagnosis shaping the latter response. Both Axes I and II psychiatric conditions are suggested, and for females in this group, a common diagnosis appears to be Borderline Personality Disorder (22).

The Public Figure Stalkers

This large group (*n* = 271) in our sample is the first published data on celebrity stalkers since the early work of Dietz et al. (29) concerning threatening and otherwise inappropriate letters sent to Hollywood celebrities. It is also the largest studied sample of celebrity stalkers, and will be the focus of a subsequent publication.

This group is distinguished by the greater proportion of female stalkers (27%) and male victims (30%), but the typical gender disparity of most stalking samples remains. These stalkers are significantly older, have less violent criminal records, and are more likely to be psychotic than the other three types. The vast majority evidences a history of major mental disorder. They are less likely to escalate, and will express a desire for love and help seeking, a finding similar to Dietz et al. (29). They are the least likely to threaten the target (18%) in any fashion, a finding which closely parallels the 23% threat frequency in Dietz et al. (29) from data gathered 20 years ago. Only fourteen percent directly conveyed the threat to the target themselves.

The violence frequency of the Public Figure stalkers was extremely low (2%), especially when compared with the Intimate type (74%). Of the five who were violent, four conveyed a threat directly to the target. One out of the five who were violent possessed a knife. Although the majority recidivated, they took longer to do so than the other types.

It is quite plausible that the infrequent violence is partially due to the high security measures surrounding most celebrities, although the affectional motivation for their initial approaches likely contributes to this very low risk. It is also possible that they have an overall difficulty gaining proximity to the victim because of their mental problems. They may prefer nonproximity-based contact (letter or phone), further reducing risk. Meloy (40) has noted, however, that when Public Figure stalkers are violent, it is usually planned, purposeful, and emotionless (predatory), and involves a weapon, usually a firearm. It also follows a perceived rejection or humiliation by the target of pursuit. Our data also support the hypothesis that psychosis does not necessarily disorganize stalking behavior in this group, especially if they are intent on violence.

Risk management strategies for this type should emphasize the need for professional protection of the target despite the low frequency risk of violence, since the injury is likely to be more serious if violence does occur; the limited usefulness of the few directly communicated threats to predict violence—even though 80% of those who attacked did directly threaten the target beforehand, only 17% of those who directly threatened (*n* = 23) subsequently attacked; the importance of mental health professionals to identify the likely diagnoses of a celebrity stalker and tailor psychiatric and psychological interventions to mitigate risk; and the usefulness of prosecution, with forensic hospitalization as the most helpful outcome. Once again, we emphasize the importance of approach behavior when analyzing risk, particularly the

behavior of the Public Figure stalker subsequent to a perceived rejection.

We caution that our Public Figure stalking group was primarily composed of celebrity stalkers, and the parameters of this group may vary considerably when other Public Figure stalkers are sampled. Our celebrity stalking findings, however, are generally consistent with the Public Figure stalking research involving legislators, politicians, and judicial officials to date (13).

The Private Stranger Stalkers

This unusual group represents 10% of our sample (n = 103). The private context and absence of a relationship would predict that this type would position themselves on many characteristics midway between the Public Figure and Intimate stalkers, which is the case. Many Private Stranger stalkers are mentally ill men, with more than one in ten evidencing suicidality (12%), but they are significantly less likely to abuse drugs and have violent criminal records than the Intimate stalkers. Although the majority of their targets are women, they are significantly less likely to pursue women than all the other groups combined. They are direct, proximity based, and frequent followers, but are more likely to just want to communicate with the object of pursuit.

Half of this type of stalkers do threaten, however, and nearly one-third are violent toward person or property. One out of seven assaulted their target of pursuit. Recidivism risk is moderate (25%) and slow. Risk management of the Private Stranger stalker should focus upon the need for both psychiatric treatment and aggressive prosecution. The potential for violence and the high frequency of major mental disorder suggest that both approaches are necessary, but neither one alone is sufficient. Mental illness is likely to be an aggravating factor for violence risk in this type due to the intensity of the pursuit and risk for violence despite an absence of a prior relationship (41).

Threats and Violence

Our study confirms and extends the findings of others concerning threats and violence among stalkers:

1. The majority of stalkers directly threaten their target, unless they are pursuing a public figure (13,30,42). The vast majority (86%) of Public Figure stalkers in our study did not directly threaten their target.
2. Personal violence toward the object of pursuit occurs in the majority of cases of Intimate stalkers. Personal violence in other stalking groups warrants serious concern, but is substantially less frequent. Third party violence is unusual.
3. The first reported data on the frequency of violence among Public Figure (celebrity) stalkers indicates a low risk (2%). Among those who were violent, 80% threatened, and one used a weapon—a knife. When threats do occur in Public Figure cases, they should be taken very seriously.
4. The severing or disruption of a sexual pair bond and physical proximity to the target are closely associated with personal violence in stalking cases (40).
5. Among all stalkers, psychosis appears to be negatively associated with violence risk (43).

Limitations

There are several sources of methodological weakness in this study. Selection bias is evident in the nonrandom samples of convenience utilized, and limits the generalizability of our findings to those stalking subjects who have had contact with law enforcement or private security firms. A known example of this bias is seen in our outcome data, which indicate a 65% conviction rate on an offense related to stalking. Observation bias may be present in the differential recall and data-gathering strategies for each of the six samples when the cases were first investigated. For example, the authors' files likely contained much more psychiatric and psychological information than the law enforcement, prosecutorial, and security files. Nonresponse bias is evident in the relatively large proportion of unknown data concerning mental health status, suicidality, and drug abuse in our sample. Methodological weakness concerning chance—the likelihood that significance difference between groups is the result of chance—has been minimized due to our large sample size and chosen significance value. Confounding variables, however, may exist in this study, which influence the significant associations but are unknown to the researchers as they were not measured.

Conclusions

The RECON typology demonstrates excellent interrater reliability and logically predicts temporal reliability. It evidences discriminant validity across a variety of demographic, clinical, pursuit, threat, and violence characteristics in a large, nonrandom sample of North American stalkers. This study confirms and extends the work of others concerning the histories and pursuit behaviors of those who stalk. We would welcome attempts to cross-validate our typology in other countries.

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