On Being Stalked*

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Over the past decade "stalking" has emerged as a new social problem. Some reported cases of stalking involve efforts to extract vengeance from another right from the start; others ultimately come to center around vengeful threats and violence. But the dynamic characteristic of most cases of what ultimately come to be recognized as stalking involves efforts to establish (or re-establish) a relationship in the face of the other's resistance. This paper uses data collected from a variety of sources to examine the social processes through which such relational stalkings emerge and come to be recognized as such. From the point of view of those who eventually may come to feel that they are being stalked, these processes involve permutations and exaggerations of a variety of common relational behaviors, including: recognizing that one is being followed; learning that another is pursuing detailed information about one's life and routines; fielding and putting off persistent relational proposals; and countering continuing relational escalations. Under these circumstances, the pursuer's attentions may eventually turn strongly hostile and even violent, leading to the kinds of threats and harm that have come to be publicly identified as "stalking."

Stalking emerged as an identifiable social problem only in the last decade. During most of the 1980s, several national magazines called attention to "women being followed or harassed with letters, telephone calls, or unwanted gifts," but the term "stalking" was rarely if ever invoked; rather, these behaviors were interpreted as "sexual harassment," "obsession," or "psychological rape" (Lowney and Best 1995:37–39). But the 1989 murder of actress Rebecca Schaeffer generated great public and media attention for "celebrity-stalking," as repeated following, harassment and threats came to be linked to incursions (some violent) on a number of high-profile entertainers, including David Letterman, Jodie Foster, and Theresa Saldana.

Public concern with such celebrity stalkings played a major role in the 1990 passage of California's antistalking law. Many other states quickly passed similar laws, and the National Institute of Justice offered a model antistalking code (NIJ 1993). The identification and criminalization of stalking went hand in hand with a shift in focus from celebrity victims pursued by strangers to a view of stalking "as a women's issue, a widespread precursor to serious violence, typically committed by men against former spouses or lovers" (Lowney and Best 1995:42; see also Dunn 1998:143–144). Thus, stalking became directly linked to domestic violence, primarily through the claimsmaking efforts of participants in the battered women's movement (Lowney and Best 1995). In this respect, stalking is no longer viewed solely as a status liability afflicting celebrities, sports figures, politicians and the wealthy, but increasingly is seen as a more widespread, albeit gender-linked phenomenon that arises in ordinary couple and workplace relations.

This article will analyze the processes and experience of being stalked; it draws upon a

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variety of accounts by those who became objects of a range of relation-claiming actions by others. It suggests that many forms of what comes to be identified as stalking grow out of glitches and discontinuities in two very common and normal relationship processes—coming together and forming new relationships on the one hand, and dissolving and getting out of existing relationships on the other. In this way the processes and experience of being stalked are intricately linked to normal, everyday practices for establishing, advancing, and ending relationships.

In light of the recent formulation of stalking as a social problem, it is not surprising that empirical research on this topic remains scanty. Two primary lines of research have emerged: forensic and clinical studies of erotomania and obsession; and a more recent survey of stalking victims.

In the wake of the Saldana and Schaeffer attacks, a number of psychiatrically oriented studies appeared treating stalking behavior as an "obsessional" or "delusional" disorder known as "erotomania" (Harmon, Rosner and Owens 1995; Leong 1994; Segal 1989, 1990; Wright et al. 1995). Zona et al. (1993), for example, rely on the concept of erotomania to distinguish among types of stalking cases brought to the Los Angeles Police Department's Threat Management Unit. They develop a typology of stalkers including "erotomanic stalkers," "love obsessional stalkers," and "simple obsessional stalkers." Erotomania involves "a delusional disorder in which the predominant theme of the delusion is that a person, usually of higher status, is in love with the subject." Love obsession adds to erotomania other severe psychiatric symptoms or diagnoses such as psychosis or schizophrenia. Simple obsession, representing the majority (70 to 80 percent) of official stalking cases, is distinguished by the fact that "there exists a prior relationship between the subject and the victim."

This line of research is of limited relevance to sociological analyses of stalking. The clinical and law enforcement samples are unrepresentative and overselective of the pathological and extreme. But more significantly, conceptualizing stalking as a result of mental imbalance obscures the relational bases of many stalkings, and makes the intricate social processes of stalking secondary to the stalkers' individual pathologies.[1] It also ignores pursued's and pursuer's differing perceptions of what is going on (differences that may be particularly marked at earlier stages before it becomes clear to all that "stalking" exists), privileging the former's version and discounting the latter's as pathology. Finally, preserving the distinction between stranger/celebrity and ex-partner stalkings not only ignores many processes common to both types, but is also static; it assumes the clear-cut, unproblematic existence of stalking as a phenomenon, and ignores the processes through which it comes to be recognized and defined.

The recently completed study of stalking victims by Tjaden and Thoennes (1998), conducted as part of the National Violence Against Women Survey, provides the most systematic and comprehensive view of stalking to date. The survey asked a large national sample of women and men whether they had ever experienced any of a number of acts associated with stalking, including being followed or spied on, receiving unsolicited phone calls, letters, or unwanted items, or noticing someone standing "outside your home, school, or workplace" (17). Respondents who answered yes to one or more of these items, who reported positively that someone had "done any of these things to them on more than one occasion," and who admitted to being "very frightened" or fearful of bodily harm (17) were counted as stalking victims.[2] Eight point two percent of the women in the sample and 2.2 percent of the men reported such experiences in their lifetime, with figures of 1 percent and 0.4 percent respec-

1. In support of this critique, Tjaden and Thoennes (1998:8) report that only 7 percent of all stalking victims explained stalking as the result of mental illness or the abuse of drugs or alcohol.

2. Tjaden and Thoennes thus define stalking operationally as "'a course of conduct directed at a specific person that involves repeated visual or physical proximity, nonconsensual communication, or verbal, written, or implied threats, or a combination thereof, that would cause a reasonable person fear,' with *repeated* meaning on two or more occasions" (1998:2).

tively being stalked within the last 12 months. While 78 percent of the stalking victims were women and 22 percent men, "94 percent of the stalkers identified by female victims and 60 percent of the stalkers identified by male victims were male" (5). Of women victims, a total of 48 percent reported being stalked by a spouse or ex-spouse, or cohabiting partner or ex-partner, 14 percent by dates or former dates, 19 percent by acquaintances, and 23 percent by strangers. Most men victims—a total of 70 percent—were stalked by acquaintances or strangers. Fifty-five percent of the cases involving women and 48 percent of those involving men were reported to the police, while 28 percent of the women and 10 percent of the men obtained a temporary restraining order (TRO).

While providing for the first time a clear overview of the demographic distribution of stalking, by its very design the Tjaden and Thoennes study cannot provide insight into the social processes that generate and give meaning to these distributions. Specifically, stalking is treated atemporally, as all of one piece, with little or no attention given to how it develops, comes to be recognized, and proceeds over time (this despite the fact that, on average, victims report the stalking incidents lasted 1.8 years: Tjaden and Thoennes 1998:12). Also neglected are the problematics of identifying stalking in the first place, changes over time in the stalker's attitudes toward or demands from the victim, and changes in the victim's responses to the problem over time.

In order to develop a fully sociological approach and to highlight how activities come to be identified as stalking, we must approach stalking in processual and interpretive terms. In this paper we will describe the natural history of stalking as a way of highlighting the processual and interpretive character of this phenomenon. We reveal process by asking whether the kinds of activities associated with stalking occur in some kind of sequential pattern or stages, i.e., how do the components of stalking change and evolve over time? This focus on the social processes of stalking thus complements the findings of the Tjaden and Thoennes survey. We ask how people come to understand that they are being stalked, an interpretation that is often highly problematic because of the possible overlap between stalking and normal romantic or relational moves and actions.

In looking at stalking as social process, we assume that stalking does not suddenly just appear, but develops in identifiable stages and changes over time. We analyze these stages and developments from the view of the person who may ultimately come to identify (and/or be identified) as a victim of stalking. We examine how the way in which victims assemble, over time, an interpretation that what is happening to them is indeed "stalking." Focusing on the experience of coming to see oneself as being stalked brings into focus a series of relational processes that existing studies of stalking have by and large ignored. These processes include following, learning about the details of another's life and routines, and proposing/claiming relationships of various degrees of closeness and intimacy. In approaching stalking in this way, we move away from defining actions and events as unproblematically pathological, and toward focusing on actions and events that are commonplace, familiar to us all as ordinary parts of the everyday pursuit of friendship or romance, or of the mundane rebuilding of failed relationships.

Taking a process approach also requires close attention to the earlier, more problematic stages of stalking—what might be termed "pre-stalking." In contrast, most existing studies of stalking rely heavily or even exclusively on data deriving from more serious or extreme cases, including those brought to the attention of the legal system (e.g., Zona et al. [1993]), or those resulting in newsworthy threats or violence. By focusing on more serious cases of stalking, these studies oversample cases where initial ambiguities about what was going on have been resolved. Hence, they neglect the earlier stages that precede clear recognition of "stalking," when most of the relevant activities were interpreted and treated as something other than stalking. These studies thus employ a form of "endpoint analysis" that retrospectively reinterprets "into more definitive form what at some earlier point had been hazy, ambiguous or downright confusing" (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995:61). To look at it another way, in

everyday life, most instances of what later might be seen as "pre-stalking" are *not* seen as such by the participants. Retrospectively reframing earlier phenomena in the relations between pursuer and pursued in terms of an eventual threat and/or harm overdetermines and distorts the character of the earlier, emerging processes and meanings. In particular, this obscures what are often for the victim the most salient and disorienting quality of the experience—the gradual accretion of suspicions, awareness, and, finally, knowledge that she or he is being stalked.

A concern with social process necessarily leads to a concern with the interpretive procedures through which "stalking" comes to be defined and recognized. What actions and conditions coalesce into a stalking? How do victims/members define stalking as they experience it? In taking such an interpretive approach, we to a large extent avoid the use of legal, clinical, sociological, or other *a priori* definitions of stalking, and focus on the experiential definitions constructed by those who are stalked (or who eventually come to see themselves as having been stalked). Thus, we look at stalking as a problem of interpretation for the participants.

Matters of interpretation become critical because of the previously noted linkage of stalking and conventional relational processes. The core activities of "pre-stalking," activities such as writing, calling, following, visiting, and gathering information about the other, also mark familiar, everyday courtship and uncoupling practices. Those who become the focus of such attention may initially frame these activities as romantic pursuit or friendship-building, only later reinterpreting them as stalking. "Stalking" is therefore an interpretive outcome, not a necessary result of a particular bundle of facts.

Processes that characterize a variety of everyday, nonpathological relational ploys and practices appear at early points in many forms of stalking as well. Indeed, incipient or hoped-for relationships typically begin tentatively, with one or both parties unsure of the other, and uncertain about how to cultivate a deeper connection. Thus, many of the key processes involved in stalking appear in situations and relationships that never become identified as stalking, or even as problematic; in this sense, being followed, learning that another had acquired detailed access information about you, and receiving initial relationship proposals, characterize ordinary interactions and relationship processes. Some of the actions employed by stalkers are extreme versions of actions that characterize ordinary intimacies: writing, calling, visiting, and gathering information appear in perverse, terrifying incarnations, but those behaviors derive from more familiar, everyday courtship and friendship actions. Similarly, the core dynamic in relational stalking—persistence in seeking a relationship in the face of continuing rejection—mirrors in extreme the dogged pursuit of "true love" idealized in the culture and media, as well as being a hyperbole of the manic love Lee (1973) noted in "normal" courtship.

This poses a deep and tricky problem for our analysis: we are interested in how people come to interpret events as stalkings, but in large part we rely on accounts of those who have definitely concluded that they have been stalked. Most of the phenomena we examine have already been framed as stalkings by victims; although they may have at some point also framed these phenomena as something else, most now see them as having been stalkings.

Data and Research Methods

In contrast to data collection methods that rely on clinical or law enforcement samples, or on random samples of the general population, we use multiple sources of data in an effort to maximize the range and diversity of "pre-stalking" and stalking cases. First, in order to avoid looking exclusively at serious cases that had advanced to some more or less clear-cut "stalking" outcome, we sought to locate informants who had experienced some of the behaviors associated with stalking but who had not necessarily come to interpret these experiences as stalking. To do so we conducted 41 personal interviews in 1996 to 1998 with people who had

been *followed*, usually without having sought a restraining order or taken other legal action to remedy the problem. Thus the purpose of the interview was described to respondents in these terms:

> I'm interested in talking to people about some different experiences that they might have had in public places—but I'm especially interested in experiences people have had that concern being followed by another person either known or unknown to them. . . . The purpose of this study is to present the experience and opinion of all kinds of people about following.

Respondents were then asked about the details of any such following incidents, how they had been affected, and how they reacted. The interview also included one question about what they considered to be the difference between following and stalking.[3]

Clearly these following interviews were tilted toward collecting accounts of encounters between those who were initially unacquainted, cases that at least initially occurred in public-place or workplace situations. The 41 subjects in this sample all currently lived in a midwestern city; 25 were women, 16 men; 25 were white, 12 were African-American, and 4 were Asian-American (1 of these is sub-Continental Indian); they had a range of occupations, from judge, psychiatrist, and professor, to business and civil-service workers, to students and homemakers, to those in lower-level white- and blue-collar jobs.

Second, we drew upon a study conducted in 1988 to 1989 of petitions for temporary restraining orders (TROs) brought under California's domestic violence and civil harassment statutes in Beach City Superior Court.[4] This research involved observation over almost a one-year period of the courthouse processes in which petitioners filled out and submitted the necessary court documents to request TROs, as well as shorter periods of observation of two legal aid clinics established to help petitioners complete these documents. A final part of this study involved lengthy, open-ended interviews conducted with ten persons whom we had earlier observed in court applying for a TRO. These interviews focused on the circumstances leading to the decision to seek a TRO, the petitioner's experience with the process, and developments after the initial TRO had been granted.

It is important to emphasize that most of the TRO cases observed involved incidents defined as domestic violence or spousal abuse between separated or separating couples, or as threats of violence or "harassment" between family members or neighbors. Some of these cases did involve accusations of following and other forms of behavior we will consider as components of the natural history of being stalked. But no petitioners or court staff used the term "stalking" to characterize even these latter set of incidents.[5] For example, even Brooke Perry,[6] who experienced what would appear to have been a classic instance of stalking (see below), did not once use this term during the lengthy interview where she described her complex relations with the persistent pursuer and harasser against whom she obtained a restraining order. Nonetheless, these cases give us a second collection of detailed accounts of following and harassment, but involving situations where the victim felt severely threatened and sought to pursue a difficult, time-consuming legal remedy.

Third, we collected accounts of having been followed and stalked more opportunistically, from students and acquaintances to whom we described our project. Where briefer incidents (usually following) were involved, we solicited written accounts from these informants.

3. This question was worded as follows: "In your mind, at what point does *following* become *stalking*?" This question provided the only point in the interview guide where the term "stalking" was used.

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5. This tendency supports the constructionist argument of Lowney and Best (1995) that the term "stalking" gained currency only after 1992; the 1980s saw similar actions characterized as "harassment," "obsession," etc.

6. Throughout this paper, we have altered names and in some cases other identifying details to protect the identities of those involved, except in those cases reported in the media. In the latter instances, individuals' names even when derived from the cited secondary source are a matter of public record.

Where more complex, longer-term situations developed, we tape-recorded interviews focused on these events. We also included one instance where a student conducting research on the police observed a patrol officer deal with a citizen's complaint that she had been followed.

Finally, in addition to this diverse set of original data on following and stalking, we made use of an extensive collection of secondary materials. Here we relied on accounts published in newspapers, magazines, and books to collect extensive material on about a dozen noncelebrity stalkings and about 20 celebrity stalkings. Most of the former and many of the latter received media attention because they involved dramatic and/or violent outcomes.

In sum, we used a variety of methods to gather data, deliberately seeking to include more ambiguous "pre-stalking" instances of following, unwanted attention. As a result, our analysis is not limited to instances of mutually recognized or officially identified stalking, but includes instances where what occurred was never designated as "stalking."

We emphasize two additional implications of our methods of data collection for the analyses that follow. First, the bulk of our data derives from accounts provided by the *victims* rather than the perpetrators of following and stalking.[7] As a result, in what follows, we analyze the relevant meanings and processes explicitly from the victims' points of view (Holstein and Miller 1990). This restricted focus is necessary, we suggest, because the phenomenon of stalking is marked exactly by radical disjuncture between the perspectives and understandings of victims and pursuers. The core of our analytic task therefore is to delineate the victim's point of view, to specify the victim's growing recognition that the perpetrator holds and asserts a very different perspective and point of view. This disjuncture is reflected in the initially radical asymmetry in the use of the term "stalking": for much of the process only the victim sees and experiences "stalking"; from the other's point of view, what is occurring is something else again—for example, acts of devotion and affection intended to attract or establish a relation with a desired person.[8]

Second, despite our efforts to collect materials on the earlier stages of what may ultimately come to be recognized as stalking, we remain heavily dependent on retrospective accounts and the endpoints they incorporate. This is so because we rely not only on victims' accounts, but on accounts elicited some time after the events at issue and organized to highlight some specific outcome to these events. Such accounts necessarily reflect a retrospectively created history and trajectory of following and stalking that tend to ignore the role that circumstantial contingencies and the victim's interpretive practices played in defining conduct as notable, as unusual, as "stalking," and so on. The personal stories that victims tell, for example, have a kind of logical connectedness and experiential coherence that was not present in the real-time, lived experience of what came to be seen as a stalking (see Gubrium, Holstein and Buckholdt 1994). We self-consciously try to minimize the effects of endpoints in our anal-

7. We have collected four additional sorts of data that do not rely exclusively on victim accounts: First, in observing the processing of TRO petitions, we observed a number of instances in which the defendant appeared and challenged the accusations presented by the petitioner. Second, respondents in the following interviews were asked if they themselves (or a proxy) had ever followed another; fourteen of the 41 people interviewed reported that they had done so, although they invariably rated themselves on the low level of offense. Third, we conducted an additional seven interviews with individuals—four with men and three with women—who admitted to having followed or even "stalked" another. One of these men had killed his victim, an ex-girlfriend, and is presently incarcerated. Finally, we have collected a series of interviews and observations involving media fans, some of whom engage in activities that are or might be perceived as stalking. Given our focus on the perspectives of stalking victims, we draw upon these sources of data only occasionally, and then primarily when examining later stages where there is less equivocality among all parties that stalking is occurring.

8. For example, consider the following situation involving a fan's pursuit of a celebrity: Even after her favorite actor asked her to cease meeting him at the airport because of its connotations of stalking, Diane continued to wait each night outside the stagedoor when he performed in a local play, and on the night of the last performance, followed him and his after-theater companions to a Hollywood restaurant, where she dined at the next table with her friends. Diane considered this following a very different matter than meeting unannounced airport arrivals, and certainly did not view herself as a stalker, although the celebrity gave every indication that this was just how he viewed her.

yses, wherever possible "writing against" (Abu-Lughod 1991) the determinism that pervades these accounts by continually posing the interpretive and behavioral contingencies that figure in the interactional mix from which "stalkings" come to be identified.[9]

The Concept of "Relational Stalking"

Looking at a variety of victim accounts of stalking, it becomes clear that these reports deeply implicate the nature and level of relationship between pursued and pursuer. Indeed, these reports suggest that much stalking is keyed to a variety of hitches and disjunctures surrounding relational coming together and splitting apart. A number of patterns are apparent here.

First, many reports of what ultimately came to be recognized as stalking identify the core dynamic as one-sided attempts to create a close, usually romantic relationship where the two parties were, at the start, either completely unacquainted, or only superficially acquainted. These cases include several variations: (a) The pursued can be a stranger initially encountered in some public or semi-public place, giving rise to what can be termed *unacquainted stalking*. (b) The victim can be a publicly identified figure—usually an official or celebrity—with whom the pursuer has come to feel he or she has a special understanding or emotional attachment; these involve celebrity or *pseudoacquainted stalking*. Finally, (c) eventual stalking can develop between those who had some contact in the past (e.g., former classmates), or who have some minimal present contact (e.g., co-workers in a large office or business); this can be termed *semi-acquainted stalking*.[10] While most of these various cases involve some hope or proposal of an intimate relation, some stalkings involve no explicit romantic claim; the former campaign worker who came to stalk Texas Senator Bob Krueger and his wife provides an example.

Second, other victim reports depict stalking as arising out of efforts to maintain or to recreate a close relationship that has been terminated or that one party sought to terminate. Here the parties involved are not only previously acquainted, but usually intimately linked. Many are "exes" (Ebaugh 1988) who lived together for some time and then begin to undergo formal processes of separation and divorce. In other instances, the attempted breakup of a more casual "dating" relationship generates stalking, as in this interview account from a study of strategies for breaking off intimate relationships:

> I was getting very upset, he was harassing me. I was seeing this car in my rearview mirror and I was getting very upset. . . . [I]t was a couple of weeks he followed me around. . . . Then a couple of days later he said he wanted to be friends, then he started calling me up and bothering me again. (Clark and LaBeff 1986:262)

Taken as a whole, the forms of stalking arising out of various glitches and troubles tied to coming together or splitting apart involve what we will term *relational stalking*. Relational stalking thus includes both people who were initially complete strangers, as well as those who have had a long-standing intimate relationship that one party has sought to end—and perhaps even has legally ended. All forms of relational stalking entail unilateral pursuit linked to some admiring or romantic interest in, or implied or specific assertions of rights to, a continuing, close or intimate relationship with another. Furthermore, these relational claims (and in most cases, romantic expressions) are one-sided, frequently unreciprocated, and even explicitly contested by the person to whom they are addressed. Thus, at the core of relational stalking

9. That is, while neither denying victims' stories nor discounting the incidents and experiences they report, we seek to provide a context for understanding how their observations and conclusions emerged from circumstances that were much more fluid, indeterminate, interpretively problematic, and open-ended than the endpoint accounts suggest.

10. Using the figures provided by Tjaden and Thoennes (1998:6), almost 40 percent of everyday stalkings involve acquaintances or strangers.

are reported efforts by one party to impose a relationship upon an uncooperative or even resistant other. In this sense, relational stalking involves a complex interpersonal trouble (Emerson and Messinger 1977) centered on continuing struggle over the very nature of the relationship that is to exist between two parties (as well as others who may become entangled).

Note that from very early on the pursued emphasizes that there is a radical asymmetry between their own and the pursuer's presumed understanding of what is taking place, of just what they are to one another: the pursued maintains that there is either no relationship, or a minimal or former relationship at best; the other's understanding is that there is, or will be, a close and intimate relationship. In brief, it is exactly the nature of the purported relationship between the two parties—what it is, what it was, and what it will be—that is fundamentally at issue. Relational stalking, then, involves *meta-relational troubles*, keyed to words and actions that define and comment upon whatever previous relationship the parties have had, and what the parties should be to and for one another in the future.

While accounts of radical differences in relational claims and assumptions are key to all cases of relational stalking, many eventual victims call attention to a clear-cut turning point where earlier professions of attraction or devotion devolved into jealous rages, threats, intimidation, or violent outbursts. In the various forms of unacquainted stalkings, this shift tends to occur with, and as part of, the recognized failure of the pursuer's efforts to establish the kind of relationship desired. In cases of stalkings involving exes, where the core dynamic is depicted as one-sided resistance to breakup, signs of devotion and insistence on prolonging the relationship are mixed with threats and acts of violence right from the initiation of breakup. In such cases the eventual stalker seeks almost simultaneously to reinstate the prior relationship and punish the ex for having shattered it.

Moreover, while some relational stalkings ultimately turn sour and come to be dominated by vituperation, threats, or violence, there is another class of stalkings that seem to have this character right from the start. Some stalkings appear never to have included any romantic or relational claims at all, but rather are almost from the start marked emotionally by anger, hostility, and perhaps threat, and behaviorally by following and a series of related activities explicitly focused on intimidating the victim and perhaps on extracting what the pursuer sees as payback or revenge. Such *revenge stalking* thus involves no expressions of admiration, romantic intent, or deep devotion, and no efforts to establish or claim an intimate relationship. Rather the stalker appears to view her- or himself as maltreated, and seems motivated by intimidation or revenge along with a willingness to act as an incarnate public advertisement of the error of the victim's ways. Judges, psychiatrists, and instructors—all in the business of communicating sometimes unpalatable truths or evaluations to a clientele—are the frequent objects of revenge stalking. Plastic surgeons also seem prone to this form of stalking from patients unhappy with the results of cosmetic surgery (Dull and West 1991). Here the dissatisfied patient may even come to think of her- or himself as avenging angel acting on behalf of a class of persons, as well as providing a walking billboard of surgical incompetence.

Again, relational stalking may ultimately come to involve, and may even be dominated by, the same sorts of threats, intimidation, and violence that characterize revenge stalking. But these threats and violence arise from and are linked to a distinctive interactional dynamic in which deeply contested claims about what kind of relationship exists between two parties—and hence what kind of obligations and responsibilities each has toward the other—are asserted and played out.

In sum, while relational stalkings center around accounts of actions directed toward imposing a relationship, revenge stalkings report only intimidation and threats where no active relational claim is being invoked. If the epitome of a relational stalking is an aborted or failed love relationship that the spurned party continues to pursue, the epitome of revenge stalking is a failed service relationship where the dissatisfied customer decides to press suit in public court in quasi-vigilante style. Further, where a relational stalker may initially advise a

target that "I would never do anything to hurt you" despite behavior that may vitiate this stated sentiment, a revenge stalker's explicit spirit and aims are the opposite.

The Natural History of Relational Stalking

As described and recounted by those who have experienced it, relational stalking reveals a natural history; that is, the pursued talk about what they may ultimately come to term "stalking" as occurring in a series of stages, stages marked by a number of recurrent processes that eventually led to a situation where they came to confront another who unilaterally and asymmetrically claimed a relationship in the face of their own continued resistance.

While all forms of relational stalking reveal common processes, these processes are combined and accented differently in accounts of stalking involving initial strangers as opposed to the acquainted. For example, while the pursued usually rejected a stranger's relational proposal received *after* extensive following and acquisition of information, the rejection (or, perhaps more accurately, attempted rejection) of the acquainted begins the process in which the rejected seeks to update and keep information current, drawing on a core of extant knowledge of the pursued's identity, activities, and connections to do so.

In fact, the similarity and overlap between the activities and practices identified as constituting stalking and those of everyday relational and courtship pursuit posed a problem for informants, who routinely took special care both to point out these similarities and to highlight the differences. Our concern, again, lies in how those experiencing pursuit and following come to recognize and understand these activities, particularly in when and how they come to interpret these activities as "stalking." Thus, we do not seek to specify how the actions that comprise stalking differ from comparable ones of ordinary courtship; rather, we look at how those who come to identify themselves as inappropriately followed and/or "stalked" orient to and establish this distinction.

Of course, stalking may also involve actions that do not correspond so well to ordinary relational or courtship practices, or correspond only to the unpleasant realities of romantic relationships involving abuse. For example, a wife returns home to find that her ex-husband has painted filthy words all over the outside of her garage. To what, in "normal relationships," does that correspond? Similarly, a series of sweet love letters may become grotesque when their recipient pairs them with recurrent beatings from the same source. However, even here, it is the victim's task to show how such actions go beyond an exaggeration or realignment of some piece of normal, friendly communication.

In what follows, we construct the natural history of relational stalking in the sequence characteristic of unacquainted stalking. The core processes here include recognizing that one is being followed, learning that another is assembling detailed information about one's life and routines, fielding and putting off persistent relational proposals, countering continuing relational escalations, and handling threats and possible violence. We will also suggest sequential and substantive variations in these processes as recounted by those who have experienced acquaintance stalking.

Everyday Pursuits: Being Followed

Incipient or hoped-for relationships typically begin tentatively, with one or both parties unsure of the other, uncertain about how to cultivate a deeper connection. Even the most intense relationships have to grow from virtually nothing. Establishing and cultivating a relationship when the parties involved are initially unacquainted is especially problematic. Yet as Davis (1973:3) emphasizes, in contemporary urban, mass societies "the primal encounters between the previously unacquainted are a critical phase in personal relations." Of course, a

significant number of a person's present intimates consist of "those who were at one time strangers to him and whom he can recall coming to know at a specific time and place" (Davis 1973:3).

Efforts to establish social relations with a stranger are often risky (Goffman 1963), and hence are pursued cautiously, relying on moves to promote casual encounters, to tie opening remarks to some small service (Davis 1973:5–6) or to a piece of public aid (Gardner 1988), to acquire information that might be useful for starting and building conversation, and so on. In light of the restrictions that ordinarily surround initiating engagements with strangers, it is not surprising that many delay making any overture, marking time in the hope of seeing a clear opening. Following another with whom one can envision a possible relationship, whether for shorter or longer periods, would appear to be particularly useful in this respect. Following allows one to look for natural opportunities to strike up a conversation, to acquire information about when and where one can expect to locate the other at another time and place, and to build up an initial store of information that might be used to stage a first engagement or to provide conversational material during that encounter.

Indeed, the relative frequency with which respondents reported that they had at some point followed or been followed by another suggests that following may be a relatively common event in many U.S. urban areas. While some followings involved disguised pursuit by an established romantic partner, many involved pursuit by strangers. Those involving strangers presumably began with some chance public encounter in which one party took note of another, then sought to keep the other in view.[11]

Our data provide at least glimpses into the fact that longer term intimate relationships may have initially involved public place following of someone who was a stranger. One respondent (California 1998), for example, reported that he met his former girlfriend while he was a college student and she a late-night shuttle bus driver, since "she had seen me in the library for the last two years and she had followed me around campus." Similarly, others reported that intimate relations developed out of public place service encounters. One woman said that her future fiancé "would come in where I was working *over* and *over*. It was positive. He was coming to see me and would always go through my checkout line at the grocery."

However, other followings do not turn out so positively, and do not lead to acknowledged or welcomed relationships. When following is made visibly apparent to the unacquainted, for example, even what turns out to be a one-time occurrence can become upsetting. Consider the account of a white male college student driving in gridlocked traffic after a professional basketball game, who noticed:

> a girl staring at me from another car, two lanes over. She was about my age and not bad looking, so I smiled at her, I guess, and she smiled back. . . . Then she began edging over into my lane, and she managed to get behind me in her car. . . . So I kind of kept an eye on her, sort of in my rearview mirrors, and there she was all the time, grinning and smiling at me.

Following sustained for days, weeks or even months, once detected by the pursued, can generate pervasive uneasiness, as in a young white woman's report:

> It was the summer of '95 when I started noticing that, whenever I went out to walk aerobics, I seemed to see the same maroon Chevy somewhere around me. Sometimes it would pass me; sometimes it kept pace with me for a little while—long enough for me to tell it wasn't anybody I knew. Sometimes I saw it parked ahead of me, with nobody in it but like it was waiting for me. . . . This lasted, on and off, maybe half the summer.

These feelings may be particularly intense when the pursued cannot identify the pursuer. One

11. "Presumably" because in many instances the initial encounters that were so meaningful to one party went unnoticed by the other. Thus, victims' accounts of initial contacts are fundamentally retrospective in character, reconstructed after they become aware of a pursuer.

frequent consequence is to review one's past to try to infer who might be engaged in such an activity. This woman reported:

> It flickered through my mind, "Maybe it's one of my ex-boyfriends," who I have quite a lot of living in the general area. But I don't think I've parted from any of them with bad feelings. So I decided no, it wasn't that, and it wasn't any of their cars.

As in this case, even with pursuit persisting over an extended period, followed and follower may never make any direct visual or social contact. At times, lack of face-to-face engagement is a product of the follower's efforts to maintain distance and remain unidentifiable. The pursued's persistent efforts not visibly to acknowledge or ratify a pursuer's presence and interest may also prevent such contact, as indicated by the aerobic walker: "I never got a clear look at who it was. . . . I never would give him the satisfaction of looking over."

The followed often acknowledges such first overtures, initially responding to the other's presence, gesture, or greeting. But in many instances the pursued quickly decide against any further response. The young man in the basketball game gridlock described his subsequent reactions in these terms: "she was pretty and had a nice car, but I didn't smile back no more. I remember, for a while after this, after the gridlock broke, she followed me for a while, then I didn't see her." Likewise, a young black woman paralegal informant who was followed for several months to and from work by a white man in a pickup truck said: "he'd try to catch my eye and smile. The first time I saw him, I smiled back, but boy, never again."

Followings may also arise from more focused encounters, often brief and impersonal, linked to public places, such as everyday service encounters. And followings may arise among those who are distantly acquainted, as through occasional contact in a work setting. Computer technician Richard Farley and electrical engineer Laura Black, for example, were introduced by a coworker at their large Silicon Valley defense firm. While she thought nothing of their meeting and brief conversation, he reported, "I think I fell instantly in love with her. . . . It was just one of those things, I guess" (Gross 1992:191). Brooke Perry, who eventually sought a restraining order, was thrown into contact with her eventual stalker in two settings when "[he] joined the same religious organization as I belong to . . . [and] I got a job at the same office; I ended up working at the same business, at the same office as this individual. And . . . I saw him at the [religious] meetings as well as at work." And followings may develop from more prolonged workplace contacts, as in the case of a young white Midwestern man:

> I work at the big Denny's as night manager. One of the women I hired as a waitperson last summer used to follow me home—I found this out later. Honestly, I never really knew she liked me or anything and I hardly noticed her until my wife found her on our lawn one morning.

In these cases the pursued interpreted following as a bid to extend or deepen an existing if limited formal relationship (customer/server, co-workers) into a more intimate relationship.

As the above cases suggest, persons may not initially realize they are being followed, only at some later point coming to understand that this has been occurring. This realization may produce dramatic transformations of the *awareness contexts* (Glaser and Strauss 1965) between pursuer and pursued, the latter learning for the first time of the intense interest and sometimes quite extensive covert following. In some instances the trailing is even done quite openly and/or clumsily, in an effort to inform the pursued of the pursuit.

The famous are a special case with regard to following. Exposure to the famous through media creates a sense of "knowing" the other as a person (Horton and Wohl 1956), a pseudo-acquaintance. Also, if met in the flesh, the famous are "open" figures: strangers can approach them, address them by name, pose as critic of their oeuvre, and ask them for a small range of favors (autograph, handshake, photo op). Situational following is thus common and expected, if not always welcome, as when one young woman actor noted that, after an autograph, "women—and some guys, too—try to follow you into the john" (Pearlman 1997:182).

Persistent following that does not eventually lead to some sort of direct contact or overture can be particularly frightening and upsetting. The black woman repeatedly followed by a white man in a pickup truck over a period of months without any move toward personal contact, for example, came to interpret her pursuit as racially motivated intimidation and mockery:

> I think he just wanted to creep me out, and he definitely did that to the point where the thought of going to work or out in my car gave me stomach flips. After about two months it stopped, but still I thought about it. . . . In a way, I felt like he'd been teasing me—you know, it was like a parody of a person who's head-over-heels in love with you, romantically, and they follow you around all the time. [Why was it a parody?] Because black and white don't mix in this city, and because any black person who sees a peckerwood—excuse me—in a pickup anywhere near them is bound to be afraid. I was afraid.

In this respect learning that a follower wants to establish a relationship may provide a kind of ironic reassurance; his or her intentions are at least made visible and the process becomes a bit more comprehensible (if not necessarily more manageable).

In general, respondents reported that initial yet diffuse following could begin to generate a distinctive quality of stalking—the sense of menace. The eventual victim begins to experience the pursuer's persistent yet distanced attentions as "sinister" or "creepy," and begins to anticipate and dread the other's appearance jogging by their house, purchasing lunch in the restaurant where they regularly eat, or walking down the aisle of the supermarket they patronize. Even at initial junctures, victims can be aware that someone has noticed them in unusual ways, and may be alarmed by the pursuer's *not* attempting to advance the relationship in a "normal" fashion, as well as by trying for too much too soon. While this sense of menace may or may not be intended by the pursuer, it can seep into and color the pursued's daily life.

Here significant differences along gender lines appear in reactions to cross-gender following. When women followed and pursued men, the latter rarely expressed deep concern or upset, did not appear to be particularly threatened by the knowledge of their pursuit, and took few countermeasures in reaction. Consider this comment from a man:

> Didn't want to be mean to the girl who followed me. . . . I didn't really think she was psycho or anything. . . . Just felt weird and thought she was strange. No real threat—she couldn't rape me or anything. [A white man in his twenties who works in a white-collar job.]

Contrast this with the reactions of a woman who experienced persistent following:

> I could go to therapy with this [question]! I thought this way [I'm about to tell you], but not anymore—well, I kind of am still cautious all the time. For instance, if I pull into the apartment complex and someone pulls in beside me, I won't park until they do. I look into my car before getting in. If it's empty, I jump in and hurry and lock the door. And then, I also make sure my feet are not close to the bottom of the car so no one can cut my Achilles. I used to be scared of being home alone. I'm not scared anymore with a baby. I am very cautious. Another thing, if home by myself, whatever room I'm in I close the door. For one, when the door is open someone could be watching. . . . And I am particularly cautious around men. They make me nervous. [A white woman homemaker in her twenties.]

In sum, following appears to be relatively common in everyday life, arising for a variety of purposes, usually short term and aimed at no one individual, and generally focused on and exploiting public places. There is thus considerable variation in whether someone who has come to recognize that they are being followed equates this with being stalked. The comments of a 27-year-old white woman student are typical in this regard: "[f]ollowing becomes stalking when the behavior is repeated. . . . It would seem the threat of harm would be greater. It could be (and often does) go on for many years. . . . In my mind, stalking seems more intentional, planned, premeditated than following." Thus, those who become aware that they have been followed tend to define this as stalking when the activity

persists over a period of time, when no relational proposal is forthcoming, when the pursued begins to detect qualities of inappropriateness and threat, and when trailing is augmented by systematic efforts by the pursuer to increase knowledge about the life and routine of the pursued.

Access Information and Being Pursued

In order for any of the minimal encounters that commonly occur in our society—encounters between employees and customers, fellow pedestrians, coworkers, friends of friends, even fans and celebrities—to become more than a passing moment, one party must take steps to make it possible to make further contact with the other (Davis 1973). One way this may be done is to acquire some kind of access information (Gardner 1988) about the other; learning another's name, address, phone number, or workplace enables the unacquainted to attempt future contact on a more predictable basis. Providing access information about oneself and seeking such information about others is a normal, basic feature of many initial contacts between the unacquainted, especially those who envision possible future romantic contact (see, for example, Cloyd 1976). Indeed, many long-term romantic relationships spring from just such encounters that were extended in time and space by this kind of information.

While providing or acquiring access information is a constant, regular feature in everyday social life, people ordinarily seek to control and regulate who can legitimately accumulate such information about themselves. This tendency is particularly marked in public place encounters involving the unacquainted (Gardner 1988:384). There are strong gender differences in this regard: "women generally guarded their privacy, safety, and respectability by controlling the release of access information, whereas men often divulged the same information with little or no perception of personal risk" (Gardner 1988:384; see also, Gardner 1995:131–148).

A key dynamic in the experience of those who are followed, whether briefly or persistently, involves just such efforts to restrict and control access information, even while regularly confronting evidence of the failure of these measures. As noted earlier, observable following often vividly conveys to the followed the detail or extent of the information another has acquired about oneself: a follower first noticed while walking near home who subsequently appears inside one's apartment building or at one's workplace provides a case in point. Or vice versa:

> One time this guy started talking to me at work. I didn't think nothing of it. He asked me what time I got off and I had told him. He had followed me all the way home. I was totally shocked when I seen him there.

Such instances dramatically remind the pursued how their most routine movements can be used by those who want to assemble access information.

On some occasions the followed learn that even a brief observation can be parlayed into detailed information. Consider the following complaint registered by a woman informant in her thirties who flagged down a police officer:

> The other day I was driving home from work—I work in Santa Barbara—and this man was following me. Anyway, he got my license plate number and gave that information to the DMV. He told them that he was a detective and he needed certain information about me. Now he knows where I live and stuff. What should I do?[12]

Those who learn they have been followed, then, may simultaneously learn that a stranger has been more or less systematically building up a wealth of working knowledge about their life and mundane activities. Thus, when a pursuer avers to the pursued, "I feel as if I've known you for a long time," the latter may hear this as an all too accurate statement.

12. The Department of Motor Vehicles can allow conversion of publicly visible information (license plate numbers) into rich, specific access information, making these bureaus figure in stalking incidents; in the aftermath of the Rebecca Schaeffer killing, the power of the California DMV to divulge such information was severely restricted.

Controlling the information from exes as opposed to the unacquainted reveals a somewhat different dynamic. The pursued knows that the ex already has detailed knowledge of their life circumstances, including telephone number, places of residence and business, the same information about a gallery of friends and family members, and customary hangouts and daily routines. The pursued, in turn, typically devote their efforts to blocking access—changing phone numbers, addresses, residences, locks, jobs, and even names, while enlisting the aid of friends, neighbors, and relatives to keep this new information from the other. Such efforts are often not successful, particularly if previous knowledge can be exploited to overcome efforts to restrict current access. For example, Danica Petersen reported that her ex-boyfriend knew she was a university student and lived near campus, and hence was able to locate her parked van: "[h]e spied around where he saw my van parked, prowling around . . . through the yards until he found where I lived by looking in the windows. . . . He hung around the student union area and began to try and figure out where my classes were and actually started following me to my classes."

Coworkers often are ideally placed to learn about one another's work and outside doings, so those concerned about being followed often have special concern about the availability and dissemination of information in the workplace. One professor, for example, eventually learned that the young white woman student who returned his wallet and briefcase lost from the poorly anchored trunk of his car had done so only after painstakingly recording all the information off his photo I.D.s and credit cards and photocopying his teaching schedule and student rosters. Similarly, Laura Black finally realized that, after she had declined to give Richard Farley information, he "asked a friend working in the ESL personnel office to look up Black's birthdate on the computer so he could surprise her. While the woman accessed Black's file on the computer, Farley leaned over her shoulder and memorized Black's home address as well" (Gross 1992:191).

Many of those who come to realize they have been persistently followed also learn of illicit steps pursuers have taken in order to learn about their lives. As a result, the pursued may become distrustful of normal appearances and claims. For example, a middle-aged man who was a driving student reported that a fellow, "angelic-looking" woman student told their driving instructor that the man had left his text behind (in fact, she had stolen his book from the rack under his desk) and volunteered to return it since "she was pretty sure we were neighbors—she just needed to look at the instructor's roster to get the exact address." The instructor obliged, also helpfully providing the phone number. As the informant noted: "that was step one into my private life. From then on, the fun never stopped."

The pursued may also discover that their pursuer will turn not only to public agencies and corporate sources, but also to their own families, friends, and intimates, drawing these parties into and implicating them unknowingly in the illicit acquisition of access information. One young black man acquired the phone number of a young black woman—she had introduced herself to him at a funeral—by calling every listing with her (rather common) last name in the phonebook. Although her number was unlisted, her father was listed. The man told her father how much her words at the funeral had meant to him and, deeply touched, her father gave the man his daughter's phone number. Then, apparently using the three-digit phone number prefix, the man "figured out about where I live and just went driving around till he saw me [on the street] one day." As notable as this pursuer's claims of noble emotions were his labor-intensive methods.[13]

13. Some fans employ similar deceptions and ruses to acquire celebrity access information, perhaps with like rationalizations. One Los Angeles fan described how she and a friend learned the home addresses of some of their favorite television stars:

> My friend and I snuck into the [Studio] lot—he told the guard he was in some theater group. And we couldn't get onto the set, but I took a bunch of stuff, papers, from the bike messenger's basket when it was parked. I figure that's not stealing, they can just make more Xeroxes. Anyway, the addresses were on it. . . . [T]hey live in the hills, mostly, and I can go by their houses.

Those being followed may discover that their pursuer is looking for means for gaining immediate access to their possessions, space, or person without their consent or cooperation. For example, the young black woman informant whose father gave out her phone number found her follower going through several large bags of her garbage; she assumed that he was looking for "maybe some schedule or page from my appointment book . . . or maybe he thought he'd luck out and find a dupe backdoor key, who knows." She reported the "distinct feeling [that] this man was after getting to me, getting in my house or maybe, oh boy, surprising me at work at a big meeting, or—I don't know what. But there was something different about that time."[14] Some victims even came to feel that the acquisition of detailed, intimate information had become an end in itself for the pursuer.

What is particularly disturbing to victims of persistent following is not simply discovering that the pursuer is seeking ways of gaining this direct access by all means possible, but also that the pursuer wants them to know that this is occurring. Some pursuers deliberately convey to their victims the amount and details of the intimate information they have acquired. For example, Richard Farley told Laura Black how he had painstakingly made a key for her house, and actually received a copy of the key from him in proof of his claim, accompanied by his promise that he would never use it. In the same way, other followers boasted to victims about their ability to circumvent any efforts the victims might take to curtail access to information or resources—or to victims' attempts to change information or resources. For example, when Brooke Perry got an unlisted phone number in an attempt to avoid harassing calls from her pursuer, she received this message on her answering machine: "'in case you're wondering how I got your number . . . I can get your number anytime, I've got a friend at GTE [the telephone company]. . . . I've had the number since the day you changed it.'"

These communications often create or heighten the pursuer's sense of being a victim of stalking, generating feelings of being threatened, menaced, or even shamed. The sense of being stalked thereby arises with feelings that another—an ex, a stranger—now knows more about one's life than many of one's intimates, and more than the victim wants known, that this information is ill gotten and illegitimate, and that the victim has lost control over what is known by whom. A black woman department store worker reflected on the man who followed her:

> He knew for sure where I lived, what my routine was, where I walked, where I shopped [for food] and took my dry cleaning. Just from that, he could have easily found out more about me, enough so he could insinuate his way more into my life. At the time, I was afraid he also would show up at [the large department store where she has a position working with the public] or inside my apartment.

These feelings are apt to become stronger as the pursued learns that the pursuer is continuing to collect and update information (and craftily to accumulate more access resources), even in the face of pervasive efforts to limit access to such information. In fact, the threats from having lost control over access information may persist as a sense of uncertainty even after overt following has stopped. The woman in the previous example continued: "and then, of course, when he stopped, I was never sure it was over. This was two years ago, and I'm still not sure."

It is here that we again find particularly significant gender differences. Tjaden and Thoennes (1998:3–5) report that both women and men may find themselves victims of stalking, and that both men and women can engage in stalking—although women are more often

14. A number of eventual stalking victims came to learn that their pursuer had been accumulating *access resources*, that is, items that could provide immediate physical access to the person, space or possessions of the pursued. Art Maldonado, for instance, kept a key which he used to gain access to Danica Petersen's car. Richard Farley lurked around Laura Black's home, doggedly (but unsuccessfully) seeking the code for her electronic garage door opener, and eventually obtaining a copy of her house key by taking a clay mold from her keyring while she was momentarily away from her desk, a tactic that many might heretofore have believed limited to spy novels.

victims, and men stalkers. Beyond such frequencies, however, female victims of male pursuers and stalkers perceive risk, threat, and menace as much more pervasive and immediate than do male victims of female stalkers.

Initial Proposals and Initial Rejections

While relational stalking involves efforts to resist attempts to establish or maintain a relationship, neither following nor acquiring access information involve explicit relational proposals. But such proposals (for example, an overture by the pursuer to the pursued to begin or continue a relationship of a particular sort) are commonly made, and sometimes the pursued responds to them favorably: some offers to meet and some dating/relational proposals are accepted, and a number of short-term relations certainly develop briefly and then dissolve from such beginnings. Relationships between sports and rock stars and their "groupies" are notorious in this regard (see Chamberlain 1991; Des Barres 1987). And, indeed, some long-term relationships spring from such beginnings: one woman reported receiving a series of anonymous notes and gifts from the man who would eventually become her husband. Even fan/celebrity contacts may produce long-term relationships upon occasion: TV heartthrob Luke Perry, for example, married a woman whom he first met after she sent him a fan letter containing one of her undergarments. Similarly, a number of couples in the throes of breakups or long-term separations ultimately may reconcile, transforming what might have been a permanent end to the relationship into mere temporary separation. In all these instances, then, a proposal (or in the case of exes, a counterproposal) is accepted and a mutual relationship created or reestablished.

In the instances that came to be seen as stalking, however, those receiving proposals reported that they rejected them, but that rejection failed to end pursuit, and that implicit or explicit proposals continued. In this section we examine the sorts of initial proposals linked to episodes of following and the acquisition of knowledge, as well as the rejections of such proposals reported by respondents. But in many of the cases, relational claims and proposals did not end with such initial rejections, setting up the dynamic characteristic of stalking that we examine in the next section—experiencing persistent relational overtures despite continuing rejection.

Among the unacquainted, an overture may be offered during the very first meeting or verbal contact between the two parties; alternatively, it may arise much later after a substantial period of following and accumulating access information. In the first case, a pursuer who has made minimal contact with the pursued may simply rely on that contact to ask for a meeting or date, hence making a bid to begin a particular kind of relationship with the other. In the second, the pursuer may wait until accumulating a rich body of knowledge about the other, trying to select an opportune occasion and way to advance a proposal. Of course, relational proposals may continue to be offered, after the first rejection. Proposals vary, not only in timing, but in form and substance. The pursued may be asked directly for a phone number to call in the future for a meeting or date: Larry Stagner's first overt attempt to contact his former highschool classmate Kathleen Baty was to call her at her parents' home (but using a false name); Richard Farley approached Laura Black at work and asked her to attend a truck pull with him.

Others receive more indirect proposals in the form of anonymous phonecalls, letters, or gifts. Many of these actions make an *announcement* of relational interest rather than an explicit relational proposal. Thus, answering machines may become laden with flattering messages from an unidentified caller; anonymous notes of admiration may be left on a car, in a mailbox, or mailed to one's home; flowers may be left on the doorstep or sent to the workplace, perhaps with a card unsigned or minimally inscribed ("An Admirer," "Your Friend—I want to be," or

"Your Adoring Audience," the last to a professor who thought it came from one of the roughly 500 students in a lecture class).[15]

As noted previously, while in some instances the pursued may have previously detected the interest of another in the intricacies of her or his daily rounds, in many cases the pursued becomes aware of this interest only upon receipt of a proposal. As a result, proposals may dramatically transform the awareness context between pursuer and pursued, the latter learning for the first time of the other's intense interest, prior covert following, and accumulation of information about her or his daily life. For some this process was extremely traumatic. For example, a white nurse in her thirties became extremely upset upon receiving a note that read, in part, "I am following you everywhere." Similarly, a white woman college student with one hand who had noticed for some time that a man in a red pickup truck was following her on her daily rounds recounted this experience:

> [While walking home], all of a sudden, I passed and saw an envelope with lettering on it. I thought it said, "Man with one hand"—*what?* I turned around and looked again and the letter was addressed, "For the woman with one hand." I picked it up and read it. It said I was an angel and he would build me anything. He was a carpenter. He said his whole life had changed after seeing me. I was shaking. . . . [I]n that letter he said he knew where I lived and had left a rose at my doorstep. I didn't get a rose, so I knew wherever he thought I lived was wrong. Nails and duct tape and string were with the letter, and I was supposed to leave a letter on how I felt.

In part, this relational proposal frightened its recipient because it revealed almost without warning that another had become fixated on her and sought to acquire close familiarity with her life (even if somewhat inaccurately to that point). Moreover, the recipient was frightened because she found something inappropriate and "off" about the proposal: it was excessive in its expressions of devotion, presumptuous in its projection of a future union, and peremptory in directing her reply.

A number of victims of future stalking noted this disturbingly inappropriate quality of initial proposals, which might be glossed as "something off," "it seemed funny somehow," "outré," or one of a dozen other phrases. But the more ordinary the proposal (asking for a date, for example), the more likely it was to be seen initially as unproblematic, the "off" quality becoming apparent only in retrospect. On the other hand, frequent hang-up phone calls, assumed names, or the use of devious means to make contact made many recipients uneasy or suspicious right from the start. In addition, recipients sometimes experienced elements of self-centeredness and inconsiderateness in such contacts and proposals. Thus, an Indian psychologist living in the Midwest was first contacted by a man who subsequently began to stalk her when he began to leave telephone messages at her office "expressing great interest in speaking more to me about the psychological implications of the Hindu pantheon," a topic in which she had absolutely no interest. Or, as a woman who had a dozen long-stemmed roses delivered to her office without a card pointed out, the person her office mates called her "Secret Admirer" also showed disregard for her: it "takes up forever to figure out what to do with all those flowers at work, which my boss doesn't appreciate. And, by the way: I hate roses."[16]

When the parties involved have a relationship or have had a prior relationship, relational proposals take on a different quality. In these situations the "proposal" is not to begin but to maintain a relationship that the other explicitly seeks to end, as rejection precedes rather than

15. Often these anonymous contacts seem intended as way-paving overtures to future face-to-face contact and proposal. As a young white woman who used a professor's voicemail for more than checking her assignments said: "I tried to leave a cheerful thought for him each day, so that when we finally did meet, he would, like subconsciously, have positive feelings about me because . . . he'd know my voice."

16. Despite the awkwardness and insensitivity of many of these overtures, many pursuers claim they try to be respectful and appreciative of the other—at least by their own lights. Thus, in making hang-up calls just to hear the other's voice, one caller said he "hung up with a respectful click, because I didn't want to scare her." Likewise, a young white man recalled placing such calls to his older Asian-American instructor on a regular basis "every evening at six, eight, and ten, because I wanted to make sure I didn't wake her up."

follows a consequential relational proposal. In this sense, an ex-to-be is actually *reacting* to the initiative of the other who desires to leave, offering a *counterproposal* to continue a relationship called into question (and see Vaughan 1986).

In some cases, relational proposals, whether to begin a new relationship or maintain an old one, are accepted, and a new relation may form, or an old one revive, at least temporarily. In other situations, the other may initially agree to a proposal, but subsequently decline any further meetings, hence rejecting any further relationship. But in the accounts provided by our respondents, the pursued *rejected* such initial proposals and the sustained or intimate relationships they sought to establish or maintain. In some situations involving the unacquainted, the pursued may reject immediately and consistently, declining any and all dates, meetings, or future contact. In doing so, however, they may use any of a number of standard accounts or excuses to deliver this rejection in ways that minimize damage to the proposer's ego. Consider the explanation offered by the woman followed home by a man customer:

> He asked me if I could give him my number and I told him no because I lived with my boyfriend. [In telling him this] I had lied. But that's the only way to get rid of him that I had at the time. It worked. As far as I knew, he never returned to work or at my home.

Or consider Laura Black's attempt at face-saving in rejecting Richard Farley's proposal to go out: "I tried to explain to him that I wasn't interested in being anything other than a work friend" (Gross 1992).

At first glance, these rejections might appear partial and somewhat equivocal. And, in point of fact, in many instances the proposer is not explicitly and forcefully told that his or her proposal would never be accepted under any imaginable conditions; most relational rejections are delivered in ways that offer the proposer at least some opportunity to save face. Thus, it may well be that persistence trades on ignoring the rejecting message being conveyed, or submerging the negative content of the communication in favor of its civil, face-saving form. Nonetheless, it should be apparent that such responses would be heard as clearly and firmly negative by many people. Moreover, the "clarity" of the rejecter's rejection is not the key issue here; in many situations, rejecters report experiences where the proposer ignored, denied, or rationalized even the most unambiguous rejections and continued to seek contact.[17] As a result, unmitigated rejections to proposals from the unacquainted and exes are more likely to be made to repeated rather than to initial proposals; it is at that point that it becomes clear to the recipient that the civility of refusals was being used to sustain morale.

Rejections vary in the pseudoacquainted stalking of fan/celebrity contacts, depending upon the nature of the contact. Since celebrities typically restrict direct access to their person, initial contacts are usually indirect—frequently letters or perhaps gifts sent to studios. Thus, initial rejections are delivered in an impersonal, automatic, often mass-produced fashion: either letters go unanswered and gifts unacknowledged, or form letters of thanks are sent out. Attempts at face-to-face confrontation with the celebrity can be met with the impersonal baffle of a security force or entourage—or direct request from the celebrity to cease and desist, which may be as invigorating for the fan as continued contact itself.

Similar processes can mark an ex's reactions to a counterproposal to continue the relationship the former has sought to downgrade or break off. Sometimes the counterproposal is rejected in unequivocal terms. But in other instances such a rejection is taken as encouraging simply because it involves face-to-face interaction, indirection and a concern to minimize affront (on the strategic need for interactional subtlety, see Vaughan 1986:66). Even when conflict comes to a head and direct confrontation does occur, equivocation may nonetheless

17. Clark and LaBeff (1986:262), for example, noted that the rejected sometimes refused to accept even the firmest announcements of termination, "the receiver of the news [making] extraordinary efforts, occasionally violent, to either hold on to the relationship, or make the life of the deliverer miserable."

mark its resolution, for agreement on either may prove temporary, the abandoned only acquiescing long enough to placate the abandoner or vice versa. Consider the problems that can arise when one party demands that the other move out, often a key moment in uncoupling. One young white woman, for example, insisted to her boyfriend "that he had to make arrangements to leave immediately. No ifs, ands, or buts . . . 'I want you out of here. You have to go.' And he wouldn't leave." She was eventually able to get him to leave but then had to change the locks to keep him from simply returning when he wanted. In the face of concerted opposition, then, "breaking up" may come to involve continuing conflict marked by "rehashing" (Clark and LaBeff 1986:263) further proposals and rejections. Separations under these conditions take on an open-ended character, as reflected in the words of a former cohabiting partner and subsequent stalking victim: "I've been definitely breaking it off and it wasn't working too well."

Persistence and the Recognition of Stalking

Relational proposals and rejections are not limited to a single round, but occur again and again; the first rebuff of the pursuer's persistent advances and claims need not be the last. Moreover, persistence in the face of rejection sometimes pays off and may in fact produce a long-term relationship; some spouses recount having first met in this manner, including the woman quoted earlier who met her future fiancé as the result of his persistent use of her checkout line. However, when relational claims continue or even escalate in the face of rejection, the pursued not only explicitly depict themselves as victims of stalking, but also increasingly report the feelings of fear, frustration, and anguish characteristic of such victims. It is by highlighting the persistence in the face of multiple and consistent rejection that the other is identified as a stalker. As one respondent reflected, again in retrospect, actions become stalking "[w]hen the one incident becomes multiple incidents. When the follower is told that his/her intentions are unwanted and still persists. When the person knows your schedule and shows up at your workplace, etcetera."

Critical in this regard is learning about the pursuer's increasingly labyrinthine efforts to accumulate personal information about one's life in the face of systematic resistance and strong discouragement. For example, denied entry by studio security when he tried to hand-deliver a stuffed animal, Robert Bardo used a private detective to find Rebecca Schaeffer at home. Similarly, turned down in his efforts to date Laura Black, Richard Farley convinced a security guard that Black's desk was his own in order to get an extra key that he then used to dig through her personal belongings. The pursued may experience these one-sided quests for personal information and recurrent intrusions into one's everyday routines in a variety of forms.

First, the pursued may receive increasingly frequent phone calls. Douglas Mann complained, "She is calling my job, I am this close to being fired from my job. . . . [S]ometimes she'll call me, I'll hang up on her and she'll call me back twenty-five times. They're going to fire me for this if it continues." Others experienced persistent hang-up calls where no words were exchanged, but where it was clear to the respondents just who was calling. Brooke Perry recalled:

> I had received hang-up phone calls all the time . . . the first few weeks after I told him, you know, to bug off, uh, probably about five or six times a day. Anywhere from 5:30 in the morning until 1:30 at night. And, um, when I would confront him about the phone calls, he would simply deny it and tell me I'm crazy. . . . [T]his had been going on for about two years.

Second, the pursued may receive continued or ever-more-lavish gifts. Tina Teller reported: "[h]e would send me flowers so many times at work until I was embarrassed. I was like, 'I don't believe this.' They would call me, 'Tina, we don't believe you got some more

flowers. Who is this guy?' And I was like, 'I wish he would stop.'" In general, persistent gift-giving becomes an imposition, with the recipient quickly coming to dislike and to decline these items. In turn the giver learns ways of leaving presents through which the presents need not be directly accepted. Danica Petersen recalled: "[he] started leaving gifts for me by the door, leaving gifts inside of the car, that he still had a key to." In this way the rejected pursuer becomes an uninvited part of the other's everyday life.

Third, the pursued may find that the pursuer begins to show up or regularly drop by home or work. Brooke Perry, for example, found that her pursuer had moved into her neighborhood and began jogging past her house every day. He then began to drop by her house at odd hours, and "at one point in time, he came over to my house like six o'clock in the morning, knocking on my door." Exes are particularly adept at "pop-up" appearances—Darlene Zygmunt, a forty-year-old white lawyer, said that her husband's pattern of "Jack-in-the-box appearances cumulatively told me that I could find him anyplace, from my living room to our old box at the Symphony to our daughter's playgroup, and anytime, from the middle of the night on the porch to walking past the glass walls of my office in the middle of the day."

Fourth, the pursued may find the pursuer intruding into his or her family and friendship networks, trying to elicit information and enlist allies. Particularly in the case of exes, family and friends can be besieged with calls from the pursuer. Suzanne Healy complained: "he called a girlfriend of mine named Sheila . . . and just lost it . . . and she just kept saying, 'Look, she doesn't want anything to do with you! Why don't you just leave her alone?'" Douglas Mann reported that his ex-girlfriend "just continues to call my mother at 3 o'clock in the morning . . . she just babbles on and on. My mother turns on the machine and just gets a 20-minute message."

As the result of these activities, the pursued experiences widening intrusion into the fabric of her or his daily life and, in response, may change her or his routines to try to make any contact at all more difficult, all the while denying that any sort of legitimate relationship exists. Phone numbers are changed, unlisted numbers obtained, a residence unknown to the stalker occupied temporarily, old haunts or areas where the stalker might be encountered avoided. Stalking victims devote considerable efforts to trying such "normal remedies" (Emerson 1981), generally involving avoidance and distancing, to prevent further contact (see also Tjaden and Thoennes's "self-protective measures undertaken by stalking victims," 1998:13).

Instead of finding the pursuer retreating in the face of explicit rejections and systematic avoidance, the pursued experiences continued and perhaps even escalating relational claims:

> [T]he door opened at 7 a.m. to reveal a letter that had been left on my porch sometime during the night or early morning. . . . Sometimes the letters were pleading: "I dreamt last night that you had a boyfriend and you were in bed with him. . . . I hope that wasn't true. Tell me it wasn't." [Or they] were simple and direct statements of how John felt: "I love you so much I can't wait until we see each other. It's been too long." (Horton 1992:16)

Moreover, as in this case, the pursued may begin to receive more sinister symbolic messages mingled with the expressions of devotion. On her birthday, Brooke Perry received a bottle of perfume, "Obsession," even though she did not wear it (and she was not the only stalked woman to receive an item from this product line).

With these developments, the pursued comes to realize that half-measures are not working, and turns from responses relying primarily on avoidance and distance to more exceptional, costly, disruptive remedies. Three such exceptional remedies stand out: first, the pursued might at this point seek out the pursuer to deliver an extreme denunciation and ultimatum. Laura Black eventually told Richard Farley, "I would not go out with you if you were the last man on earth." Similarly, Brooke Perry ultimately went directly to her pursuer to try to put an end to his relational overtures: "I said, 'I don't want anything to do with you, ever again. I don't want you coming over to my house. And I don't want you to call me. This is it. I don't want nothing to do with you.' You know, 'You're just too weird.'" Second, victims of

persistent pursuit will sometimes turn to the legal system for help, calling the police, and/or seeking a restraining order against the pursuer. Finally, victims may make dramatic changes in their life circumstances with the intention of ending any further pursuit and contact. Danica Petersen, for example, tried a geographical cure, moving to Chicago, Minneapolis, and Texas in an effort to discourage Art Maldonado, but her unwanted suitor found and followed her each time.

This struggle can sometimes escalate to frightening levels of unreality. Brooke Perry's experience with her pursuer provides an extreme instance: "some people [at the church community center] approached me and congratulated me on my upcoming wedding. And I said, 'What are you talking about? To who?' 'Well, to Jason Wyatt.' So he was out, telling people that we were getting married. I mean, just totally berserk."

As the victim realizes that even the most unequivocal rebuffs and rejections do not deter the pursuer, the former's sense of menace deepens and takes on fatalistic, hopeless qualities. The victim repeatedly encounters the stalker's lack of response to what the victim considers the reality of the situation: the victim believes there is no relationship, but the stalker continues to evince belief that there is one. This is especially the point at which things that others might see as flattering or romantic—an overwhelming volume of flowers, little gifts on the doorstep every morning—become, to the victim, sinister, for they are presented in the face of outright rejection and become evidence, to the victim, of the stalker's intent to persist to the bitter end (whatever that might be).

It is precisely the experience of this type of persistence in the face of continuing rejection that can identify stalking for its victims. Victims not only see the other dismissing, brushing aside, and reinterpreting the most severe rejections in continuing to advance relational claims; they also directly encounter the now-stalker's refusal to address or acknowledge their contrary relational claim. As a result, the victim experiences a sense of radical non-alignment in the respective relational claims. Danica Petersen highlighted these processes:

> I tried to break off the relationship by telling him, you know, "It's over and I don't want to see you anymore." And I had several boyfriends in junior high school and high school and a couple during the first year of college, so it's not as if it was the first relationship. *But I had never experienced someone who when you told them that you didn't want to be with them anymore they didn't go away. Um, most people will say, "Oh, you know, sorry, uh, I'll get out of here now." And that's sort of the end of it. But this, this person, um, didn't accept the idea that I wanted to not be with him.* (Emphasis added.)

As a result the victim experiences stalking's distinctive relational dynamic: an explicitly rejected pursuer persists in seeking a relationship, elaborating new tactics for gathering access information and for making contact in the face of clear and sustained resistance, continuing rejections of overtures, and denials of willing contact. The consequence is a sense of unasked-for involvement in one's daily life imposed over and against deep resistance. As one stalking victim aptly stated: "[h]e just wanted to make it clear . . . that he was a part of my life whether I liked it or not" (Horton 1992:16).

The Turn Toward Revenge: Hostility, Jealousy, Rage, and Violence

Full-blown stalking relationships are marked by deep changes in the pursuer's orientation and actions and in fact may become overwhelmingly, aggressively negative. Continuing rejection in the face of persistent relational claims and proposals often sours earlier expressions of devotion and affection, as the pursuer increasingly mixes expressions of hostility and jealousy and threats of reprisal with claims of love and relationship. The spurned pursuer may now become the prototypical stalker, following and seeking access to the other in order to intimidate, frighten, or injure. While threats of violence and the creation of a sense of menace may

be as far as some stalkers ever go, other stalkings culminate in violence, often in ways that attract extensive media attention.

Some threats of violence are delivered indirectly. Holly Murphy, for example, recounted how her ex-husband called attention to his own "obsession": "[h]e still calls me . . . to tell me he loves and misses me—at one point he even called me and said that he's obsessed with me and he worships me. . . . And I said, 'You know, you sound like that guy who killed Rebecca Schaeffer.' He says, 'I can understand it. I can understand it.'" In declining to distance himself from the killer of Rebecca Schaeffer, this ex-husband intimates a chilling if unspecified outcome. Similarly, Texas senator Bob Krueger and his wife, stalked by a former campaign worker who just could not let go after Krueger lost the 1984 primary, began receiving obsessive overtures. Mrs. Krueger stated, "He'd tell us he loved us, that we meant the world to him." However, when the Kruegers spurned those overtures, his daily communiqués grew more sinister, until he finally made the specific threat that got him imprisoned: "I'm going to kill you. I'm going to kill you. I'm going to kill you. I've hired a killer to put a .22 caliber to your head while you lie sleeping next to your wife" (Ellis et al. 1993).

The indirect threats described above were embedded in verbal claims of love and admiration, serving to create an exasperating sense of mixed messages. Threats could also be more explicit and unencumbered by any expression of current love. Richard Farley's letter to Laura Black, written after she reported him to their company's personnel department, documents this transition from love to hate:

> Time to remove the kid gloves. I asked you to see me and you refused, that is your right. It's my option to make your life miserable, if that's what you really want. You asked me what I could do. Kill you? The answer to that was and still is no. If I killed you, you won't be able to regret what you did.

Even in cases such as these, stalking victims may have difficulty getting the legal system to take their complaints seriously, particularly if the stalker stops short of actual violence. Consider the account of a homemaker in her forties, who had been battered and stalked by her first husband:

> [When asked to rate kinds of stalking experiences, the] worst is being followed in the car. The man following me was my husband. We were separated. He would follow me home from work and try to run me off the road. The cops aren't much help, because in order to help me Phil would [actually] have to run me off the road. Phil would stare at me—a spooky, evil-eyed stare. He would stay in the parking lot and wait for me to get off of work. He wasn't allowed in the restaurant: the people [managers] of the restaurant knew Phil was dangerous to me, so they didn't allow him in the restaurant. My boss seen Phil hit me.

Here the victim obtained what protection she could informally from her employers, not the legal system. Yet a sense of menace, of continuing vulnerability to someone who appears willing to ignore the costs of formal punishment, pervades this account.

While stalkers who actually kill are relatively rare (with one exception, all our data on stalking deaths derive from media reports), these instances are extremely dramatic (Lardner 1995; *Newsweek* 1992).[18] Killing may serve as a way of linking the fates of the two parties, of creating a permanent relationship, if *ex post facto*, between stalker and victim. Larry Stagner seemed to take this approach when he kidnapped Kathleen Baty: "my life's over, please come with me this last time," he pleaded with her. This interpretation is supported by an additional theme that marks a number of killings: the stalker goes a step further, claiming not only that if the stalker could not have the pursued no one else could either, but also that "if I can't have you, I can't live." Often, in planning a violent outburst, the stalker mentioned his or her own

18. These killings differ in some profound ways from the "hot-blooded" ones Katz (1988) has analyzed as "righteous slaughter," not only in their long-term, slow-burning character, but also in their seeming lack of any claim to a higher good. Nonetheless, there may also be some parallels, especially in movement toward "transcendence."

intended death in the plan, whether he or she was ultimately successful or not. Thus, in a note to Laura Black, Richard Farley wrote: "[l]et's say you don't back down and I don't back down, and pretty soon, I crack under pressure and run amok, destroying everything in my path until the police catch and kill me." While he was not killed by the police, he wounded Black, killed seven others, and was ultimately sentenced to death for his killing rampage (Gross 1992). Leslie Vandenberg described her kidnapping by David Prince in these terms: "he drove me around and, uh, he was threatening me that he, they were going to find me dead in the morning or both of us dead in the morning. . . . [H]e threatened that he was going to choke me and he had a knife and he put the knife, like, to my chest, like he was going to stab me and then he went in the bathroom and said that he was just going to kill himself."

In some cases these suicidal intentions are realized: A number of stalker killings ended with the pursuer committing suicide, or trying to, after having slain the victim. Michael Cartier, who killed Kristin Lardner after stalking her for a month in the wake of the breakup, ran home and shot himself to death immediately after killing her (Lardner 1995), and Rick Varela stalked and eventually gunned down his ex-girlfriend Sarah Auerbach in her New York City dry cleaner's shop, then shot himself in the head in a nearby park (*Arizona Republic*, April 9, 1994). What is especially tragic about these outcomes is that they often provide the first situation in which all participants agree unequivocally that what is going on is indeed dangerous, and is indeed "stalking"—an agreement which may come too late to save the victims.

Conclusion

Stalking is an extremely complex phenomenon to address sociologically, since many aspects of what comes to be seen as "stalking" are routine features of budding or dissolving relationships. Following another who is seen as a possible romantic interest, collecting and accumulating information about that other's identity, life, and routines, making overtures and even explicit proposals to develop a relationship, and carrying on doggedly in pursuit of such a relationship even in the face of persistent (but from the pursuer's point of view, initial) rejections, are regular, sometimes even commonplace activities in many ordinary relationships. Moreover, these activities appear in a range of normal relations: the initially unacquainted who may maneuver to create or avoid opportunities to meet, date, romance one another, the ex-spouse or former boy- or girlfriend who is trying to renew or maintain a relationship with an ex, the fan who seeks to cultivate some kind of special standing with a celebrity.

Consider, for example, the breakup of intimate relationships. Vaughan (1986) argues that the dynamics of "uncoupling" between exes-to-be are marked by the lack of synchronicity between the "initiator"—the person who initially becomes discontented with the relationship and "who first begins the social transition out of the relationship" (122)—and the other "partner," who for a long period of time remains unaware of the initiator's discontent and moves toward transition. Thus, the initiator often gives up on the relationship even while the partner may remain committed to it; only subsequently does the partner give up on the relationship and make his or her uncoupling transition, the initiator often continuing to "display discontent to convince the partner that the relationship is unsalvageable."[19] In this sense, uncoupling is a process of out-of-sync transitions from an initially shared social world; symmetry may finally be restored only when both partners come to accept the end of the relationship.

But until this sort of congruent alignment is established—an outcome that is hardly assured, and that in some instances may never occur—the parties involved may find themselves threatened by a kind of relational *havoc* (Goffman 1971). Havoc arises when each

19. Thus Vaughan insists that the initiator in uncoupling is not necessarily the party who ultimately comes to propose and push for separation. Uncoupling may eventually occur when "the partner responds to the initiator's display either by initiating a separation or by behaving so that the initiator has legitimate reason to do so" (1986:121).

defines the relationship in ways that the other cannot or will not accept, when neither can get the other to change his or her definition and all that goes with it, and when exit does not occur. Presumably, in most uncouplings such havoc is either avoided or is of short duration: one or the other party eventually changes his or her definition of the relationship, or simply decides to move on without explicit resolution. Trouble arises when neither party changes their irreconcilable definitions of the relationship, yet some sort of contact continues. This is the breeding ground for stalking. Many instances of what may eventually come to be recognized as stalking grow out of these relational dynamics, dynamics involving deep yet persisting disjuncture and misalignment.

Instances that come to be interpreted as stalking thus make visible the problematics of ending a relationship, of producing exit: while leaving might appear to be an individual, unilateral act, in fact its accomplishment depends upon the other's acceptance or acquiescence. This quality is quite general: any relational outcome depends in some sense upon the actions and agreement of *both* parties. Thus, rejecting a proposal is not unilateral, but depends upon the other's reactions for its realization. If the other accepts the rejection and acts accordingly—that is, if the rejection is uncontested—all well and good. If not, statements of rejection, no matter how clear and forceful, do not assure that efforts to create or end a relationship will cease. Ironically, then, not having a relationship, or ending a relationship, requires the agreement, or at least the acquiescence, of *both parties* (Ferris 1990).

Those who report having been stalked frame this experience exactly as one marked by radical asymmetry: at the extreme, the victims of stalking describe efforts by someone with whom they "have" absolutely no relationship to impose a relationship on them. Victims' accounts, then, highlight this asymmetry, depicting both their own shortcircuitings and rejections of the relational proposals, and the other's claims and persistence in advancing and often escalating these proposals and claims. Victims thus describe stalking as a matter of relational misalignment and imposition as the pursuer increasingly inserts him- or herself in their life and routines, overcoming heightened avoidance and raised barriers to do so.

In these terms, stalking victims' accounts show one final, intriguing feature: they depict common alignment reemerging if and when their pursuer abandons efforts to claim intimate relations. Thus, when expressions of devotion give way to outbursts of rage and retaliation, when the pursuer now says "I used to love you but now I just want to make your life miserable," victim and pursuer come to share common definitional ground; both now acknowledge that what is taking place *is* "stalking" and that the latter is openly and appropriately termed a "stalker." The irony is that such interpretive symmetry is frequently a product of the very acts of exploitation, harassment, and violence that have come to epitomize stalking in the vernacular understanding.

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