

Stalking and Its Victims

Stalking has been around for hundreds of years, yet has only gained the prominence that it has for the last two years or so (Nicol, 2006). Stalkers tend to maintain a low profile as the idea of stalking is that the victims should be unaware that they are being stalked.

Definition of Stalking

Stalking is defined as a combination of behaviors and actions which one individual inflicts on another through unwanted intrusions and communications. The National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC) defines stalking as a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to fear. Stalking can be violent and, if not addressed, often escalates over time, with victims reporting at least one unwanted contact per week. Stalking often also involves the use of technology, such as computer databases or Global Positioning System (GPS) tracking systems to track and locate the intended target. According to the report "Stalking Victimization in the United States" published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 2009, it is estimated that 3.4 million people in the United States are stalked each year, with 3 of 4 victims being stalked by someone they know. What may start as a feeling of infatuation or curiosity toward the victim slowly transcends into a routine or habit and finally transforms into obsession, with the stalker willing to go to extreme measures to feel closer to the victim.

Stalking Goes Hollywood

December 1980:

On December 8, 1980, former Beatles member John Lennon was assassinated by Mark David Chapman. Chapman followed Lennon to New York. As Lennon was returning with his family to their hotel, Chapman aimed directly at the center of Lennon's back and fired five hollow-point bullets at him from a Charter Arms .38 special revolver. While Lennon did not survive the injuries, Chapman is currently incarcerated in the Attica Correctional Facility in Attica, New York, since 1981, serving a twenty-year sentence.

July 1989:

On July 18, 1989, Rebecca Schaeffer was murdered by Robert John Bardo, an obsessed fan who had been stalking her for three years. Bardo had become fixated on Schaeffer and made numerous attempts to contact the sitcom star through letters and forcible visits to her sitcom set. In 1989, Bardo obtained Schaeffer's home address by paying a detective agency \$250. When Schaeffer answered the doorbell, Bardo shot her in the chest at point-blank range before fleeing the scene. Schaeffer was pronounced dead 30 minutes after her arrival at the hospital.

August 2003:

Sandra Bullock was stalked by Thomas James Weldon, aged 41, for a period of seven years. Weldon voluntarily revealed that he was on a "cross-country" mission to find Bullock at a home that she owned in the state of Wyoming. Bullock was able to obtain a restraining order that protected her until 2009. Following its expiration, Bullock was then issued a new, temporary restraining order against Weldon on July 2010.

July 2010:

Jennifer Aniston was granted a restraining order against a man who was on a "delusional mission" to locate and marry her. Jason Peyton, aged 24, was arrested after he was found prowling near the Aniston's home, carrying a bag, a note, a roll of duct tape, and messages about Aniston. Peyton's car was carved with large messages reading, "I love Jennifer Aniston." Peyton has been ordered to stay 100 yards away from Aniston's home, work, and vehicles.

August 2010:

Livia Bistrițeanu repeatedly attempted to contact actor Leonardo DiCaprio through e-mails and handwritten letters, claiming that she was his wife and that DiCaprio was the father of her unborn child, Jesus. On the basis of the letters and documents submitted to it, the L.A. County Superior Court ordered Bistrițeanu to stay at least 100 yards away from the actor.

References:

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- Nicol, B. (2006). *Stalking*. London, England: Reaktion Books.