

STALKING ISN'T ROMANTIC; IT'S A CRIME.

January 27th, 2023

Stalking is talked about a lot in mainstream media, just not in the way it should be. We hear the term used casually, jokingly, and mistakenly. If someone looks at their date's Instagram before the date, they may say, "I totally stalked their Instagram." Or if a dating partner surprises their partner for lunch at work, and they jokingly exclaim, "stalker!" Except, neither of these situations are stalking, and they completely disregard the very real and often traumatic experiences of those truly being stalked. So, what is stalking?

Stalking: Defined

Stalking is defined by the Stalking Prevention, Awareness, & Resource Center (SPARC) as a pattern of behavior directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to fear for the person's safety or the safety of others; or suffer substantial emotional distress. Different behaviors can constitute as stalking, including following someone or showing up places they know the victim is going to be, unwanted contact with the victim in person or electronically, tracking the victim's location, leaving unwanted gifts or items for the victim, harassing friends/family/other third parties to get information about the victim, threats, damaging victim's property and so on.

It is estimated that 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men will experience stalking in their lifetime.

While stalking impacts people of all gender identities, women are most likely to be victims. Young adults ages 18-24 experience the highest rates of stalking among adults, and students with disabilities, LGBTQ+ students, Native American/Alaskan Native students, biracial/multiracial students, and younger students are at HIGHER RISK for stalking victimization than the general student population (4) Stalking is extremely linked to intimate partner violence, with 40% of stalkers being intimate partners or former intimate partners¹, and stalking can occur before, during, and/or after the relationship has ended. Stalking is also linked with sexual violence: 48% of sexual assault survivors between the ages of 18-24 also experienced stalking². Many female victims of stalking may fear being sexually assaulted by their perpetrator. 16% of victims 18-24 years old report that the stalker shared nude, semi-nude, and/or sexually explicit photos of them.

Stalking can cause fear for their physical safety, anxiety, paranoia, distrust in others, difficulty concentrating at work or at school, and more. 1 in 8 stalking victims lose time from work, and 1 in 7 stalking victims relocate in an attempt to get away from their stalker (3) Stalking in intimate partner violence cases can also lead to homicide, with 76% of intimate partner femicides including stalking in the year prior (5).

Client Experiences

At The Center, we see clients experiencing stalking typically as they leave an abusive relationship but also was a part of the abuse during the relationship. Some of these behaviors involve tracking location using Apple's Air Tag and the victim wouldn't even know it's there. GPS monitors are often hidden near the tires and Snapchat Maps can also give locations. Additionally, some abusers install apps such as Life360, FindMyiPhone and others to track the victim's location, sometimes without their knowledge and other times as a means of control.

STALKING ISN'T ROMANTIC; IT'S A CRIME.

January 27th, 2023

One of our Family Violence Victim Advocates, Joan Robbins, shares, “One client knew her abuser was tracking/stalking her but couldn’t find any devices. One time she went to The Center for counseling but parked at a local business instead of The Center’s lot. When she got home, he confronted her about why she was at that business. This was a recurring issue of him trying to catch her in a lie by tracking her location and interrogating her about her whereabouts.”

Cameras that are in the house are also used to control the victim. The abuser will make sure they have control of the account so that they always have access to the cameras. This way they know who comes to the home, the time the victim leaves and arrives, etc. Victims don’t always consider it stalking, but it is. Many of the stalking behaviors are also part of coercive control, where there may not be physical violence but there is the fear of the possibility that the partner will get angry or use violence if the victim doesn’t tell every detail of their day. It’s definitely a form of stalking, which is why coercive control can now be part of the factors in granting Temporary Restraining Orders.”

How Stalking is Portrayed

Let’s use the mistaken examples in the beginning of this article to dissect what stalking really can look like. Someone looks at their date’s public Instagram profile before going on the date. The date goes okay, but they are told their date does not wish to pursue the relationship further. The next day, this person sees a photo of their date at a local café. They look at the location tagged and begin showing up at that café every day for a week until they arrive on the same day as their date. The date is surprised to see them since they only went on one mediocre date over a week ago and had expressed disinterest in pursuing the relationship further. However, the other person felt the date went well and disregards their date’s disinterest, hoping they can continue to pursue the relationship. They continue to show up at the café to see their date, every week, even though they have had no communication and their date made it clear that they did not want to see them again. The behaviors escalate and the person starts leaving letters on their date’s car stating that they would do anything to be with them. The date starts to fear what lengths this person is willing to go to.

Now, let’s use the second example: a dating partner surprises their partner for lunch at their place of work. On the surface, this may seem harmless, and to some it may even seem thoughtful and romantic. However, context and intention is everything. Perhaps the partner that “surprises” their partner at work is actually extremely controlling and possessive. Their partner is stressed about their new role at work and has told their partner that they can’t have any distractions. Their partner disregards this request, accuses the partner of lying and cheating, and decides to show up to “surprise” them. Their partner ends the relationship. Now, the former partner wants to get them back. So, they send flowers to their ex-partner’s office every day for a week and calls the office every day to try to reach their ex-partner. Their ex-partner’s boss tells them they need to sort things out because it’s become disruptive to the workplace. They tell their ex-partner to stop contacting them, but the ex-partner persists. They start threatening to expose intimate photos of them to their boss if they don’t call them back.

There was a case SPARC identified where a victim called 911 in a panic one day, stating there was a cup of coffee in her car. At first, the police had no idea why this individual was calling 911 over this, until the victim said, “he’s here” in reference to a former intimate partner that had abused and stalked her. She had relocated with address confidentiality to get away from him. Before leaving for work one day, she got in her car and a cup of coffee with his old nickname for her on it was sitting there. Again, context is everything; just hearing about a sudden appearance of a cup of coffee may not sound scary at first, but when we understand the full picture, it is.

 **24/7 Domestic Violence Hotline (203)731-5206**
24/7 Sexual Assault Hotline (203)731-5204

 **TheCenterCT.org**

References
1. Smith, S.G., Basile, K.C., & Kresnow, M. (2022). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2016/2017 Report on Stalking*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
2. Brady, P. O., & Woodward Griffin, V. (2019). *The Intersection of Stalking and Sexual Assault Among Emerging Adults: Unpublished Preliminary Results*. mTurk Findings, 2018.
3. Baum, K., Catalano, S., & Rand, M. (2009). *Stalking Victimization in the United States*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
4. Smith, S.G., Zhang, X., Basile, K.C., Merrick, M.T., Wang, J., Kresnow, M., & Chen, J. (2018). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2015 Data Brief*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC.
5. Mohandie K, Meloy JR, McGowan MG, Williams J. The RECON typology of stalking: reliability and validity based upon a large sample of North American stalkers. *J Forensic Sci*. 2006 Jan;51(1):147-55. doi: 10.1111/j.1556-4029.2005.00030.x. PMID: 16423242.

STALKING ISN'T ROMANTIC; IT'S A CRIME.

January 6th, 2023

Many romantic comedies have played off this thin line between grand romantic gestures and stalking behaviors. If you strip down some romantic comedies to just what is happening and take out the uplifting music, comedy, and attractive actors, the behaviors are often incredibly unsettling: not taking 'no' for an answer, following, and chasing them down in an airport, showing up unannounced – and sometimes breaking into their home – to surprise them with a grand gesture, etc. These themes may make for good movies, but in real life can cause extreme discomfort, fear, and disruption to their lives.

This is why it is so crucial that we take stalking seriously, educate the community on what stalking really is, and empower victims to seek out help and support.

Accessing Support

Stalking can be extremely difficult to prove or prosecute, and often victims, and even law enforcement, feel helpless. In some cases, victims can be stalked for years. Because of these common misconceptions and inaccurate and damaging portrayals of stalking in the media, stalking is incredibly underreported.

It's so important to try to document as much of the stalking as possible by keeping a log of some sort. At The Center, we take stalking seriously and prioritize clients' emotional and physical safety. Advocates at The Center are here 24/7 to provide support for anyone experiencing stalking.

Cara Mackler, Director of CAPT Programs