The Psychology of Stalking: Clinical and Forensic Perspectives

edited by J. Reid Meloy

San Diego, CA: Academic Press (1998) ISBN 0 12 490560 9
(250 pages, £39.99)

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The past decade has seen considerable debate and media hype centred around the harassment behaviour known as stalking; some newspapers have gone so far as to label stalking 'the crime of the nineties'. Stalking has now become accepted as not only a serious social problem, but also one that warrants criminal status. Accordingly, in the current text Meloy describes stalking as 'an old behaviour, but a new crime'. He then sets out to compile a scholarly text with the aim of clarifying and refining what we already know about the phenomenon that is stalking, and to indicate directions for future research.

This is the first academic book solely devoted to stalking. It covers in detail the current state of the field and provides several overviews of the literature available to date. One of the main benefits of the book is that it has drawn together authors from disparate backgrounds, including consulting and academic psychologists and psychiatrists, the police, private security and threat management specialists, and the US secret service. This has resulted in an accessible text that contains material relevant to a variety of interests.

The possible reasons why one individual and not another may stalk are dealt with in several chapters, and a number of theoretical perspectives are advanced. Various typologies of stalkers are discussed, and a wealth of information about the nature of stalkers and their likely victims is described in detail. This latter material was obtained from a large number of real-life stalking victims. The legal background to stalking is also provided, although this is almost exclusively from the US legal perspective. In fact the book seems to have been written almost solely with a US audience in mind, and all the contributors work in the USA.

The second half of the book looks at more specific issues, such as the stalking of clinicians by their patients, and the now established link between domestic violence and stalking. Authors from the US secret service provide a chapter on how attacks on public figures may be prevented, drawing on a range of research and professional experience. There is also a chapter on managing the threat element involved in many cases of stalking, and practical advice on how to assess and prevent violence and how professionals can help. Specific advice is provided on how to increase home and workplace security to deter stalkers.

However, the book lacks direct and practical advice for victims of stalking, despite the seemingly high prevalence rate (Meloy informs us that, for women, the lifetime risk estimate is eight per cent). The book also concentrates on describing individual authors' perceptions of the general nature of stalking, rather than on hard facts. Given that stalking is a relatively 'new crime', it

is perhaps inevitable that sample case histories and even hypothetical cases figure more prominently than facts derived from years of rigorous research.

In summary, the book provides a sound overview of the problem and distils much of what is known about stalking into a fifteen-chapter edited book. Although what is currently known far outweighs what is not known about stalking, the book offers a reliable guide to the literature and goes into a good deal of speculation based on psychological and psychiatric viewpoints. Historical overviews are provided and new angles discussed—in one chapter it is even postulated that Shakespeare may have been a stalker, and in another, the issue of stalking via the Internet, or ‘cyberstalking’, is outlined. The strength of this book lies in its easy style, which will appeal to individuals from a number of disciplines. Hopefully, it will aid the development of a truly multidisciplinary approach to research aimed at tackling this pervasive phenomenon, which has so caught the popular imagination.

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